

Thomson TRADEWINDS

DAVID & MARY THOMSON C.I. ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

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Thomson Grad Targets Parkinson's



When **Tilo Kunath** smiled for the camera in his yearbook photo for 1990 (left) could he or anyone else have foreseen that twenty years later he would be in the forefront of scientific research aimed at combating the dreaded effects of Parkinson's disease?

Today Tilo is a Parkinson's UK Senior Research fellow at the MRC Centre for Regenerative Medicine at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. The lab which he heads has as its primary aim understanding how disease proteins, such as α -synuclein, cause neurodegeneration and using that knowledge to generate new therapeutics in dealing with such degeneration. In layman's terms, he and his team have been working to create cells and neurons which act in the same way as those affected by Parkinson's, in order to screen compounds that will rescue them from dying.

They have recently established cell models from the skin cells of a family from Iowa with a genetic mutation in the alpha-synuclein gene. Half the family members succumb to an aggressive early-onset form of Parkinson's. The team have now set themselves the goal of identifying disease-modifying compounds by screening stem cell-derived neurons from this family. Promising drugs will be tested in rat or mouse models of Parkinson's with the hope that the best-performing drugs could move to human clinical trials. Progress is slow and painstaking, but each new development brings its share of excitement and renewed hope.

Asked to recall memorable teachers at Thomson, Tilo mentioned **Mr. Law**, whom he considered "very cool" and who created some great explosions in the chemistry lab - notably sodium metal. He was also inspired by **Mr. Hensley** in biology. He remembers doing a project on how pH

affected the ability of amylase to break down starch, which he dubbed the "spit on a piece of bread experiment" (since amylase is abundant in saliva). He presented his report with great care but also, according to the mark assigned by classmates, too much boredom. Mr. Hensley, impressed by the rigour of Tilo's work, bumped the mark up!

Tilo moved on to complete his Bachelor of Science from Queen's University in 1994, his Master of Science from McGill in 1996 and his PhD in developmental biology from U. of T. in 2003 with **Prof. Janet Rossant**. He was the recipient of a prestigious Medical Research Studentship Award for 1999-2002. He spent many hours at the Samuel Lunenfeld Research Institute at Mount Sinai Hospital, working on placental stem cells and also discovered a novel type of stem cell he termed XEN cells. He was actively involved with the environmental group Waste Watchers and, from 1998 to 2003, Co-ordinator of the SciHigh Outreach Program in Toronto.

In 2003, Tilo became a post-doctoral fellow at the University of Edinburgh with **Prof. Austin Smith**. From 2005 to 2009 he was the recipient of an MTC/ Parkinson's Disease Society



Fellowship in Stem Cell Research. In 2007 he started his own research group with funding from Parkinson's UK. He remains active spreading the word to the community.

If you're inspired to check out Tilo's work in greater detail, just google his name, and you'll be referred to a number of interesting sites. Meanwhile, Tilo (and Thomson) can be justifiably proud of what he has accomplished since that yearbook photo was taken. And just wait for what happens in the next twenty years!

Profile Updates: Grads in the Broadcast Media

Sixteen years ago we profiled a number of Thomson alumni/ae in radio and TV. (Read the profiles in the Spring 1996 newsletter at our website www.thomsonforever.ca). Here's an update on some of them, plus a couple of newer additions.

Linda MacLennan (1974), on finding the 1996 profile, felt she was reading about someone she only vaguely remembered. So much has changed since she was asked about her life then.

She left her anchor job at CBS in Chicago nine years ago, after network bosses in NYC decided the station needed new management. As with virtually all businesses, the new management wanted their people in positions like Linda's. Being bought out of a newly-minted three-year contract helped cushion the blow, but after a twenty-five-year career, half in Canada and half in the U.S., it took her a very, very long time to feel fine about her life being turned upside down, and not by choice.

Now she has come to feel that this dark moment led her to understand that the greatest gift is the gift of TIME: time to spend immersing herself in the ever-changing lives of her children (after her two boys, she had a daughter, **Charlotte**, in 1999) and her husband, who is often travelling for work.

She also had time to spend with her beloved mom, who, despite being young-looking, vigorous, productive and barely into her 70s, was diagnosed in 2009 with stage-four colon cancer. Linda had time to travel back and forth between Chicago and Bobcaygeon. Her mom and her family had one year to make the most of life lived fully.

Linda has also had time to adapt to life in the suburbs from life in a huge metropolitan downtown; time to pursue the activity that thrills her the most: photography; and time to do what she promised her mom she would eventually do: sing in a church choir.



In a few months, her eldest (seen between Linda and her husband, left) goes off to university, a bittersweet time made less bitter with no regrets about having spent too little time with him. Linda says there can always be jobs - though not many like the incredibly exciting career she had - but never enough time.

(View Linda's photography at www.pbase.com/lindamaclennan.)



Tom Hayes (1980) has a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from the U. of T., which he earned while learning his broadcast journalism skills on the side at Scarborough Cable TV. In 1996 he had been news anchor and reporter at CTV News in Toronto for eight years, and remained there until 2011, when he moved to Citytv, where he now anchors the 5:30 pm newscast.

He has been the recipient of the RTNDA Edward R. Murrow International Award, the RTNDA Regional Award and the Toronto Firefighters' Association Award.

His series of investigative stories on date rape and Ontario's antiquated liquor law prompted the legislation to be changed. Ontario Minister of Government Services at the time, Gerry Phillips, called the new law "The Hayes Amendment."



Tom also "moonlights" on guitar and lead vocals for The Twisters, a rock and roll band who have become regulars at the Scarborough Rotary Ribfest in Thomson Park on the August holiday week-end (in action in the photo above).



Glenn Pelletier (1978), much in demand as an MC and on-stage performer at Thomson, seemed a natural for a broadcast career. After graduation from Ryerson in 1981, he was hired at 570 CHYM in Kitchener as a newscaster/reporter, but within a couple of months he signed on as a reporter with the local CTV affiliate, where he stayed until February, 1983 to go on the road as lead singer with a Rolling Stones tribute band.

By late summer he was back in radio as copy clerk at CBC National Radio News in Toronto. From October, 1983 to February, 1984 he was the morning news anchor at CKBB radio in Barrie. Back to the band from February to August of 1984, then off to Winnipeg as anchor/reporter at 58 CKY under **Charles Adler**.

In November, 1984, he returned to Kitchener where, in May of 1985, he began a 12-year stint as an on-air personality at CHYM. In the summer of 1997, when the station became 570 News, he took on a number of roles, including sportscaster and business talk show host.

In April of 1999, he left to join the crew on the Toronto Blue Jays radio broadcasts, working alongside **Tom Cheek** and **Jerry Howarth**. But in March, 2000 he was lured back to 570 News, at first hosting his own talk show before moving to his present role as morning news anchor in November, 2005.

Glenn has two daughters: **Lucy**, 15; and **Ellen**, 9. He would also love to hear from fellow grads: glenn.pelletier@570news.rogers.com.



Curt with Jean Chretien

Curt Petrovich (1980) was profiled in our Autumn 2000 newsletter, when he won the Michener Award. He is still with the CBC, but no longer in Winnipeg. In 2001 he went to work at the parliamentary bureau in Ottawa. After having been responsible for an investigation which resulted in a declaration by a retired judge that some of the implicated were unmitigated liars, he is now able to see how the pros do it - lying, that is. In four years, he had “a front row seat to some of the boldest examples of obfuscation, subterfuge, deception and outright lies fuelled by partisan ideology and a desperate, craven thirst

for power.” These included the sponsorship scandal, the inquiry into the case of **Maher Arar**, and the implosion of the Canadian Alliance Party. But Curt also feels these were also incredibly important times for any journalist covering the nation’s business.

In 2001, he was to cover **Prime Minister Chretien’s** visit to the UN in New York, but then came 9/11. Anti-terrorism and security laws became a dominant theme in Ottawa. Curt, frustrated by the pack mentality of the press gallery, wanted to get back to telling stories about people, not politics. So in 2005 it was off to Vancouver, the one Canadian city he’d always wanted to work in but had never managed to land. With him came the woman who had vied for the same job, but was willing to settle for the prospect of becoming Curt’s wife (he was divorced for the second time by 2005).

Despite the sticker shock of Vancouver house prices, they found half a duplex up a mountain in the suburbs. They now have a daughter, 6; and a son, 5. If it weren’t for the necessity of paying bills, Curt would love to stay home and enjoy them both.

Instead, he’s spent time in Washington and London as a foreign correspondent; he’s covered wildfires in California and murder investigations in BC’s interior. He’s been to China several times, once to help open the CBC’s bureau in Shanghai; back again to research and gather material ahead of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing; and then for the games themselves. Last March he was sent to cover the earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

In the summer, Curt completed a documentary for The National about the return of former kidnapped Canadian journalist, **Amanda Lindhout** to Africa. Just as his group reached Kenya, the humanitarian crisis boiled over as a thousand Somalis a day poured over the border, running from famine and the ruthless barbarism of Al Shabab, the Somali terrorists. Meeting and talking to the people who lost children and other loved ones on their foot journey has left a lasting impression, causing Curt to value the life and joys with which he has been blessed.



With children at the refugee camp at Dabaab, Kenya

He feels his career has given him a unique opportunity to see history unfold and has made him grateful for what he has. As a parent, Curt hopes his children will have as positive an experience in high school as he did at Thomson - difficult as that may be!



Jennifer (Peck) Valentyne (1986) has been married since our 1996 profile - to her camera operator at Citytv. She has two children: **Jackson** (11) and **Georgia** (10) plus an amazing husband who likes to cook and clean. With the kind of schedule Jennifer has on her own, plus all her husband’s and children’s activities, there are some weeks when she wonders how they managed to get it all done.

One thing hasn’t changed. Jennifer is still with Breakfast Television on Citytv in Toronto after close to 20 years. She’s still getting up at 4 am, something she expected would be a temporary inconvenience back when she was 25 but now enjoys. She has been the singing Weather Girl and still handles Celebrations (saluting birthdays, anniversaries, etc.) and her major role on the Live Eye segments. She has rappelled down City Hall, gone up in a fighter jet with the Blue Angels and sat in the passenger seat as Julie Clarke did aerobatics in a small plane over Jennifer’s house. Each winter she inaugurates the season jumping into Lake Ontario with fellow crazies for the Polar Bear Dip. She has recordings of many of her adventures, storing them up to show to grandchildren!

When she was in high school, she wanted to become an actress. As her mom was dying of cancer, they had long conversations about the practicality of that career. They visited Centennial College together and loved its Television Broadcasting course prospective. Now she wouldn’t exchange her life with anyone. She gets to work with “the best team in morning television,” who are like family even off camera. She loves hearing that she has helped people start their day with some laughter. And perhaps, now that **Tom Hayes** has joined her at City, he might consider recruiting a guest vocalist for his band!



Laurie Brown (1975) is still with the CBC, but she has moved on from her position as Senior Arts Correspondent, with frequent reports, reviews, interviews and documentaries for their television news and current affairs programs. Now she is heard coast-to-coast Monday to Saturday evenings from

10 pm to midnight as host of The Signal, on CBC Radio 2, a program featuring an eclectic mix of live and recorded music with a contemporary sound - “new” classical, world, improvised, cross-genre and anything else that appeals to her taste, with an emphasis on Canadian writers, composers and performers. She has built a loyal following and invites us all to give a listen and sample what she’s playing.

Her daughter and son are now adults. She lives in Toronto but does get to spend some time each year at a second home in Nova Scotia, where her parents live.

School Update: Changes at Thomson

First, for those who have been asking, Thomson has not been torn down yet. We asked Principal **Soriana Mantini** about the status of the Bendale-Thomson Project, and she indicated the Board has reached the step of putting together a Local School Community Design Team (LSCDT) to plan what a new school on the site should look like. Recommended members include school principal(s); school superintendent; school trustee; school parent/teacher chairs, if applicable; school tenant representatives (e.g. child care), if applicable; community ratepayer association representatives; and community representatives. Anyone out there who would like to see an alumni representative on the committee (and who would be willing to be that representative)?

Meanwhile, there have been some notable changes in the building, even from the time of our 50th anniversary in 2009. The highlight is the newly-renovated library, shown in the photograph. New paint and carpeting (in school colours) is complemented by large open spaces, with book shelves and computers moved to the periphery. There are two distinct teaching areas with interactive whiteboards (you can see one in the photo). And



students love the new “nodes” - brightly-coloured chairs with work surfaces that are mobile and versatile (they can be arranged in many different configurations, even joined together to create tables for group work). The library is now a flexible, student-centred commons.

Anticipating the use of the new school as a centre for Board in-service training, the TDSB staff development department has taken over the staff lounge, room 146 and

a portion of the student café (walled off from the student area) for use by Board employees for various staff development and meetings. The staff lounge is now composed entirely of large round tables and chairs with a whiteboard set up for meetings. (Yes, the billiard table is gone!) Thomson actually has to book the room for its own staff meetings. Teachers tend

to eat lunch now in their department offices or leave the building. Room 214 has been set up as a small staff lounge, with a photocopier, some comfy chairs, a work table, fridge, etc. Some staff eat there, and supply teachers use the room during unassigned periods.

So the old school continues to evolve and is likely to do so for a number of years yet.

In Memoriam



Dave Lea (left), who made his mark as a very popular member of Thomson’s Science Department from 1973 to 2002, died at the end of January. On Facebook, former students remembered his sense of humour, his patience and his passion for science. “We learned a bit about biology and a lot about learning,” said **David Hill**. “He provoked, confounded and inspired,” according to **Patti (Paddle) Loach**. All agreed that we have lost a good man too soon.

We have also learned of the death a year ago of **Tom Coulston** (right), who taught History and Geography and counselled in the Guidance Department from 1963 to 1969. He was also involved in directing and producing some of the musical stage productions during those years. He moved on to head up Counselling at the Board before his retirement.



As we were going to press, we learned of the death in mid-March of **Nick Vasiloff**, Thomson’s respected Head Caretaker from 1985 to 1994. Our condolences to the families of all three former staff members.

Pub Night April 20 - with a Special Celebration?

Our Spring Pub Night is scheduled for Friday, April 20 from 8:00 pm, with a return to the Boston Pizza restaurant just off Brimley Rd. north of Progress and south of the 401. We hope to take a moment to toast the memory of **Mr. Lea**. Also, our 50th Anniversary collage that we admired electronically last year is now up on the wall at Thomson. We’re trying to arrange a permit for an alumni unveiling at 7:30 pm outside the upper auditorium doors, before we head up Brimley for refreshments, etc. Keep an eye out on Facebook or your emails for official word.

Electronic Newsletter?

Finally, we’d like to see if some readers would prefer to receive the newsletter electronically, rather than by “snail mail.” We would use less paper and save on printing and postage costs, allowing us to reduce membership fees to \$5.00 for those who opt for this. As a preliminary poll, please email info@thomsonforever.ca indicating your name and whether you prefer paper or email. We’ll tabulate results before the fall, let you know the results in the next newsletter and, if there is sufficient interest, explain how the system will work.