

Profiles

with Jennifer Barr



Ted Freeman gets frustrated when his hands won't quite close and he gets weary by four in the afternoon. But Ted is lucky to be alive. Six months ago Ted became a human torch when a flash propane fire in his motor home trapped him inside.

The Freeman's 18-year-old son Lyle was due to start engineering at the University of Guelph in the fall, so the March '81 school break would be the last holiday Ted, Shirley, Lyle and Gordon, 16, would spend together. The Rockwood family flew to one of their favorite holiday spots, Houston, Texas, and leased a motor home for a ten day drive down the Gulf of Mexico coast.

Three days out of Houston across the desert into the Rio Grande Valley, the Freeman's stopped to gas up. The motor home hadn't been starting too well and it refused to start after re-fueling. Realizing it would take some time Ted told his family to pop across the road and purchase supplies from a fruit stand.

The motor was inside the vehicle under a cover between driver and passenger seats. Ted removed the cover and started working on the carburetor. The engine backfired and a blue flame appeared momentarily above the engine. Hearing a "woof" Ted turned to the right to see a sheet of blue flame fill the motor home trapping him eight feet from the only exit.

A later inquest found that a potential leak in the propane gas line fueling the stove and fridge and filled the motor home with gas. The family sitting up front in air conditioned comfort were unaware of the danger until the engine backfired.

But Ted didn't have time to worry about causes—he had to get out. With his mind "stripping an exit," realized he was in a "time bomb" and dove for the door. His 200 plus pounds failed to burst the door open, did in fact succeed in locking it. With temperatures reaching 2000 degrees and the heat already buckling Ted's knees, he managed to get the door open although he still doesn't remember how.

Once outside Ted realized he was a human torch covered in blue flame feeding on his propane gas saturated clothes.

His first reaction was "this is it—my body's burning." Having the presence of mind not to breathe and thus seal his lungs, Ted tucked his burning hands into his chest and squatted down trying to smother as much of the fire as he could. The bare tarmac held little hope for rolling so Ted smothered the flames coming out of his shirt licking his face with his hands. Flames shooting out of his pants seemed to originate in his cowboy boots, so Ted kicked them off. Still on fire, and out of breath, Ted ran 10 feet and took a good gulp of fresh air stopping to wipe more flames from his body.

By then his hands looked like brown paper bags with skin hanging off them in shards but the flames were out. Ted's body was still intensely hot and burning but he glanced back to the

camper to see if he could save anything. Black smoke was pouring out, the bubble door window had melted and Ted resigned himself to losing everything.

By then help was coming. Shirley and the boys had realized all that black smoke was coming from THEIR camper and Ted was being helped into the filling station where an ambulance was called.

Ted still didn't feel any fear or pain. In shock, he was mainly annoyed that the holiday would be interrupted while the family made alternate arrangements. It would be three days before he became conscious that his holiday was over and he was lucky to be alive.

The extreme heat had burned over 35 per cent of Ted's body with immediate second and third degree burns. Damage to his hands and arms was considerable and risk of infection was high.

Ted credits Texan ambulance crews and his doctor, Roy Stewart with saving his hands so they would heal without needing grafting. Three days in ICU of Edinburg Hospital with his eyes bandaged and full of silver nitrate and drugged on Demerol had Ted wishing he was at home. The concern and care of hospital staff and Texas friends still brings tears to Ted's eyes.

Within a week the need to get Ted into a whirlpool and closer to home made Dr. Stewart agree to release Ted and arrange for transfer to Hamilton General Hospital. A big courageous man, Ted refused the 17 hour ambulance flight ride and opted for a speedier commercial flight with his family, nurse Pappy Wood and a swelling body swathed in bandages.

Two weeks later Ted was released from Hamilton with his hands functional and a hairless and "sunburned" head and torso. His left leg and calf muscle was also severely burned but healing.

Less than two months later Ted was just as active as he'd ever been working a long day with his farm equipment company, Freeman Farm Systems.

Always a strong believer in God, Ted says he has one more proof of a Supreme Being—"Somebody opened the door of that camper," he says. And he's very grateful for the kind people who helped him and his family get home in one piece.

"Now I can truly say 'It's hot in Texas'" quips the man who's been "heat-treated" and has lived to tell about it.

Economic woes topic of speaker

Inflation, high taxes, the faltering economy and what can be done about them was outlined about 18 business-people at a special Chamber of Commerce Speaker's Luncheon Thursday at Acton Meadows.

Gord Stovel, CLU, president of Advance Financial Planning Corporation, explained Canadians are in an "economic war of survival." He noted not many people receive formal education in financial planning, thus their planning becomes helter skelter.

Stovel explained that financial planning is essentially trying to minimize taxes; manage inflation; and trying to go about a process of creative wealth accumulation.

The soon-to-be released federal budget, Stovel said, holds some economic woes for the small businessman, whose taxes will be increased an estimated 20 to 30 per cent. This, he said, will fuel inflation as the businessman will have to pass on his added costs to the consumer.

Stovel told the small audience that what could be purchased in 1901 for

\$1.00 would cost \$2.82 in 1980 according to the consumer price index. With the consumer tax index, (the sum total of provincial, municipal and federal taxes) a \$1 in 1961 was worth \$4.96 in 1980. As a result, he said, the price index is not rising as much or as fast as the tax index, thus adding to the economic problems.

What's inflation? Stovel asked. In 1940, \$1 could purchase 19 loaves of bread. In 1980, the same dollar could purchase only one and a half loaves and in 1981 only one-and-one-third loaves could be bought for \$1.

From 1940 to 1967, the financial expert pointed out, interest rates barely moved from about five per cent. However, since Centennial year, rates have skyrocketed 300 per cent. He emphasized the bank rate is set by the government, not the banks.

Meanwhile, Stovel said, there is no such thing as a "get rich scheme." Diamonds are about the best investment to make, he said, but take about 10 years before they can see a profit on the money in-

vested. \$10,000 worth of diamonds after 10 years could be worth \$100,000, but it's a long wait.

"You're always going to have to deal with 15 per cent money and 10 per cent inflation rate," Stovel concluded.

Chamber of Commerce president John Allison said he was pleased with the turnout for the first-ever luncheon and hoped more could be held in the future.



Chamber of Commerce first vice president Dave Whiting (left) and president John Allison, (right) welcome Gord Stovel to the Chambers' first Speakers Luncheon at Acton Meadows Golf Course Thursday.

Shots fired at area motel

A 28-year-old Georgetown woman was charged with dangerous use of a firearm and theft over \$200 Sunday after a shooting incident at the Cedar Springs Motel, east of Acton on Highway 7.

Sergeant Ron Southgate, Halton Regional Police, said officers were called to the scene after shots were fired in the parking lot and without incident arrested Cynthia Hayes, Dayfoot Dr.

The weapon, a .38 calibre Smith and Weston revolver, had been stolen earlier Sunday from the residence of Frank Jones, Main St., North, Acton.

Police recovered both the revolver and some spent shells in the parking lot. The accused didn't fire the shots at anyone, Southgate said, the shots were fired in the air. She was released from custody to appear in court November 9 and the incident was the "result of a domestic situation."

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WELCOME HOME TIM



Pete Masson, President of Pete Masson Motors Ltd. is pleased to announce the appointment of Tim Haines as Sales Manager. Born and raised in Glen Williams, Tim spent 8 years with General Motors and the past three years with Neal Pontiac in St. Catharines. He looks forward to renewing old acquaintances and making many new ones.



Ted Freeman

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