

No beer for Embrun smokeaters

by Julie Van Dusen

Well sir, there's no more beer in the Embrun Fire Hall! Not since 1974, the year Maurice Gregoire took on the job of chief of the Embrun Fire Department.

"That's the first thing I did when I became fire chief, threw out all the beer, said the 36-year-old father of three. We guys like to socialize, but there's a time and place for everything, and there's no room for heavy drinkers on this force."

Operating from a Fire Hall that was built in 1971, the force has \$200,000 worth of equipment financed by the municipality. Mr. Gregoire spoke with obvious pride of the 19 men ranging in age from 19 to 57 who have doused about 15 fires this year alone.

The men earn a salary but it's only a token. For example, earnings of the average Embrun fire fighter from December to June were a meagre \$150. And to top it off, 10% is allotted to the Embrun Fire Fighter's association.

"We sure aren't here for the money" said Mr. Gregoire. "I'd say that in 95% of the cases, my men do it mainly for the excitement."

When asked to elaborate, Mr. Gregoire warmed perceptibly. "Well, there's no doubt about it, you really need guts to be a fireman. It's like conquering nature; you're only a man and you have to defeat that flame."

He was quick to add that there's the major factor of saving people's lives. "Every time that alarm rings, we know that there's someone out there who needs us."

Luckily it's a rare occasion when the men have not been able to get to the scene on time. "It's only happened a couple of times since I've been a fireman," said Mr. Gregoire. "Once, two young people lost their lives. They were dead before we got there. There's really nothing that we could have done. Even so, you can't help but feel responsible for what happens."



EMBRUN FIREFIGHTERS

Standing, back row: Jacques Sigouin; Lucien Bertrand, captain; Paul Bourgie, deputy chief; Lionel Masse; Denis Lavictoire. Second row, Pierre E. Perras, Robert Seguin, Jacques Emard, captain; Jean Brisson, Pierre C. Perras; Bottom, Maurice Gregoire, chief; Claude Gagne; Jean Guy Gregoire; Roma Bourdeau; Gerald Lavictoire; Germain Lapalme.

I cried that whole night and couldn't sleep for two weeks."

Mr. Gregoire has been a fireman since 1966, and was elected fire chief by the men. Besides living and working in the town to qualify, an Embrun firefighter must be accepted by each person on the force. Being physically fit is essential. Besides having to scale 35 foot ladders, (they are high enough to reach every structure in Embrun) the men must carry 40-pound compressed air tanks on their backs to combat smoke inhalation. They must be able to drive a truck, having obtained a class D licence, and above all be willing to devote a lot of time, at sometimes ungodly hours, to the job.

Mr. Gregoire, who is also the manager of the Embrun Community Centre Dance Hall, stated that, apart from the monthly fire drill, there are various other

meetings that bring the men together.

As fire chief, Mr. Gregoire must make sure that the men get the job done. "But that's no problem" he says proudly. "Once the men are at the site, they know what to do, each man pulls his weight, myself included. I love to show the fellows that I gave it my best." Stressing the obvious camaraderie shared by the men, Gregoire seemed a bit at a loss when queried about the absence of women on the force.

"There were two women who expressed an interest in joining our team, but one was from Ottawa which is too far away in an emergency. The other one," he continued somewhat reluctantly, "Well she was just too sexy!"

Russell W.I. goes touring

Canadian Industry was the theme when the Russell Village Women's Institute held its July meeting at the Zion United Church in Cedar Hill near Pakenham.

In spite of scattered showers the Russell ladies enjoyed an interesting day touring the Mill of Kintail, the Pinecraft store in Almonte, and rose greenhouses in Carp.

The day was planned by Diny Achtereekte and Tean Campbell. The ladies of Zion United Church provided an excellent luncheon.

The meeting in Cedar Hill was presided by Mrs. Eileen Hamelin.

A very unusual fly

By M.M. McCallum

"Once upon a time," said Alfred, "I met a lovely lady. Her name was Mercy B. Chair. Mercy came from the East Coast where the pines grew straight and tall. Indeed, her beautiful grain and mellow colour gave away her age more than anything she said."

"You only had to look at her to know that her pine tree must have been at least 150 years old at the time of her birth, and she claimed to be over 90 when Alfred met her."

Alfred, you will remember, is the 37-year-old fly who reads and writes stories of his travels.

We last left Alfred in a workshop with many interesting objects: Among them Mercy B. Chair.

"What an interesting name you have," said Alfred.

"Well" answered Chair, "I came by it honestly. It so happens that when folks are tired, or there is a fretful baby to be rocked, they sink upon me saying, — 'Mercy — but I am glad to rest!'"

"Oh, of course, how clever. But what does the 'B' stand for?" asked Alfred.

"Oh nothing, really. I just thought it sounded interesting. I heard some call letters on a radio one day; they had a very lyrical sound so I came as close to it as I could with my M.B.C. initials."

My, my, mused Alfred, such a simple explanation of an interesting happening — but then, most of the world-shaking events are simple, once they are explained!

"What happened to you Mercy, as you emerged from your parent tree so long ago? When I was curled up on your bottom I noticed uneven marks as though someone had been chipping at you."

"That's it exactly," cried Mercy. "In the long ago there were no handy electric saws and such — dear me no! — I was hewed out of the rough lumber with an adze."

"What about your rungs?" queried Alfred.

"Oh, I must admit they were rounded and smoothed with a spoke-shave," said Mercy.

"I know what a spoke-shave is. I have had many a good slide on its gleaming, gently curved blade," Alfred nodded.

"Did you notice this narrow bit here on my center back rung?" asked Mercy.

"Yes, but I didn't like to mention it" said Alfred. "Grandad Whirlygig says it's not polite to mention anyone's shortcomings."

"That's O.K. Alfred, it's quite an honourable scar really. I received it during the big fire of 1892. Why, I saw dozens of cousins and friends go up in smoke. How I can recall that terrible day. I was rocking little Jenny Lind. She was bound to me by a wide trip of whitened flour bag and we were watching her mother pound her clothes clean on the river rocks. Slap-dash, slap-dash went the clothes on the rocks — then suddenly the sun was blotted out."

Smoke whipped by, carrying live embers and grey ash!

Mrs. Lind acted quickly. Picking us both up she waded into the water. There's no doubt about it. The ducking saved both the child and myself. All, that is, except for one little spot on my back where a live coal danced and sizzled, as the flames roared overhead. Fortunately Mrs. Lind splashed me again, and I have only that scar to show for it. That experience drew Jenny and I together and she took me with her when she married and moved east to Ontario."

"There were long winter evenings of euchre parties when a granny and her knitting were my close companions, and my, I near wore my rockers clean through with the flu epidemic after the great war. Why just six weeks ago I was at center stage in the institute home for a bridal shower."

"But now, Alfred, old Mrs. Stewart — my Jenny Lind that was: is gone and her granddaughter has sold the farm and me too. I don't know what's ahead. In spite of all my scars and scratches, I still have a rock or two left in me yet, and my back is as straight as ever. I've never let a sliver or splinter damage flesh or dress yet. I don't know — Oh, I don't know..."

"Well" said Alfred, "Remember that beautiful tall lady who came here yesterday? She is a famous cookie-maker and she has a sturdy rocker already — but — she just loves pretty things too. I saw her looking at you."

"Keep smiling and rocking Mercy B. Chair, smiling and rocking. Maybe the best is yet to come!!"

Gerry Leroux



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