

# Chapter 6

## *Annus horribilis*

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### *Unwelcome news*

After an unseasonably mild and almost snow free December, 2014, we had a real blast of winter starting on the first Sunday of the New Year. From 43 deg.F (6 deg.C) in the morning, the temperature dropped to well below freezing by evening. The following day was bitterly cold with a temperature of only 10 deg.F (-12 deg.C) and a significant wind chill. Later in the week it wasn't too bad; just 14 deg.F (-10 deg.C) when we went grocery shopping in the morning, but with very little wind it didn't feel all that cold. However, when we walked home from the Park House tavern in the evening, the wind had already starting to increase. Then, the following day we were greeted with our first blizzard of this winter, and blowing snow made it almost impossible to see the houses opposite. All schools were closed (no buses), and the police warned motorists not to drive if at all possible—closing two of the three main highways in and out of Goderich. Environment Canada had issued an extreme cold weather alert for most of South-western and Eastern Ontario, and it was supposed to stay really cold for the rest of the week.

Unfortunately, we received unwelcome news. Monica went for her routine bi-annual mammogram, and two days later received a phone call to return for more pictures to be taken. She was told that she also had to have an ultrasound examination done. She hadn't been home all that long when her doctor's nurse called to give her some not-so-good news. Monica looked at me and gave the thumbs-down sign. Apparently, she had a 'suspicious area' in her right breast. The nurse stressed that in his report, the radiologist hadn't said that it was cancer, but a suspicious area that needed further checking. That meant a biopsy, and while mammo-grams were done at our local hospital, those particular biopsies meant having to go to St. Joseph's Hospital in London—an easy trip on a nice day, but far from it when the weather was bad. After waiting to hear when she had to go, the nurse called with the appointment, which was: January 29th at 12:40 p.m.

On a happier note, we had a lovely time when our friends Rosemarie and Geoff Edwards visited. Even though they moved to Stratford over three years ago, they have kept the same doctor and dentist they had when they lived here in Goderich. Geoff had a doctor's appointment that morning, and when he was finished at the Medical Centre, they arrived early enough for us to have coffee and goodies before going out for lunch. We went to the Park House tavern, and it was great seeing them again. Even more so for Monica, since she was able to confide in Rosemarie, who fully understood Monica's situation having had a double mastectomy operation about thirteen years ago.

On the day before Monica's hospital appointment, the morning was supposed to be quite nice, followed by increasing cloudiness in the afternoon. Then, on the actual day, the forecast was for periods of snow, both in Goderich and London. So, we made a reservation at the Station Park Hotel, which was not too far away

from the hospital and drove to London a day earlier. The plan was to return home as soon as we were finished at the hospital, but if the road conditions weren't good, we would stay a second night in the hotel.

Sadly, before we left for London, we had to say our goodbyes to our friend Norris MacEwan. We received the news that he had died on the morning of January 26th. Visitation at the funeral home was both in the afternoon and in the evening, and his funeral was two days later. Needless to say, we felt badly that we would miss the funeral, but keeping Monica's appointment was more important.

With sunshine all the way to London, we had a good journey and arrived at the hotel just before 4:00 p.m. We chose to stay at a hotel rather than with my cousin, Don, and his wife, Claire, even though they offered us a bed for the night if the weather was bad. However, they lived quite a distance from the hospital, so we would have had to contend with a lot more city traffic if we had stayed with them. We also knew their guest room had a queen-size bed, and being used to having our own beds, we felt that neither of us would get much sleep if we tried sleeping together. We had dinner that evening at The Keg, a popular steakhouse not far away from the hotel.

Even though periods of snow were in the forecast, we had only a few light flurries in the morning, and with the temperature hovering around zero, the snow quickly melted. We arrived at the hospital in good time for Monica's appointment and made our way to the Breast Care Centre. Being a city hospital, we expected Monica to be treated a bit like a number, but we couldn't have been more wrong. Everyone there was very kind and caring, especially the two technologists who assisted the radiologist.

After registering, we had a short wait before being seen by a Nurse Navigator, who went into more detail about Monica's 'suspicious area', and also explained the biopsy procedure, which took about 60 minutes. Monica had some small calcifications in one of the milk ducts, and for these to be biopsied, her breast had to be compressed between the plates of the mammography machine. She had to lie on her side, and getting her into the exact position took quite a while. Then, she had to lie absolutely still and not move. Once I was in the correct position, the radiologist froze the area, and then removed several samples. Monica didn't feel a thing, and was eventually released from the mammography machine. Surprisingly, she had no discomfort when the freezing wore off, and no bruising. All she had was a small red mark where the incision was made, and that healed very nicely. Anyhow, the lab tests would take up to ten days, and the result sent to our GP.

While we were inside the hospital, we had no idea what the weather was doing, but we emerged from the underground parking to find wet snow falling. However, as the temperature was still hovering around 32 deg.F (0 deg.C), the roads were just wet, so we headed straight back home. As we drove north, we passed through areas where it had obviously snowed earlier in the day. On the whole, the roads were good until we reached Clinton, which is 11 miles (18 km) east of Goderich. There, we ran into snow, and it got heavier the closer we got to the lake. By the time we reached home, there was already about 2 inches (5 to 6 cm) of new snow on the ground. That was nothing, though, compared to the following morning. It was really stormy overnight, and we must have had another 6 inches (15 cm) accumulation. Then, with blowing snow reducing visibility and bad road conditions most of the day, we were very glad that we hadn't decided to stay a second night in the London hotel.

I had some problems with my left knee and little toe. Twinges in the knee that I put down to inflammation (I had been walking on uneven snow/ice, and that may have caused extra wear and tear), but a short course of anti-inflammatory pills helped. The little toe incident was more bizarre, as pressure was a prime cause of pain. I knew I had accidentally bashed it against the bed caster. Anyhow, X-rays showed I had chipped off a bit of bone. My GP said not to worry and that it would heal itself, and it seemed better as the days went by.

My Coventry friend, Roger Moore, had open heart surgery, which was successful; although he was still very weak. He was kept in hospital beyond the anticipated release date, but had since been discharged home. The familiar surroundings would probably help in his recovery.

At the end of January, I was still writing my memoirs; having finished Chapter 10, and up to page 574 (with the Appendices) and reached the year 1991. There appeared to be less archival stuff available for the later years than before the 1990s, so it became a challenge finding source information as I progressed to the book's planned ending at my retirement in 2005. Still, it was very interesting delving back into one's life.

## *Serious health issues*

Although we hadn't had as much snow this winter as we did last year, at the beginning of February, our garden was still buried beneath 16 to 20 inches (40 to 50 cm) of precipitation, so we weren't going to see spring flowers any time soon. In fact, they were going to be under as much as 6 inches (15 cm) deeper, as a large part of Ontario had been placed under a Winter Storm Warning. Light snow soon started to fall, and it intensified overnight with a strong wind making it feel like  $-13$  deg.F ( $-25$  deg.C). With no reduction in the wind, blowing snow brought about whiteout conditions in the country, and the police closed many of the highways in this area.

The forecasters were a little out in their estimation of the amount of snow that we got. Surprisingly, when we heard the news at 7:00 a.m., only three highways in this immediate area were closed, and as it hadn't been very windy, we imagined that they would soon be reopened. The clouds started breaking up just before 10:00 a.m., and it was beautiful with the sun shining from a cloudless sky. Even with the sun, though, it was still very cold: 11 deg.F ( $-10$  deg.C).

Unfortunately, our Coventry friend, Roger, wasn't doing too well. Following his open heart surgery, which apparently was a success, his surgeon took him off most of his medications, including those controlling his *atrial fibrillation*. Even though this caused him problems while he was in the hospital, he wasn't put back on the medications when he was discharged. As a result, he was having *atrial fibrillation* attacks almost every day, and not surprisingly, they were affecting his daily life. He was finding it hard to do anything, so Sue was having to do some of the household chores that Roger would normally do. It would seem that the surgeon had to be the one who decided whether or not to put Roger back on his *atrial fibrillation* medications. Roger had an appointment with the surgeon, but there were two weeks to wait before any decision could be made. Fortunately, their daughter, Lindsey, was able to send computerised telecommunication broadcasts of their granddaughter, Ella, and these cheered them up a little.

Monica received the results of her biopsy, and the upshot was that small calcifications in one of the milk ducts were cancerous. Her doctor called with the bad news and talked about the next step. He said that there were many different ways of treating breast cancer, but he wasn't up to date on all of them. He wanted Monica to see a breast cancer specialist, so the next step was to send a request to St. Joseph's Hospital in London and register her for an appointment. We received a great deal of support and advice from cancer survivors; also many well wishes from friends and acquaintances. Monica even received extensive long distance phone calls from an acquaintance who had endured the entire stress and was now in excellent health. Rollie, our next door neighbour, also had had cancerous calcifications in both of her breasts. She had now been cancer-free for over four years. Until we met with the specialist we had no idea of the extent of future treatment; whether surgery, radiation or chemotherapy.

This was the second year that February 5th had been an unkind day for us. It was one year ago on the same day when we heard the sad news that my father had died.

On the positive side, however, I received an e-mail from Roger in Coventry. After several weeks of touch and go non-activity, he was feeling much better. His medication had been adjusted and this had made the world of difference—nearly two weeks without having an *atrial fibrillation* attack. He said that he could now walk two miles (3 km) without any exertion, and at 76 years of age, he was eagerly looking forward to spring so he could resume gardening chores. He and Sue even anticipated visiting here in September.

I developed a bad toothache, so made an appointment with the dentist. Fortunately, there was a cancellation and he could see me early. What I thought would be just a filling turned out to be a real ordeal. After drilling the tooth in readiness for replacing the filling, the dentist discovered that the tooth had a big crack in it and couldn't be saved. Then, as he was extracting the tooth, it broke, leaving the roots in the gum. Although the dentist did his best to extract all the roots, one that was particularly long and hooked resisted all his attempts to remove it. I then had to go to an oral surgeon to have it surgically removed.

The oral surgeon's practice was virtually just around the corner, and I didn't have to drive anywhere. However, that was the good part of the experience. When I arrived to register, I was bombarded with all kinds of forms to read and sign—malpractice disclaimers and other legal mumbo-jumbo so the team of surgeons had ironclad protection against lawsuits, etc. I didn't like that a bit—typical of a big city attitude. The dental nurse then guided me into the surgery and again peppered me with questions about my medical history—very little tact. The big man then came whisking in large as life. “Open wide!” “Let me see!”; then rammed in a rubber device to keep my jaws apart. He peered in for a minute (that cost \$76.80 ‘consulting’ fee), and said, “This'll be an easy one, but first we have to freeze the area.” Out came the syringe – JAB!! No messing or prior anaesthesia where the needle was to penetrate. “OK. It'll take a few minutes”. “Want a magazine?” Off he went and I was left all alone.

Back he came with the nurse in tow. Another look into my open maw and he then proceeded to drill with a coarse bit. Bloody hell! I nearly went through the roof! “Looks like we need more freezing.” Out came the syringe – JAB!! More waiting in the chair. Finally I couldn't feel the entire one half of my face. Now for the fun stuff, the surgeon selected a huge lever-like device from his arsenal of tools and reeled on the reluc-

tant root to remove it. “Open wide.” In goes the curved needle with catgut (twice). “OK, you’re done.” “Told you it’d be easy.” “Take painkillers once the freezing has worn off.” But before he quickly disappeared, I said, “Oi, I’m a Senior living on a fixed income.” “Give him Senior’s rate”, came the reply as he walked out of the door. Well at least that saved me a few dollars, but I was still charged \$254.40 for the extraction. The fee for my regular dentist was \$159.00 on top of all that.

We celebrated Valentine’s Day at Thyme on 21 fine dining restaurant, and for once we were a little disappointed with our meal. Not the food, but the menu. Usually, when it is a special occasion, the establishment’s *mein host* creates a special menu, but this one just featured the most popular items from the regular menu. I was more than happy to have the prime rib of beef, and Monica was equally happy to order the Arctic char. Our dessert was a slice of lemon layer cake. Since it was Monica’s birthday—even though we were really celebrating Valentine’s Day—the layer cake was decorated with a lighted sparkler. We made a reservation with *mein host* to have a belated birthday celebration at the end of the month.

Considering the weather, we were surprised that there was a good turnout of guests. The wind picked up soon after lunch, and it came from just the right direction to bring snow squalls off the lake. There were blizzard like conditions for most of the afternoon and evening, and at times we couldn’t see the house next door. The temperature also fell dramatically throughout the afternoon, brought on by an Arctic air mass. The high temperature during the day reached only  $-0.4$  deg.F ( $-18$  deg.C).

For Monica’s belated birthday, we both decided to have a steak, and I opted for the sirloin while Monica chose the bacon wrapped beef tenderloin. We also had different starters: I ordered the Moroccan red lentil soup, and Monica had the vegetable spring rolls. For dessert, we shared a slice of the flourless chocolate cake, with Monica’s half decorated with a lighted candle. It was another lovely evening.

We then heard from our doctor’s office, and Monica’s appointment with the breast cancer specialist in London was scheduled for March 6th at 1:00 p.m.—so, not too long to wait.

## *Consultations and surgery*

**W**e doubted that we had seen the end of winter, but the previous two weeks had given us the feeling that spring was on its way. The temperature had been above freezing most days, and we also had had lots of sunshine. So, with conditions ideal for a purely for pleasure out-of-town trip, we made an early start on our theatre season. Because of the unpredictable weather in March, we didn’t include the first production in the repertoire when we bought our tickets for the 2015 season back in November. We preferred to wait and see what the weather was doing before going out of town in the winter. Then, if it was good, we could always call the box office to see if there were any seats still available, which is what we did. We were lucky enough to get two on the front row of the balcony and saw *The Last Resort*, which was described in the theatre guide as being a madcap musical whodunit, and it certainly lived up to that description. It was very funny with all the usual twists and turns that left the audience guessing right up until the end. Then, to complete our day out, we stopped in the village of Blyth on our way home and had a very good meal at the restaurant, Part II Bistro.



Everything went very well with the breast cancer specialist's consultation, and we came home feeling even more positive than when we went. Even Mother Nature co-operated and gave us a nice, sunny day for our trip. We arrived at the hospital in plenty of time for Monica's 1:00 p.m. appointment, and made our way to the Breast Care Centre. We were seen first by a pleasant young intern, who asked the usual preliminary questions. She was followed by Dr. Latosinsky, the breast cancer specialist and surgeon oncologist, whom we found to be easy going and very approachable with a sense of humour. His first words after coming into the room were, "You are not going to die from the type of cancer that you have!" He then went on to explain that what I had was *ductal carcinoma in situ*—DCIS for short—which, according to the medical description, was an early form of highly curable breast cancer that, by definition, had not spread.

He then gave us detailed descriptions of the two ways of treating DCIS and their success rates. Monica could have either a mastectomy or the less invasive lumpectomy followed by radiation treatments, which could be as few as 15 or as many as 30. Monica opted for the latter. It was possible that we would have been given a date for the surgery before we left the hospital, but Dr. Latosinsky's secretary was away on vacation. However, he thought it could be either at the end of March or the beginning of April. We would be hearing in about two weeks. The surgery would be done at St. Joseph's Hospital, and followed about two months later by the radiation treatments. For that, we would have to go to the Victoria Hospital Cancer Clinic which was on the south side of London. Unfortunately, we would have to cross the city every time we went there.

After my ordeal at the dentist, and subsequent visit to the dental surgeon, I hoped that my dental problems were over; but, unfortunately, they were not. I developed toothache again, and to make matters worse, on both sides of my mouth. So, I went to see to our dentist. However, because the problem on one side was where the tooth had been removed, the dentist wouldn't look at it. He referred me back to the dental surgeon, and since it was a follow-up, I was seen two days later. After a brief examination, the surgeon reached for a pair of tweezers and pulled a small splinter of bone from my gum. No wonder that side of my mouth was so sore! As for the problem on the other side, in order to save that tooth, it had to be root filled, and I made an appointment with our dentist to have that done.

**W**e had a call from Dr. Latosinsky's secretary and the date for Monica's surgery was confirmed as Wednesday, April 8th. However, Monica had to undergo pre-surgical screening, and we went to St. Joseph's Hospital for her appointment on March 31st at 1:00 p.m. This became something of an ordeal. Although the weather wasn't too bad in the Goderich area, the nearer we drove to London the worse it became. The county roads hadn't been snow ploughed and that didn't help matters. Still, we arrived at the hospital on time and found the admitting desk for registration.

It was after 1:30 p.m. before we were shown into an examination room; then had to wait for the anaesthetist for his consultation. We were also told that a senior nurse would interview us. The anaesthetist was thorough in his advice; together with blood pressure and oxygen count testing, and medication assessment. We were very confident with his bedside manner. We then waited for the nurse, who explained a number of precautions in readiness for the surgery. Monica then had to undergo an ECG examination. Finally we waited until Monica had a blood test (and more interrogation) before leaving the hospital just after 4:00 p.m. By the time we arrived home, we were exhausted.

Because Monica didn't have an actual lump, she had to have another procedure (pre-operative localisation) carried out before her surgery at 1:30 p.m. Guide wires were to be inserted into her breast to mark the area for removal, and that would be done in the same manner as the biopsy, with her breast compressed between the plates of the mammography machine. As it would be late afternoon before we were finished at the hospital, we seriously thought about staying that night in a London hotel; perhaps even two nights.

Everything went really well for Monica's procedure on April 8th. Although she was expecting to have a general anaesthetic for her surgery, it was decided at the last minute to only use sedation, so she left the hospital feeling great and with no after effects. Now, only an incision, that was a little sore and tender, reminded her of the surgery, which went like this:

Although the surgery wasn't until 1:30 p.m., we had to be at the hospital at 9:25 a.m., so we were very glad that we had already decided to drive to London the previous afternoon and had made a reservation for two nights at the Station Park Hotel. As it was, we arrived at the hospital just before 9:00 a.m., and after registering at the Admitting Department, we were taken into the Surgical Day Care Unit (SDCU) and shown to a bed. Neither of us expected that I would be allowed to stay with Monica, but, except for when she was having the guide wires implanted and in the Operating Room (OR), I was with her all the time. So, we sat and watched as the many nurses carried out their various duties, and every so often one would stop by Monica's bed. Then, around 10:15 a.m., we were taken to the Breast Care Centre for Monica to have the guide wires implanted. Once that procedure was completed, we were taken back to the SDCU to wait until it was time for Monica to be taken to the OR.

While she was lying in her bed in the hallway waiting to be wheeled into the OR, Monica's surgeon oncologist, Dr. Latosinsky, came out to speak to her. He said that Marie was his anaesthetist that day, and that she was very good with sedation. So, since Monica was having just a lumpectomy, he recommended she be sedated instead of having a general anaesthetic. He said that she would feel much better after her surgery as she wouldn't have any of the usual after effects. Monica immediately agreed to be sedated, and soon after was wheeled into the OR. She remembered looking at the clock and saw it was 1:45 p.m., and heard Marie say that she was starting the sedation. Monica then neither felt nor heard anything, and it wasn't until they were almost finished that she became aware of them talking. By the time they had finished—the clock said 2:35 p.m.—she was completely awake and able to thank everyone. Marie and her assistant then wheeled Monica straight back to the SDCU, as she didn't have to spend time in the recovery room.

When Monica left the SDCU, I went to get some lunch, and as I was leaving the hospital cafeteria to go to the waiting area, I unexpectedly met my cousin, Don, and his wife, Claire. They had decided to visit the hospital and provide morale support. It was a complete surprise, and chatting with them certainly helped pass the time; although it wasn't the two or three hour wait that I had expected. In fact, it had been only an hour or so when someone from the SDCU came and told me that Monica was out of the OR, and that I could return to her bedside. I arrived to find Monica enjoying some apple juice and cookies that she had been given after returning to the SDCU. Fasting since the previous midnight had bothered Monica more than having the anaesthetic. Anyhow, it wasn't long before she was allowed to leave, and we headed back to the hotel.

Once we got back to the hotel, we had another snack. Of course, Monica thought that she wouldn't feel like eating much that evening, but we decided to go out for dinner. I suggested we walk down the road, and we came across The Black Trumpet Restaurant. Since we both felt in the mood to celebrate having Monica's surgery behind us, neither of us could resist choosing the butternut squash soup and venison. The drunken cherry cheesecake, which we shared, was also delicious. We drove home the following morning.

Our next trip to London was scheduled for Friday, May 8th, for a follow-up appointment with Dr. Latosinsky, the surgeon oncologist. By then, he should have received the pathologist's report. This would determine the number of radiation treatments, but that decision would be made by the radiation oncologist at the Cancer Clinic. The visit to St. Joseph's Hospital went according to plan, and despite a slight delay, we met Dr. Latosinsky and the clinical nurse specialist.

The clinical nurse specialist was the first to consult with us, and explained that Monica needed to undergo a further procedure before her radiation treatment. From the results of the pathologist's report, although the initial surgery had successfully removed the cancerous tissue, a number of rogue cells had escaped from the calcification area. From this detection, the medical team decided that to ensure no additional cancer cells had spread beyond the breast, a further procedure of a lymph node biopsy was recommended. This meant Monica had to return to the hospital and enter the Nuclear Medicine Department where irradiated dye was injected into the breast and tracked to the lymph nodes, and the first 1-3 nodes removed for analysis. A positive result meant further lymph node removal, and a negative result meant no further surgery. Dr. Latosinsky assured us that this procedure was basic and not too intrusive. Also that Monica could still be sedated and not have a general anaesthetic. The medical team's attitude was totally upbeat, which left us with a very positive outlook despite this being an unforeseen complication.

On Wednesday, May 20th, Monica underwent her lymph node biopsy as a day surgery procedure. As it was going to be an early start (admission at 6:50 a.m.), we decided to drive to London the day before and stay overnight in the same hotel as for previous visits to St. Joseph's Hospital. We went first to the SDCU, and after going through the usual preliminaries, we were taken to the Nuclear Medicine Department where Monica received two injections of radioactive material into the breast. As the isotope travelled through the lymphatic system, it was scanned and mapped in an MRI-type machine. The electronic map, together with a special dye, helped the surgeon detect the true position of the lymph nodes. Once the mapping was complete, we were taken back to the SDCU where we had a nearly three hour wait before the surgery at 11:30 a.m., when Monica entered the OR for the biopsy procedure. Again, she only had to be sedated so no post-operative recovery was necessary and she came through with flying colours. During her sedation, she did feel some minor surgical activity, but nothing untoward, and even the anticipated restrictions of her arm movements became a nonevent. Anyhow, like the first time, she was fully awake when she left the OR, and was taken straight back to the SDCU where she was given apple juice and cookies. Then, once she had finished those, she was allowed to get dressed, and by 1:30 p.m. we were on our way home. Her next consultation appointment with Dr. Latosinsky was scheduled for Friday, June 12th.

Curiously enough, in the same pre-operation room, we met our neighbours from down the street—neither of us knowing that we would be at the hospital on the same day. So, while Monica was wheeled



away, I had a long chat with these folk, the wife of whom was having a more serious operation. Throughout this difficult time, we had received lots of support—including a totally unexpected message from an ex-colleague, Bruce Page, whose wife had heard of Monica's situation through the grapevine. As we continued down this bumpy road, we still remained positive.

**O**ur journey to St. Joseph's Hospital on June 12th was the worst one so far. There was torrential rain, but once we left the rain behind, we didn't have any more for the rest of the day. As Monica's appointment wasn't until 3:30 p.m., we first visited my cousin, Don, to have lunch with him and his wife, Claire. Despite all our trips to London, this was the first occasion that any of the appointments were at a suitable time for us to visit them, and we had an enjoyable couple or so hours of catching up on each other's news.

In case the traffic was bad, we left Don and Claire's house in plenty of time to get to the hospital and make our way to the Breast Care Centre. We were seen initially by a clinical nurse, who first checked the lymph node removal incision scar, and she said it had healed well. She also intimated that the results of the lymph node biopsy were negative, which boosted our morale. She was followed soon afterwards by Dr. Latosinsky, who told us officially that the pathologist's report indicated that the cancer cells hadn't spread to the lymphatic system. He then talked a bit about the next step, and that he would not want to see Monica again until about nine months time. We would learn more about the follow-up treatment when at the Cancer Clinic, which would be Monday, June 22nd.

Not surprisingly, when we left the hospital we felt in the mood for celebrating. So, we decided to stop at Eddington's fine dining restaurant in Exeter. There was a big fundraising dinner taking place in town, so the restaurant was unusually quiet for a Friday evening. As always, we had an excellent meal, and we looked forward to a much brighter future.

## *Time for socialising*

**I**n between the hospital appointments, we found some time for socialising. Back in mid-May, we visited our friends Rosemarie and Geoff Edwards in Stratford. Although they had been busy since arriving home after being away for two months, we arranged a get-together, and went to their place where we sat and chatted over coffee until it was time for lunch. We decided to go to the Arden Park Hotel as Rosemarie and Geoff had been there a few times before and found it very good. However, we got there to find that the bar area, where we had wanted to eat, were being renovated, so we had to eat in the main dining room. Not only was it crowded and noisy, but the food was very ordinary. Following our disappointing lunch, we went back to Rosemarie and Geoff's for a while before leaving to come home.

Later in the month, we drove to Kincardine, a small town about 31 miles (50 km) north of Goderich, to go to a 90th birthday party for a longtime friend. We first met Joan and her late husband, Louis, soon after we moved to Goderich, and we used to visit them and their family at their home in the small community of Saltford. After Louis' death in 1989, we continued to see Joan fairly often, but lost contact when she moved to Kincardine several years ago.

Anyhow, it was lovely seeing Joan again, and she was remarkable for someone her age. Since Louis died, she travelled extensively, and had visited over 100 countries. So, instead of having a big birthday cake, there were individual cupcakes, each one decorated with a tiny flag of one of the countries Joan had visited. Another novel idea was the balloon release at the end of the afternoon. The room, in which the party was held, was decorated with balloons in various colours and with different designs on them. There were 91 of them to represent Joan's 91st year, and they were released outside in a final gesture.

Another out-of-town trip was to Kitchener to have lunch with our Coventry friends, Roger and Sue Moore, together with their daughter, Lindsey, her partner, Chris, and their first child, Ella. As always, it was great seeing them; especially Roger, who had gone through a very rough patch healthwise during the two years since we last saw him. He was his old self once again.

This was the first time we had met Ella—a sweet little girl. Needless to say, she was the centre of attraction, but not because she misbehaved. In fact, just the opposite! Chris sat her in the highchair, and she stayed there for ages without making any fuss. However, she eventually became restless, but was still very good considering that we were in the restaurant for well over three hours.

The first theatre outing of June was to see *Legends ... of Rock and Roll*. It was a fantastic show—a fast paced musical revue featuring the music and songs made famous by the big names in Rock and Roll from the 1950s through to the 1970s. It was performed by a cast of very talented actors, all of whom could sing and dance while a few could play several musical instruments as well. The costumes were also outstanding. The show ended with a medley of Elvis Presley songs, and the cast took its final bow to a well deserved standing ovation by the capacity audience.

Actually, that evening was the beginning of a weekend of celebrating. June 14th was the 41st anniversary of Monica's emigration to Canada, and we celebrated it twice: with a special dinner at home, and the previous evening at Thyme on 21 fine dining restaurant after returning from the theatre in Drayton. We saw *Looking*, a comedy about finding love. The story revolved around a middle-aged couple who met on a blind date. However, instead of going alone, both of them took along a friend for moral support. Anyhow, after a few upsets along the way, all four of them found love. It was a very well acted play with lots of humorous moments, and we thoroughly enjoyed it.

*Mein host* of the restaurant, greeted us at the door, and was delighted to hear the good news about Monica's operation outcome. We then mentioned that we were also celebrating her anniversary of coming to Canada, and although it wasn't the best choice to go with our *entrées*, we decided to have a bottle of sparkling wine since it was such a special occasion. The shared dessert came decorated with a sparkler, and was compliments of the restaurant.

So far, June turned out to be one of the wettest and coolest for years. Goderich had lots of rain with really heavy downpours at times, and other places were so waterlogged, they couldn't absorb any more. Driving to London and Drayton, it was awful to see so many fields with crops planted in them under water. As well, a few rivers and streams had burst their banks and flooded the surrounding area.

## *CT simulation*

The Victoria Hospital Cancer Clinic informed us of our appointment with Dr. Jeff Cao, the radiation oncologist. Our first visit would be on June 22nd, at 9:30 a.m. With a drive of 68 miles (110 km), it was a pre-dawn rise to be on the road in good time. Fortunately, the weather was good, and it took us less time than we thought it would—about an hour and forty minutes—which pleased us with so many more trips still to make. Once there, Monica filled out several registration forms; then taken by a registration assistant to meet one of the many volunteer guides, who explained a tracking procedure (entering information on a computer kiosk at each visit to the clinic) and a general orientation of the clinic's facilities, e.g., refreshment areas, library and PC terminals for Internet use, and consultation/radiation therapy rooms.

All visitors awaiting consultation were given an electronic pager, so they knew when they were next in line. After a while we were called into a consultation room and spoke with Nancy R.N., who took down further particulars and gave us a thumbnail sketch of what to expect from Dr. Cao's examination and explanation. Eventually, after waiting for about an hour, Dr. Cao (an Oriental) arrived. After confirming a few details, Dr. Cao said that Monica was a somewhat unusual case. He then went on to explain that we had three hormone receptors, and when tested, two of the three—the same two—in the majority of women were usually positive while the third was negative. However, in Monica's case, the two which were usually positive were negative, and the negative one was positive. For a woman 20 years younger than her, that would almost certainly mean having chemotherapy treatment. For Monica at her age, though, he wasn't so certain and thought the risks might outweigh the benefits. However, being a radiation oncologist, he wanted to get the opinion of a chemotherapy oncologist. So, he proposed presenting Monica's case at a forum of oncologists who met every Friday morning to discuss 'interesting and unusual' cases.

The discussion then turned to radiation treatment. Years ago, 25 treatments were the norm, but it was later realised that 15 + 1 treatments were all that were needed. However, Monica was different again. When the cancerous tissue was removed, there was only 1 mm of clearance on one side, not the 2 mm that is preferred. So, for that reason and as a sort of insurance, Dr. Cao added a further five treatments to the 16, making 21 in total. The date when these would start was still unknown and depended on whether or not Monica had to have chemotherapy, which would be given first. Anyhow, our discussion ended with Dr. Cao saying that he would call us after he had presented Monica's case at the forum of oncologists, and inform us of their decision.

Our phone rang the following evening, and it was Dr. Cao. He wanted to let us know that the oncologists' forum had been cancelled, and he couldn't present my case. So, since he would be on vacation the following week, he was going to e-mail two of his colleagues, whose opinions he trusted, to find out their recommendations, and he would call again.

Dr. Cao called Friday, June 26th, to tell us that neither of his colleagues thought that Monica needed to have chemotherapy, which made both of us very happy and relieved. He also said that we would be getting a call to arrange an appointment for Monica to go for a CT simulation, where a CT scanner is used to outline the area for the radiation treatment. She would also be marked with three small tattoos.

Less than an hour after Dr. Cao called, our phone rang again. It was his secretary to say the appointment, was on Tuesday, June 30th, at 2:00 p.m. So, after what has seemed at times a long and drawn out process, things were really happening fast now. We got the impression from Dr. Cao that the treatments would start fairly soon after the CT simulation. They would be given daily—Monday to Friday—for 21 days, or four weeks plus one day. We anticipated making the trip to London every day to start with, but if we found it got too much towards the end of the four weeks, we would stay in one of the hotels near the Cancer Clinic.

**I**t was rainy and misty on our journey to London for the CT simulation, but that didn't delay us and we arrived early once again. Even though we knew the journey took about an hour and forty minutes, we felt we had to add an extra half hour or so to allow for any unexpected hold-ups, such as road repairs. Anyhow, arriving early gave us time to relax after the journey. Coffee, tea and cookies were provided free of charge by the Cancer Society. Another nice feature was being given an electronic pager when you checked in at the reception desk, so you were free to go where you wanted within the Cancer Clinic.

When the pager alerted us, we went back to the reception desk where we were met by a radiation therapist, who took us to one of the many treatment areas. I was allowed to go along, but had to leave before they started the simulation. As usual, Monica had to answer a lot of questions, and they definitely made sure they were treating the right person. At St. Joseph's Hospital, before any of the nurses did anything, they asked for your name and date of birth. At the Cancer Clinic, though, not only did they want to know your date of birth and your address, they even took your photo!

Anyhow, with the formalities completed, Monica was asked to lie down on the bed of the CT scanner. Supports were then placed between her legs and under her head to prevent her from moving. There were also supports for her arms, which had to be kept above her head. Once the therapists were satisfied she was in the right position, the scanner was activated. After it stopped, measurements were taken and marks were put on her skin with a marking pen. Since those marks would gradually wash off, permanent ones—actually tiny tattoos about the size of a freckle—were made. She had three of them, and they were to be used as reference markers so that she was in the same position every time she went for a treatment. These would follow the same procedure as the simulation, but using the LINAC machine instead of the CT scanner.

Before Monica left the treatment area, she was given a card with the date of her first appointment. It was Monday, July 13th, at 12:05 p.m. She was also given a short questionnaire to complete, and we were very pleased that one of the questions was: "Do you have a preferred time of day for your appointments?" Needless to say, our answer to that was any time after 12 noon, and from the receptionist's remarks when the questionnaire was returned, it seems likely that we would be given afternoon appointments. She then went on to explain that, when Monica went for her first treatment, she would be given a schedule listing the appointments for the next two weeks. She also said that a specialist would see Monica every Friday following the treatment, so we were to expect a longer visit to the Cancer Clinic on those days than on the rest.

Expecting that our visit would be quite a long one, we thought that we would be leaving the Cancer Clinic about the right time for us to return home by way of Hessenland Country Inn and have dinner there. When we arrived, we were greeted by Christa, who we have known ever since she and her husband, Ernst,

started the inn back in 1984. She was really pleased to see us, and, of course, wanted to know how Monica was doing. We had a long chat before eventually ordering dinner which, as usual, was delicious.

## *Radiation treatments*

July started very cool and wet, and Canada Day was downright miserable, which was such a shame as it was the one day of the year when celebrations were held right across the country. Here in Goderich, it was touch and go whether the main events—a fireworks display and a big parade—would take place because of the inclement weather. It was already overcast when we got up, and then during the morning a heavy mist rolled in off the lake, and that kept the temperature well below normal. When the parade started at 2:00 p.m., it was only 63 deg.F (17 deg.C)! However, it got a little warmer each day after that.

Before we started our daily trips to London, we had a theatre outing to Drayton and saw *Hilda's Yard*, which was described in the guide as an uplifting comedy. It was very funny and we really enjoyed it. We also went to the Grand Bend theatre to see *Chicago*. Following the show, we had dinner at Thyme on 21 fine dining restaurant to celebrate our 41st wedding anniversary one day early.

We went to the Victoria Hospital Cancer Clinic for Monica's initial radiation treatment. Despite a disturbed night's sleep, we managed to navigate through a modified ablutions and breakfast session, and left on time for the drive, which took roughly an hour and forty minutes from door to door. No holdups with road construction, traffic volume or detours, and the weather was sunny and hot—up to 84 deg.F (29 deg.C). We knew where to go to the reception, and had our pager in readiness for when the radiation therapist took Monica into the treatment room. She was then subjected to being positioned precisely on the radiation machine bed, full instructions being verbally given all the time. After a slight adjustment, the technicians activated the LINAC machine, which was in operation for about five minutes. There were no obvious signs of discomfort; although that could change as the treatments progressed. We knew the times of the next ten treatments, and they were all in the afternoon, so we didn't have to scramble for a morning appointment. Every Friday, a radiation specialist would spend some time with Monica to assess the weekly treatments. After today's treatment, we left the hospital and had a hearty lunch at the Red Lobster restaurant.

As for the treatments, Monica wasn't even aware that she was being treated. On the first day, she was still waiting for them to start the treatment when they said it was finished!! She learned to listen for the buzz of the machine when it was working, and was given two short doses from two different angles. She was in the treatment room for only about ten minutes, and most of that time was getting her in the correct position on the machine bed. They were very precise and used laser beams and her tattoos to align her exactly right.

By July 21st, Monica had been through a third of the way through her radiation treatments, everything was going very well, and it was only since the fifth treatment that she was starting to experience any of the side effects. Even then, it was only an occasional slight itchiness of her skin, which might have been due to her urticaria condition. Monica mentioned the problem to the radiation therapist when she went for her sixth treatment, and was told that it was OK to apply the hydrocortisone cream used to alleviate the discomfort brought on by the urticaria.



Halfway through Monica's radiation treatments we were well on track with the schedule. There were no problems in the daily journey to and from the Cancer Clinic, and the afternoon appointments meant we were not rushed. We began to know the 137 mile (220 km) round trip quite well, and the weather had been very good; just one day of rain. Very high temperatures (91 deg.F [33 deg.C]) for a few days meant that air conditioning in the car was essential, and, of course, the hospital was climate controlled. Monica was reacting very well to the radiation treatments; just some skin irritation, a rash and slight swelling that, following her weekly reviews, was considered normal. She kept her skin well moisturised by applying a lotion as well as the hydrocortisone cream, and that seemed to help.

We were getting lots of moral support from friends. They telephoned or at least send encouraging e-mails, and Monica had even received flowers and kind messages out of the blue. In this small town, we met acquaintances on the street and kept them advised.

As a break in the journeys to London, we went on a theatre outing to St. Jacobs and saw *Last Chance Romance*, which was described as a heartwarming comedy. While we didn't find it particularly heartwarming, we did find it quite funny, and it was certainly well acted. We enjoyed it. Following the show, we had dinner at DH Food & Lodging in the village of St. Jacobs before driving home.

The following day, August 2nd, we had a most terrifying half hour starting around 3:30 p.m. A line of really severe thunderstorms crossed the area, and the one that hit here was very reminiscent of the August 21st, 2011, tornado. We had torrential rain, very strong winds and hailstones, just like four years ago. What made it all the more scary was that it happened on a Sunday afternoon, and at almost the same time as when the tornado struck. Thankfully, it eventually passed over.

When Monica went for her last weekly review, she was warned that the side effects could continue to worsen even after the treatments had finished. The main concern was with blistering, but, thankfully, that didn't happen. Before we left, we were given Friday, November 6th, as an appointment for the follow-up consultation with the radiation oncologist, Dr. Cao.

As it turned out, the only difference between the five booster treatments and the other sixteen was the number of angles and length of time of each dose. Instead of getting a dose from two different angles, Monica was given shorter doses from three angles, which caused a slight worsening of the skin irritation and rash, but it didn't bother her.

Monica completed her schedule of radiation treatments on August 11th, and after her final session she participated in a ritual. Near the reception area there was a Chinese brass gong that hung in a wooden frame, and whenever anyone finished their course of treatments, they traditionally 'banged the gong.' In true fashion, Monica struck the gong; thus symbolically ending her radiation treatments there, and was given the customary round of applause by the people sitting in the waiting area.

Now we gradually reverted to our normal lifestyle and everyday schedule; including the occasional fine dining. On the evening of her final session, we celebrated by indulging in a sumptuous meal at Thyme on 21

fine dining restaurant. This included the obligatory glass of wine, as Monica had been ‘on the wagon’ since before her radiation treatment programme began. We agreed to share a small bottle of *Henkel Trocken* for an *apéritif*, and then have a glass of wine each with our entrees. Monica had the pecan crusted chicken while I had one of the special—a smoked pork chop with a cherry sauce. As we both started with appetizers, we shared a slice of peach pie, which was delicious. Then, when our bill came, the *Henkel Trocken* was compliments of *mein host*. A very kind gesture which nicely rounded off our celebration.

Any vacation plans we had considered were shelved pending completion of Monica’s radiation treatments. Our next door neighbours slipped off to a Caribbean island for a while. When they return they will be moving to another jobsite community as the fellow of the couple is a contract worker and his next contract will take him away from this area. They had been here roughly a year and we visited each other a few times. As well I checked on their apartment whenever they were away for long trips or returning to their actual home in Hamilton, Ontario, during bank holiday weekends, etc. They took us out for a meal at the Park House tavern as a thank you, which was a nice gesture. The apartment had already been let to an elderly lady, so there would be some upheaval in a few weeks time.

Needless to say, it didn’t take us long to get back to normal following our last trip to London—it was similar to returning from a holiday. As for Monica, things were going well. She didn’t have any worsening of the side effects—in fact, just the opposite. Her skin had gradually improved, and now only some patchy redness remained. She still had the rash, but it wasn’t as pronounced.

Towards the end of August, we went to Hessenland Country Inn for their Mongolian Grill. Other years, we had always gone after attending the theatre in Grand Bend. However, the one time we went to Grand Bend this year was on a Saturday, and that conflicted with wedding celebrations at the inn. Anyhow, as the Mongolian Grill was something we always enjoyed, we wanted to go before the season ended, but had to wait until Monica had finished her radiation treatments before making a reservation. This very popular event usually sold out every week, but we were lucky and managed to get a reservation.

We were invited by Shirley’s family to join them at Thyme on 21 fine dining restaurant for lunch there, and celebrate her 91st birthday. There were ten of us, and we all sat around a large table that had been set up in one of the four dining rooms. It was a very happy occasion, and it was lovely to see everyone, especially those whom we usually only saw when we went to Shirley’s house party on Boxing Day.

This year, the Drayton Festival Theatre celebrated its 25th season, and *The Music Man* was chosen as the production to mark this milestone. Many of the actors, who had taken part in various productions over the years, appeared once again. It was a fantastic show: everything about it was first class, and the performing company most certainly deserved the standing ovation it received at the end.

Our friends, Rosemarie and Geoff Edwards, visited us, and the four of us went out for lunch at the Beach Street Station. The old Canadian Pacific Railway station at the harbour was moved to a new location back in August, 2013. It took from then until early July this year for the building to be restored and a new kitchen built so that it could open as a restaurant. After hearing mixed reviews when it first opened, we

decided to wait until the wrinkles had been ironed out before going there. So, since Rosemarie and Geoff liked to try new restaurants, we thought we would go and see for ourselves.

After being led to believe it was going to be a high class restaurant, it was an utter disappointment. Although a marvellous job had been done restoring and renovating the old station, the food and service left a lot to be desired. As well, it was terribly noisy. When we walked through the front door, we thought we had entered a work's canteen!! The tables were also nearly as close together as they would be in a canteen. There wasn't sufficient room for the servers to get between them, so we had to pass glasses and plates from one side of the table to the other. The level of service was pretty poor, too.

As for the food, not only didn't it come up to expectations, we also thought it overpriced for what it was. For appetisers, we chose the apple and fennel soup, and it was thin and watery with just the slightest taste of apple. Rosemarie and Geoff decided to share the beef riblets, and they were so tough and chewy that they left some. Sadly, our main courses weren't much better either, so we passed on dessert and coffee. The only really good thing in the restaurant's favour was that it made us go down to the harbour. So, since it was a beautiful day, we decided to walk the boardwalk. We went all the way to the Cove, where there was an ice cream vendor (concession), so we had dessert after all. We then retraced our steps back along the boardwalk and back home for a well deserved cup of tea.

September began with a longish spell of +86 deg.F (+30 deg.C) weather with high humidity. Pretty muggy overnight, too, so a floor-mounted fan running throughout the night in the bedroom made it easier to sleep. The summer was on the wane, though, as the days were becoming noticeably shorter. Still, we had a nice dinner sitting on the patio of the Park House tavern—fish & chips and draught Guinness.

Now, however, the country was gearing up for a general election on October 19th, 2015, and we were being subjected to all the usual hype from the four main political parties. With Canada technically in a recession, the mood of the electorate was such that the current ruling Conservatives could be ousted. There was a great deal of support for the new Liberal leader, Justin Trudeau, son of a previous Canadian prime minister, Pierre Trudeau.

One day, it was beautiful, so we drove to Exeter and went to Eddington's fine dining restaurant for lunch outside on the patio. Then we went for a lovely hike along the McNaughton/Morrison Dam Trail. We didn't see any of the famed white squirrels, but we did see two white egrets, which was unusual for Southwestern Ontario; although we had seen some when driving along the north shore of Lake Erie. Prior to seeing the egrets, we saw a great blue heron and a hummingbird. Quite a contrast in size!

For some time, I had wanted to go to the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum at Mount Hope Airport near Hamilton. Although too far to make it a day trip, we decided that while we were down that way to continue and spend a few days in the Niagara Region. However, we didn't want to stay in Niagara Falls or Niagara-on-the-Lake, so our friends, Rosemarie and Geoff Edwards, told us about a hotel in the nearby city of Thorold. We checked it out on the Internet, and as it looked very nice, we made a reservation to stay there for three nights.

## *A September vacation*

One of the things that attracted us to staying in Thorold was that it was close to the Welland Canal connecting Lakes Ontario and Erie. The canal, with eight locks along its 27 mile (40 km) length, was constructed to bypass the waterfalls at Niagara Falls. Although we had seen it happen many times, we always found it fascinating to watch the progress of a ship going through a lock. As well, there was a museum at Lock 3 which we had never visited. Also on the list of attractions was Fort George National Historic Site in Niagara-on-the-Lake. We had been there before, but it was so many years ago we thought it was time to refresh our memories. Then, if we had time, there were numerous wineries in the area that we could visit. The Niagara Peninsula was well known for being Ontario's premier wine growing region, and produced some of this country's best wines.

As it turned out, our trip to the Niagara Region was just the break we both needed. We really enjoyed ourselves and came home feeling much better for the few days away. The hotel was first class and in an ideal location for what we wanted to do. We had a one bedroom suite consisting of a large bedroom, bathroom and a large sitting area with a kitchenette equipped with a fridge, microwave and coffee maker.

We were also lucky with the weather, and all four days were gorgeous with lots of sunshine and very mild temperatures. Because we took a leisurely route along country roads, as well as stopping for a short time at the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum, most of our first day was taken up with the journey to Thorold. The reason we stopped at the museum was for me to donate several items, some of which I had brought back after clearing out my father's house last year. I wanted them to go to a good home and thought they would be of interest to the museum, which they were.

That evening, we drove the short distance into neighbouring St. Catharines to have dinner at The Keg steakhouse. It was located in a heritage building that had been a cotton mill many years ago. After surviving a couple of fires, what was left of the structure had been restored to house the restaurant. It was very nice inside and the steaks were juicy and tender. Then, when our server brought our bill, she told us that, since it was the first time we had been to that restaurant, our desserts were 'on the house'! That was a real surprise and something we would never have expected to happen there.

The following day, we went to Fort George National Historic Site in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Built by the British between 1796 and 1799, Fort George guarded the mouth of the Niagara River, which was essential for transporting supplies to British forts on the upper Great Lakes. Although the fort changed opposing sides several times during the War of 1812, the British were the last to occupy it, and abandoned it in the late 1820s. It was then left to fall into ruin for more than a century before it was decided to reconstruct the historic stronghold to its pre-1813 appearance. Many of the buildings were furnished as they would have been back then, which gave visitors a good idea what life was like for the inhabitants of the fort. Not an easy one for sure!

It was mid-afternoon by the time we left Fort George, and as we hadn't had any lunch, we walked into downtown Niagara-on-the-Lake to look for a restaurant. However, everywhere was so crowded that we

decided against eating there and headed back to the car. We then went in search of a winery that had a restaurant, and came across The Farmhouse Café attached to the Caroline Cellars Winery. It was very rustic looking, but by then we were so hungry that we went in. The menu was limited, and both of us ended up choosing fish—I had pickerel and Monica had lake perch. The presentation wasn't fancy, but the food was freshly cooked and the portions were generous. So, while we may have been hungry when we arrived, we certainly weren't when we left.

Having had a glass of, presumably, their wine with our meal and thought it rather poor, we didn't bother going into the winery. Instead, we stopped at a winery that was on our way back to Thorold and did some wine tasting there. We could sample any three wines for a set price, and that would then be deducted from the cost of any bottles we bought to take with us. We could also share the samples, which we did as I was driving. We have never been big fans of Niagara wines—preferring white wines from one of Ontario's other wine producing regions and red wines from Australia—and our tasting that day didn't make us change our minds. However, we liked two out of the three we tasted well enough to buy a bottle of each. Then, knowing that we wouldn't want another big meal that evening, we decided to have a relaxing snack in our room, so we stopped at a grocery store to buy a *baguette* and some cheese to go with one of our bottles of wine.

On the third day, we went to Lock 3 on the Welland Canal where there was a large observation platform for visitors to watch ships go through the lock. The St. Catherines and Welland Canal Museum located there was the other place we particularly wanted to visit while in the region. Even though the canal was part of a busy and important shipping route, you could wait several hours before a ship appeared. However, we were lucky the day we went, and arrived at Lock 3 just in time to watch the *MV Baie St. Paul*, an absolutely enormous lake freighter belonging to the Canada Steamship Lines company, go through. We then visited the museum, and since it was larger than we had expected, we spent quite a bit of time looking around. Because of that, we didn't expect to see the same lake freighter again, but it got held up at a lift bridge that was being repaired, so we caught up with it at Lock 4. We ended up watching it go through Locks 5 and 7 as well, and then walked along the side of the canal until the ship went out of sight. When we got back to the lock, a large ocean going container vessel registered in Amsterdam was in view. So, of course, we stayed to watch its progress through the lock.

That evening we had dinner in the hotel restaurant, and it was excellent. The presentation of the food and the service were both very good, and the prices were most reasonable, especially considering the size of some of the servings. Both of us chose the roasted beet salad for our starters, and luckily we took our waiter's advice and ordered just one. It was huge and easily enough for the two of us to share. It was the same with the dessert. We ordered the baked apple pie, and it was a whole, small pie. For our main course, I chose the mushroom chicken, while Monica had a duck breast, and they came with roasted potatoes and a lovely assortment of vegetables. The evening was a really nice ending to our visit to the Niagara Region. We drove home the next day.

Towards the end of September, we visited the theatre in St. Jacobs to see *Sexy Laundry*. We had seen quite a lot of comedies this season, and while all of them were very funny, *Sexy Laundry* was by far the best. It was hilarious at times, but it also had some thought provoking moments. The play had only two actors,

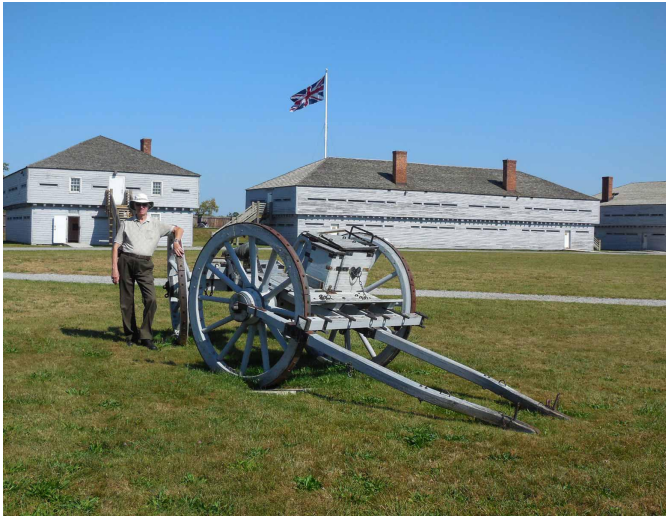




*Lindsey's Daughter Ella's First Birthday at Home in Georgetown, Ontario, June, 2015.*



*Monica Bonging the Gong at the End of her Radiation Treatments, London, Ontario, August, 2015.*



*Barry at Fort George National Historic Site, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, September, 2015.*



*Enlisted Soldiers' Barrack Interior, Fort George, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, September, 2015.*



*Officers' Mess Dining Room, Fort George, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, September, 2015.*



*Barry and Monica Share a Sample of Trius Wine, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, September, 2015.*





*MV Baie St. Paul Leaving Lock 3, Welland Canal, Thorold, Ontario, September, 2015.*



*MV Baie St. Paul Moored in Lock 7, Welland Canal, Thorold, Ontario, September, 2015.*



*Field of Black-Eyed-Susan Flowers, Wawanosh C.A. Trail near Goderich, Ontario, October, 2015.*



*Barry on the Banks of the Maitland River, Wawanosh C.A. Trail near Goderich, Ontario, October, 2015.*



*Celebrating Barry's 70th Birthday at Thyme on 21 Restaurant, Goderich, Ontario, November, 2015.*



*Monica Celebrates Christmas with Tea and Cake. Cambria Road, Goderich, Ontario, December, 2015.*



and they portrayed their characters of a husband and wife so well that, by the end of the play, we were almost believing they were actually husband and wife.

September was unseasonably warm with long spells of gorgeous, sunny weather. However, it changed abruptly with the arrival of October, and it was so chilly that we activated our central heating. The days were also noticeably shorter, and it was now dark by 7:30 p.m.: both sure signs of the impending winter.

We planned to visit Owen Sound and hike there, but neither of us slept well, so we scrapped that idea. Driving to Owen Sound, having lunch there, hiking the rigorous trail to Inglis Falls, and then driving home again with a stop for dinner on the way, made for a very long day out, and we knew we weren't up to it. However, as October 1st was such a beautiful, albeit chilly day, we felt we should still go for a hike, especially as it was forecasted to be our last nice day for a while. We thought we would like a change, so checked out the Huron County trail guide.

We discovered that the Wawanosh Conservation Area, which is about a half hour drive away, had an easy trail, so we decided to go there. Since we had originally planned to go out for the day, we also decided to eat out and stopped for lunch at Flipping Eggs, a family restaurant just north of town. When we arrived at the Conservation Area, we found that the trail system had been extended since the guide was printed, and new loop trails had been added. Anyhow, we set off intending to hike just the main trail, but it was so lovely that we also did a few of the loops. The trail took us down by the Maitland River and through an area that had been planted with black-eyed-Susans. We then completed our day out by going to the Park House tavern for dinner. So, after the disappointing start to our day, not only did we manage to salvage something of it, but it was also most enjoyable. We would definitely return to the Wawanosh Conservation Area.

All three days of the Thanksgiving holiday weekend were beautiful with lots of sunshine and unseasonably warm temperatures. On the Sunday, we cast our vote at the general election polling station. In this way, we could beat the anticipated long queues, and exercise our democratic right before the 'official' October 19th voting day. The main political parties were still trying to drum up support prior to the election. Then we went for a long hike in the afternoon, and after to Thyme on 21 fine dining restaurant for a Thanksgiving dinner in the evening. We started our meal with butternut squash soup, and that was followed by roast turkey with all the trimmings. Dessert was pumpkin pie garnished with whipped cream. We were both so full by the time we finished our desserts, but everything had been far too nice to leave any. We waddled home!!

With the temperature reaching 73 deg.F (23 deg.C) Monday afternoon, we should have gone for another long hike to work off the previous evening's big meal. However, we decided instead to take advantage of the good weather to tidy up the front garden and clean all our windows, inside and out.

Mid-month we went to Sarnia to have lunch with Diane and Mike Knight, our friends from Windsor. We didn't have our usual get-together in the spring, so it had been twelve months since we last saw them. When we saw them last October, Diane told Monica she had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Little did either of

us think then that Monica would be diagnosed with the same condition four months later. Although Diane's treatments were finished before Monica had her first surgery, Mike had cataracts removed from both of his eyes in the spring, so we were all too busy with our various hospital appointments to make the trip to Sarnia and meet for lunch. So, it was great seeing them again. While all seemed well for Diane as far as her cancer was concerned, her COPD was getting worse.

The following weekend saw a big change in the weather. Wet snow fell on and off, but it didn't settle. However, with the temperature dropping below freezing overnight, it did settle, and we awoke to find everywhere white with about 2 inches (5 cm) of heavy, wet snow. As a result, our ornamental grasses lay draped over the screen and the burning bushes were partially flattened. The weather for the following week improved, and the temperature stayed between 50 and 55 deg.F (10 and 15 deg.C) every day.

Our last theatre outing for this year was to St. Jacobs to see *The Pirates of Penzance*. It was another fantastic show, and, once again, well deserving the standing ovation it received at the end. We didn't go very far afield on another trip in October—just to attend a surprise 70th birthday party for our friend, Marris Bos. His actual birthday was while he and his wife, Tina, were away on holiday, but that didn't stop the family from organizing a party. Tina and Marris have a very large family—eight children, fifteen grandchildren, as well as both of them having several brothers and sisters. Together with their many friends, quite a crowd congregated at their house to wish him well. Coffee and cake were served throughout the afternoon; then later there was a potluck supper for those who wanted to stay a bit longer. We were among those who stayed, and what a variety of food there was to choose from—too much really. Anyhow, we enjoyed what we had before leaving.

During the last week of October, we had a very busy few days staying home and decorating our bedroom. It was originally planned for the spring, but, of course, it didn't get done because of Monica's health issue. Anyhow, we were really pleased with the end result. Except for the bathroom, where we used a special anti-mildew paint, all the other rooms were decorated using the same colour paint, called Museum. The new colour, though, was sufficiently different from the old one.

We celebrated my 42nd anniversary of emigrating to Canada earlier than the actual day—November 4th—because our favourite gourmet restaurant was closed for staff holidays. So we went there for dinner on the previous Saturday. As always, we had a delicious meal. Then, so that the actual day didn't pass without some recognition, we had one of our favourite 'at home' dinners that evening—a beef fondue with salad, crusty bread and a bottle of wine.

### *Consultation reveals good news*

**A**t the beginning of November, we went to London for a check-up with Dr. Cao, Monica's radiation oncologist. We arrived at the Cancer Clinic early, and, much to our surprise, we were immediately interviewed by a nurse, who asked the usual preliminary questions. She was followed by Dr. Gill, an intern who was assisting Dr. Cao, and he asked a lot more questions. He then left, but returned a short time later with Dr. Cao, who asked still more questions and also answered any of our own questions. Dr.

Cao also examined Monica and didn't find anything amiss. Even though he said he could formally discharge Monica, after some discussion we agreed that he should re-examine her after twelve months. She would also be re-examined by her surgical oncologist in the following spring; so an expert appraisal every six months, plus a routine mammogram, was established.

After leaving the hospital we drove to my cousin's house across the city. Both Don and his wife, Claire, were at home, and we had a nice visit having not seen them for a while. Don showed us photos taken at his mother's 104th birthday; also attended by two grandchildren. My aunt Kath looked very good for her age!

**S**now fell one late November weekend and accumulated between 6 and 8 inches (15 and 20 cm). On the bright side, it was a welcome condition to compliment the town's annual Santa Claus parade. I think the town's Works Department personnel had to scramble to install the trucks' snow ploughs and salt distributors. Our private snow clearing contractor was also on the ball, and the crews came around to plough the driveway and shovel the path. Before the snow fell, our landlord had raked the remainder of fallen leaves into the gutter for the Works Department to pick up with their suction machine. All good service—especially when a big birthday was looming, and, at three score years and ten, I was not as agile as I once was.

Another indicator in that regard was when I accidentally injured my ribcage. Of course, it was one of those stupid situations where a little forethought would've prevented the injury. I was sitting in my office-type swivel chair and leant down to retrieve something that had dropped on the floor. My immediate reaction was to reach over the armrest, and that was my downfall. The action brought my lower right ribcage in contact with the solid armrest with a force that caused severe instantaneous pain; followed by a wave of nausea (which concerned me the most). By the following day, the pain hadn't gone away, so I decided to walk up the road to our General Hospital Emergency Department and check in with the on-call doctor. He physically examined my chest and declared that nothing serious, such as internal organ damage (lung, liver, diaphragm, etc.), had occurred. However, to be on the safe side, he requested X-rays, and that was the next step. Straight to the Diagnostic Imaging Department and five X-rays taken. After he had reviewed them, the doctor said that he couldn't see any abnormalities, but would prefer that the radiologist and my family doctor call the shots. The next day, I received a phone call from my doctor's assistant, who said that the five X-rays showed insufficient information and more images were necessary. So, it was visiting the hospital again for two more X-rays. As time went by, my ribcage injury became a non-issue, and there weren't any subsequent problems. No pain at all, and my doctor didn't request any follow up examinations.

## *November celebrations*

**W**hen we made the reservation to go to the *Novemberfest* dinner and dance at Hessenland Country Inn, the significance of the date really hit us. The event was held on November 14th, and with this year being the 75th anniversary when the city of Coventry was bombed by the Germans, it seemed strange that we would spend the evening in the company of our former enemies. Of course, much had happened since then, and we were good friends with the inn's owners, Ernst and Christa Ihrig and their family.



Anyhow, we most certainly didn't let the the significance of the date spoil our evening, and we had a really great time. The couples sitting on either side of us were good company and interesting to talk to, and the dinner was also delicious. The first course, a cream of potato soup, was brought around to the tables, as was the dessert—mascarpone cheese topped with apple compote and granola. The main course was served buffet style and included many German specialities such as schnitzels, spaetzle, sauerkraut and red cabbage. There were also roasted potatoes and a vegetable medley. As at previous *Novemberfest* events, a live band provided the music for dancing, and this year there seemed to be a more lively crowd with lots of people getting up to dance. Once again, there was a silent auction in aid of the Parkinson's Association, but because we had been oblivious to how fast the time was going, we almost missed out placing a bid. However, we did just make it before the bidding closed, and were lucky enough to get the item we wanted—a gift certificate for lunch for two at Eddington's gourmet restaurant in Exeter.

My 70th birthday was celebrated at Thyme on 21 fine dining restaurant, and, as usual, we had an excellent meal. I ordered crab cakes for my starter while Monica chose Bangkok shrimp. For our main course, both of us chose the bacon wrapped beef tenderloin with a peppercorn sauce, served with mushrooms, roasted mini sweet potatoes and a medley of vegetables. We shared dessert—fresh apple crumble with ice cream. For effect, a lighted sparkler was put into my portion, and the heat from it nearly melted the ice cream!

## *End of another year*

Our weather continued to be very unseasonable with temperatures much warmer than normal and an almost complete lack of snow. We already had had one lot of snow in late November, and even though we ended up with an accumulation of between 6 and 8 inches (15 and 20 cm), it was very wet snow which didn't last long. Snow wasn't the only thing that we lacked; it was also sunshine. We had day after day of cloudy skies, and it didn't look as if there would be any improvement towards the end of the year.

The shortest day of the year was one of the mildest in December. We even reached double-digit temperatures, and there was the distinct possibility of a 'green' Christmas. Most unnatural for us, of course, but the weather prophets blamed the influence of *El Niño* in the Pacific Ocean. The mild conditions created a mixed blessing—lower heating bills; normal driving conditions; some golf courses remained open, but no snow for seasonal atmosphere and ski resorts resorted to laying off personnel.

As expected, our Christmas was more or less a repeat of previous years. We spent Christmas Day by ourselves doing things the way we like them done, such as enjoying tea with Monica's home made Christmas cake. Then on Boxing Day we continued the tradition of getting together with our friend, Shirley, and her family. Cathy, Shirley's daughter, said that she and her partner, Rainer, would take over the hosting of the family Boxing Day party this year. They lived in town and still within easy walking distance from us. Anyhow, with Boxing Day being on a Saturday, those in the family who still worked had a longer holiday and didn't have to rush back to Toronto, so we were a bigger crowd this time—fourteen of us. It was lovely seeing everyone again; especially those whom we see only once a year on Boxing Day.

We began our New Year's Eve celebrations with dinner at Thyme on 21 fine dining restaurant, and once again it was a special four course dinner. The first course was a cream of parsnip soup with apple compote, and that was followed by a roasted pear salad with arugula, chopped walnuts, dried cranberries and parmesan cheese. There wasn't a choice of *entrées* as there had been other years, but that didn't bother us as the *table d'hôte* would have been our choice anyway. It was roasted beef tenderloin with a lobster tail, twice baked potato and asparagus. Dessert was a slice of flourless chocolate cake with raspberry sorbet. The wine chosen was new to us—*rosé* from Prince Edward County, Ontario—and proved to be an excellent companion to the meal.

The restaurant was packed throughout the evening, and as we knew many of our fellow guests, a fair amount of socialising went on. One person caught my sleeve and said, "I thought it was you, Barry. Remember me? Glen Machan." It was quite the surprise. He was the retired woodworking teacher at the local high school. Back in 1976, I attended woodworking classes in the evening for recreation. Glen remembered me from those days, and we had a good chat about the time when he helped repair a broken wooden cross-country ski that I had brought into the shop. I still have most of the articles, such as steak platters, a cheese board and a candlestick that I made at that time.

We chatted to several of the other guests before leaving and it was nearly 11:00 p.m. when we arrived home. So, as there wasn't time to watch even a short movie to watch on the computer, we played a couple of hands of cribbage to help keep us awake before listening to the countdown on the radio. At the stroke of midnight, we open a small bottle of *Henkel Trocken* sparkling wine and toasted in the New Year 2016.

