

Thomson TRADEWINDS

DAVID & MARY THOMSON C.I. ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2015

FAIR LADY FOUND

From time to time, **William Strat**, our alumni webmaster, receives a request from a Thomson grad trying to make contact with another former Thomsonite. So it was that last fall, **Chris Cameron** emailed a plea trying to track down **Sharon Dale**. Chris was on our data base, having sung *O Canada* at our 50th reunion in 1999. But Sharon wasn't. **Bob Forrest**, our alumni liaison with Facebook, put out the plea to his network, and within three days, we found Sharon. Facebook works!

When we discovered why Chris was looking for Sharon, we thought that part of the story would also be of interest. Sharon's lovely soprano voice filled our auditorium when she was cast as Eliza Doolittle in Thomson's 1966 production of *My Fair Lady* and as Laurey in *Oklahoma!* (1967). Chris was playing tympani in the orchestra pit in 1966. As a grade niner, he felt the on-stage performers were "as far away and as untouchable as stars in a distant galaxy." He shyly told Sharon that she was a far better Eliza Doolittle than Audrey Hepburn, who had played that role in the movie version of the show. "Yes, I was a bit sweet on her," he admits.

In the following years, Chris became an on-stage performer himself, in *Oklahoma!*, *The Pajama Game*, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. He never looked back. He joined a youth choir in North Toronto and began to sing everywhere he could. At the age of 16, thanks to the lure of the bright lights at Thomson, he felt as if he had finally found his home.

After high school, he studied voice at the Royal Conservatory of Music and in the mid-'70s graduated with a Diploma in Operatic Performance from the Faculty of Music at the U. of T. He started to become known as an



The lead performers in Thomson's 1967 production of "Oklahoma!":
Back row: Ron MacLean (Curly), Rick McKenna (Ali Hakim), Chris Cameron (Andrew Carnes), Graham Keats (Jud Fry), Greg Nye (Will Parker)
Front row: Brenda Rodine (Ado Annie Carnes), Sharon Dale (Laurey), Judy Creer (Aunt Eller), Dave Clothier (Director)

(photo from the album cover of the 3-Lp recording of the entire show)

continued on page 3



THE THOMSON DEBT

Ted Harrison, Class of 1991

Eventually, I did go to that Thomson reunion in 2009. Eventually. I mean, it wasn't without some honest agonizing! But I had begun to daydream about the people that I might see at the reunion. To fantasize about what it would be like to talk to some of those people. *Particularly the people I owed.*

I imagined meeting a certain Principal (who will remain nameless!). In my imagination, I said to him, **“Sir, you won't remember it, but there was a moment that you happened to walk out a door and it prevented me from getting my teeth knocked out!”** And in my daydream he would say to me, **“Harrison, you're the 10th kid today to say those very words to me!”**

I wanted to see an old math teacher. A former math teacher of mine who said 5 important words to me. He said, *“How did you do that?”* when I came up with a good answer—and he instantly made me believe that I could be good at math. Which isn't true, I might add. I was, am, and always will be terrible at math. But he said those words to give me confidence—and I dreamed of telling him, *“Thank you, those five words got me through calculus.”*

I feared meeting an old high school girlfriend. Because all I could think that I would say to her was, **“I'm sorry.”** *That I was a stupid kid, and that I'm sorry.* And in my imagination, she would then offer me a hug that I probably wouldn't deserve.

I would get the chance to tell that English teacher about the time she read Shakespeare out loud. I'll never forget: she read that speech to the class, and her voice cracked with emotion as she read it, with deep emotion. You see, when her voice cracked, I realized that *she loved Shakespeare.* And in that moment, I somehow decided that I did, too. That *I loved Shakespeare.* I still do.

And there was the coach I hated. He had said some harsh words to me—words that haunted me for years. I wanted to meet him, and ask him if he remembered what he said to me. **“Because, sir, I spent years working to prove you wrong—to make those words a lie—and I did. I proved you wrong. So... thank you for saying those words. Because they shaped me.”**

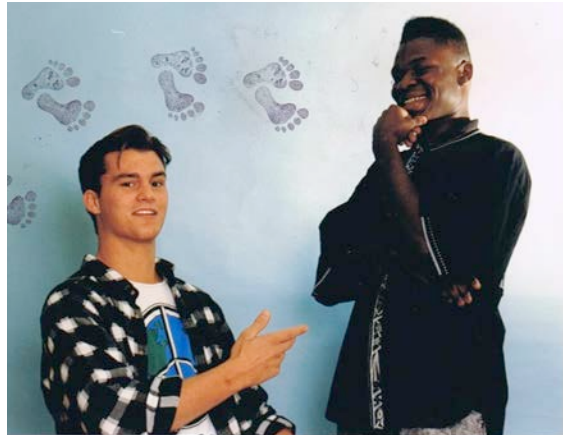
Eventually, of course, realizing all these things I had to say to so many people, I HAD to go to the Thomson High School Reunion. Not to do so would be a colossal failure of nerve!

Any guesses about those people I had to speak to? How do you suppose it worked out?

I didn't see any of them! Oh sure, I saw plenty of old friends. And we exchanged stories, and e-mail addresses, and we told a few beloved old lies. But I didn't see any of those people that I was convinced I really needed to see.

I was told that one of those teachers was down in the 1970s room—so I went looking for her, not quite knowing what I'd say if I found her. But wherever I looked for her, she had just left. Catching up with and thanking that teacher became a kind of will-o'-the-wisp. I didn't find her.

I left that reunion with a restless sense that *life is messy.* And that creating neat resolution isn't always possible. And that while those conversations would have been great to have, they're not our primary purpose in living a good life. A good life, I now suppose, is lived in a kind of ***blessed debt.*** A debt that we'll never manage to fully repay or set right. (At least not on this side of glory!) Feeling the burden of that debt reminds us to say ***thank you*** when we get the chance. And to seek reconciliation, when we can. And to say the things we



SAC President Ted (90-91), and his VP, Junior Sutton



A 2013 canoe trip: Mark Boreland, Drew Carter, Scott Campbell, Mike Williams, Nadeem Siddiq, Ted, Ken Seerattan and Tibor Kormendi. Drew, Scott, Mike and Ted are all proud Thomsonites.



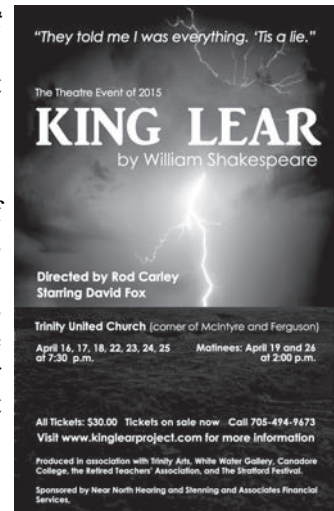
ought to say, while we still can. And when we can't pay back the debt, to *pay it forward*—to pay our blessings forward.

Thank you, friends. Thank you, teachers. Thank you, Thomson. I'm paying it forward as best I can.

Ted Harrison is part of the ministry team at Trinity United Church in North Bay, Ontario. The latest project he's involved with is a professional production of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, made possible through innovative community partnerships and "Indiegogo" crowdfunding.

Ted looks back on his Thomson years with gratitude, particularly his experiences with the Student Council, the Athletic Council, the Rugby team, and the AV team. He worked out of the office of the Thomson night school and at the Bendale pool for most of his high school years, as well as other extracurricular activities best left unmentioned.

For more information about Ted and his work today, visit: www.trinitynorthbay.ca



FAIR LADY FOUND (continued from page 1)



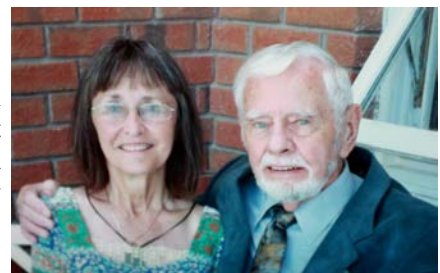
Chris today

operatic and concert soloist, and over the next dozen years or so performed in operas, concerts and radio broadcasts all across Canada as well as in Europe and the U.S.A.

In 1989 he stopped performing full time and took a job in the finance industry but continued to sing in the Canadian Opera Company Chorus until 2009. In 2013 he began a third career as a writer and editor and has recently completed a full-length memoir of his days as a singer. One of the joys of researching the memoir was finding and contacting friends and colleagues from his past, and that's how we became involved. Chris wanted to tell the story of how *My Fair Lady* (and the particular fair lady involved) had been a major part of his first attraction to the stage, but he wanted to share the story with Sharon first. The resultant "reunion" has been the most joyful reconnection of them all.

Chris modestly pays tribute to his brilliant family today: his wife is an IT education consultant, his daughter a PhD student at McGill and his son a Master's student in neuroscience at McMaster. Chris is also quite involved in physical fitness. You might enjoy checking his blogsite: <http://lyricycle.blogspot.com/>

And what of Sharon? We caught up with her (now Sharon McGonegal) in Elliot Lake. She and Chris crossed paths a couple of times. In the summer of 1976, when they shared the same vocal coach, and when Sharon was expecting her second child in August, they had a chance encounter at the Royal Conservatory. She and her husband, Bert, moved to the Niagara peninsula shortly afterwards, where Bert and a friend embarked on a new business venture. For the next 25 years, Bert opened a string of farmers' market-type stores in the peninsula, while Sharon's family kept growing - eventually six children! Attending a musical event at the Cathedral Church in St. Catharines, she was surprised to discover Chris's name on the program as one of the key soloists.



Sharon and her dad shortly before his death in December. Her mom also died last year.

Almost ten years ago, she and Bert relocated to Elliot Lake, where their eldest son, Mark, joined his dad in continuing to offer the same fare as was known over a 30-year span in Niagara. Mark has helped the family keep expanding, with a sixth child due this spring. That will bring Sharon's total to 15 grandchildren.

Sharon took voice lessons from Bill Perry after high school and he helped her discover how to sing properly using one's diaphragm. Just before she moved to Niagara, he deemed her the student who had improved the most all year, and he left her with the confidence to continue that improvement. She enrolled with the Niagara Symphony Chorus for a year and then did some solo work with other local choirs. But eventually her role as a wife and mother (and expert maker of soup and signs at the deli!) became her chosen full-time career.

Interestingly, both Chris and Sharon admit that music theatre was the one bright spot in an otherwise uninspired and uninspiring high school career. Now, if a publisher will pick up Chris's very entertaining and informative book, we can share the rest of the details! And he still thinks Sharon was better than Audrey!



THOMSON NEWS

While there is little to report on the progress of the plans for the new school, other than a number of newspaper items covering the protests of the neighbouring community about the possibility of the present Thomson site being sold to developers, the old school has had a small face lift on the first floor at the front of the building, as shown in the photo, with white walls, red columns and black doors - the Thomson colours. In addition, there has been some environmental engineering on the exterior for an improved curb appeal. A large screen TV in the front foyer broadcasts school news and school life/photos. It's available for alumni news, if we have something we wish to publicize.

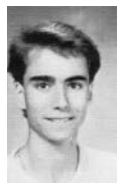


Principal **Bill Papaconstantinou** is happy to report that our athletes have not lost their touch since the years when he was Head of Boys Phys Ed. We have an East Region Wrestling Championship, and ten of our athletes qualified for OFSAA in the weeks before March Break. The Senior Boys Basketball team won the East Region championship game and reached the City semi-finals, where they lost to Emery Collegiate. The Boys' Varsity Hockey Team won the Tier 2 Championship. Beyond athletics, the FIRST Robotics Team won two awards, Highest Rookie Seed and Rookie Inspiration at the GTA East Regional in Oshawa in March. They also won Rookie Inspiration at Waterloo Regional and combined with teams from St. Catharines and Stoney Creek to win that regional tournament. As a result they have qualified for the World Championship in St. Louis, April 22-25. Their mentor, **Edmund Kim** (edmund.kim@tdsb.on.ca), is looking for fundraising and other financial support. In a similar vein, 30 Thomson students competed at the provincial business competition (DECA), with one student placing 15th province-wide in the Accounting category. To help defray the \$3000 cost of competing at this level, the students have been fundraising with a clothing drive to raise funds. They have partnered with a company that pays 10¢ for every pound of clothing they can bring in. Their goal is over 5000 pounds, with about 2000 pounds in so far. If you live in the GTA and can help out or know others who can, contact **Loui Panagakos** (loui.panagakos@tdsb.on.ca) to find out what can/cannot be included and how you can arrange to get the clothing to the Thomson DECA Business Club.

IN MEMORIAM



Since our last newsletter, we have learned of the deaths of two Thomson grads. **Malcolm Scully** (left), from the Class of 1969, had battled bone cancer for six years, having to give up an eventful journalistic career because of illness. **Sean Howell**, from the Class of 1988, was just 45 years old when he died of pancreatic cancer. The photos are from old school yearbooks, when we were young and intended to live forever. Our condolences to their friends and family.



ANNUAL PUB NIGHT - FRIDAY, MAY 1



For our annual social get-together of Thomson Alumni, we're moving much closer to home than in 2014. We've arranged to meet at Borsalino's, 4505 Sheppard Ave. E., on the south side, a bit east of Brimley Rd. Locals may remember the locale as the former Joey Bravo's (or other incarnations before that). The signage isn't large, so keep your eyes peeled. There's a special area where we can meet. Grab yearbooks and bring memories any time after 8 pm. Tell them at the door you're with the Thomson Alumni - the secret password - and they'll steer you towards the Thomson contingent. Get a group together and join us.