

ONE MEMORY AT A TIME



VOLUME TWO

Planes, Trains & Automobiles

The journeys that shaped our lives

By Tony J. Hebert

Volume Two

onememoryatatime.org

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WELCOME TO ONE MEMORY AT A TIME®

Every volume in the One Memory at a Time® series is designed to stand on its own. Whether this is your first workbook or another step in your storytelling journey, you're in the right place. You don't need to begin with Volume One. Each volume explores a different part of life through stories, guided conversations, memory moments, sensory prompts, and gentle reflections designed to help memories arrive naturally. **Read** one story, **Pause** when something connects and **Listen**.

Share only what you wish. There are no right answers. There is no finish line. One memory is enough. This volume explores the journeys that shaped our lives—the family vacations, train rides, first automobiles, neighbourhood bicycles, road trips, airplanes, motorcycles, boats, and all the unforgettable moments of getting from one place to another. Because sometimes we don't remember the destination nearly as well as we remember the journey. This volume is also available on the free app at onememoryatatime.org. **Welcome to One Memory at a Time Volume Two.**

FOREWORD

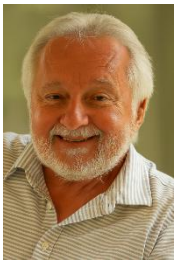
There is something powerful about a memory. Not the dates or the details, but a feeling. A sound. A smell. A person. A place. Or merely a moment that comes back without warning. For many seniors, those memories are still there. They don't disappear. They simply wait—for the right way to return. One Memory at a Time was created with a simple observation from the author's memoir of his life in sales. –

We don't ask for memories...we help them arrive.

In its earliest form, this program began as a collection of stories and prompts—designed to gently open the door to conversation. What quickly became clear was that something deeper was happening. People were not just answering questions. They were remembering. They were sharing. They were reconnecting—with themselves and with each other.

This latest version of One Memory at a Time - Volume Two builds on what we learned in testing with senior organizations, facilities and individuals in Volume One. It introduces a more natural and flexible experience to memory recall. But at its heart, nothing has changed. This is still not a program about getting answers right. It is about Connection, Dignity, Being Heard, and Being Remembered. For more information, visit our website at: www.onememoryatatime.org

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tony Hebert is a community volunteer, business entrepreneur, author of four books, and social entrepreneur whose lifelong commitment to community service spans more than six decades. Beginning with early acts of volunteerism at age 7 as an altar boy in his church, he went on to play leadership roles in major fundraising and community initiatives, helping raise millions of dollars for organizations such as United Way, the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, the Seniors Information Center and numerous other community non-profits and seniors' programs. For more than thirty years, he owned and was on the advisory board of a Level III senior care home, eventually becoming its majority shareholder before its sale.

Today, he is the creator of *One Memory at a Time*, a free, national volunteer-driven initiative gaining national attention for helping seniors recall, write, share, and preserve their life experiences. Through his writing, mentorship, and ongoing philanthropic work, Tony continues to inspire others with his belief that even the smallest memory—or act of service—can create lasting impact.

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THE 10-MINUTE MEMORY COMPANION TRAINING

You do not need hours of training to begin. You do not need special qualifications. You do not need experience. You can become a Memory Companion in about 10 minutes. Here's all you need to know:

1. **Read** the story
 - Slowly
 - Naturally
2. **Pause** when it feels right. If someone reacts, allow space and time
3. **Listen** • Give your attention
 - Let people finish without rushing
 - If no one reacts, continue
 - Allow for silence
4. Use prompts only if needed
 - Ask 1–2 simple questions
 - Skip them if the conversation is flowing
5. Do less
 - Don't over-guide
 - Don't fill every moment
 - Don't rush.

That's the training! You are not leading the program; you are accompanying it. When introducing someone new to the program, keep it simple.

✓**You:**

- Just **read** the story,
- **Pause** when something connects, and
- **Listen.**

That's all you need to do.

✓ ***What helps new memory companions the most?***

- Seeing one story succeed
- Knowing there is no pressure
- Trying it once. Confidence comes quickly through experience.

Do less and let the story work.

✓ ***Do not ask another question too quickly. Instead:***

- Wait and allow for the memory to take hold
- Don't turn it into a Q&A by asking one question after another
- Don't expect immediate responses

✓ ***Let conversation happen naturally. Don't try to fix emotions***

- Do not try to change the subject too quickly
- Don't try to "lead" every moment by offering solutions
- Stay present, acknowledge gently.

The more natural it feels, the better it works.

A simple reminder for every session—**"If you remember nothing else, remember this: Read, Pause and Listen"**. You don't need to master this. You don't need to study it. You don't need to prepare perfectly. You just need to start. And once you do, the experience will guide you.

TIPS FOR USING THIS WORKBOOK

How to Use This Workbook

Welcome to **One Memory at a Time® Volume Two**. I'm delighted you've opened this workbook. Whether you're using it for yourself, sharing it with a parent or grandparent, helping a friend preserve their memories, or simply enjoying meaningful conversations together with others as a group, you've already taken the most important step. You've decided that a life is worth remembering.

That is what this workbook is all about. It wasn't created to test anyone's memory. It wasn't created to write the perfect autobiography. It wasn't created to fill pages with answers. It was created to help people enjoy conversations, rediscover memories, and preserve the stories that make every life unique.

There is no right way to use this workbook. There is no schedule to follow. There is no finish line. Some people may enjoy one story every week. Others may spend an afternoon talking about a single memory. Some may complete every page. Others may only write a handful of favourite stories. Every one of those experiences is a success. Because success isn't measured by how much you read or write. It's measured by the

conversations you have and the memories you preserve. So relax. Pour a cup of coffee or tea. Find a comfortable place to sit. Open this book. And simply begin.

The Only Three Things You Need to Remember

People often ask, "*How do I use One Memory at a Time*®?" The answer is wonderfully simple.

- ❖ **Read.** Read the story slowly and naturally. Don't worry about reading perfectly. Just enjoy it.
- ❖ **Pause.** If someone smiles...Pauses...Laughs...or begins remembering...Simply give them time. You don't have to fill every moment of silence. Sometimes the quietest moments become the most meaningful.
- ❖ **Listen.** If a story begins to unfold, let it. You don't need to guide it. You don't need to hurry it. You don't need to get back to the workbook. Just listen. Sometimes the best stories aren't the ones in the book. They're the ones the book helps bring back.

That's it. - **Read. Pause. Listen.**

Everything else in this guide simply offers ideas to make those conversations even more enjoyable, such as memory and sensory prompts as well as the memory moments. If you're thinking, "*I don't have a very good memory*," you're not alone. In fact, you're exactly where most people begin. This workbook is not about testing memory. It is about allowing it to arrive.

There are two simple ways to experience each story:

THE STORY: Sometimes just hearing the story is enough. This is a relaxed, natural reading experience. There is no expectation to respond. You can: Read it quietly, listen as it is read, write some of your thoughts or simply let it bring back whatever it may.

THE GUIDED STORY: This version includes gentle *Memory Moments* within the story. There is no pressure to respond here either. You don't need to choose which one is right. Simply follow what feels natural. These are small pauses or simple invitations to reflect. You may share something, say a few words, or simply listen.

Your memories belong to you. No one else gets to correct them. **You can share as much or as little as you wish** - A sentence is enough. A few words are enough. Even just listening is enough. **You are always in control** - If something doesn't feel right, simply skip it. You decide which doors to open. **Let your senses guide you** - If details don't come easily, try remembering how something felt, what you heard, what you smelled, what it was like to be there, or use a photograph. Each story has a section with sensory suggestions. **Take your time** - This is not a test. There is no finish line. We don't ask for memories; we help them arrive!

INTRODUCTION

Every Journey Has a Story

When I was writing *One Memory at a Time – Volume One*, the theme seemed obvious. It was about growing up. Many readers of that first volume said my stories took them back to their own childhoods, reminding them of the people, places, sounds, experiences, and seemingly ordinary moments that quietly helped shape who they became.

This volume is different. When I first began writing it, I thought I was creating a collection of memories about planes, trains, automobiles, bicycles, vacations, and all the different ways we travelled from one place to another. But as the stories unfolded, I realized none of those things were really the stars of the volume. They were simply the vehicles that carried us through some of the most memorable journeys of our lives.

We often remember the destination first, but I have come to believe that the journey is where many of the best stories are hiding. It certainly was for me. As I reflected on my own life, I realized that every form of transportation carried something far more valuable than passengers. It carried conversations, laughter, dreams, disappointments, friendships, lessons, a few regrets, and countless ordinary moments that somehow became extraordinary with the passing of time.

A bicycle taught me independence. The family car taught me things about my father that I understand much better today. A drive-in theatre reminded me that the best seat wasn't always the one with the best view. An old neighbourhood gas station showed me what personal service and community once looked like. An airplane carried me into one of the most frightening experiences of my life, while another journey, this time across Europe, gave me a much deeper understanding of the price others paid for the freedom I had enjoyed throughout mine.

Looking back now, I understand that these stories were never really about transportation at all. They were about life. The vehicles simply helped me get there. As you read these stories, I hope they help you find some of your own. Remember the car in which you learned to drive, the train that carried you away from home, or the motorcycle that gave you your first real taste of freedom. Think about the family vacations, the breakdowns, the wrong turns, the roadside stops, the arguments over directions, the unexpected adventures, and even those ordinary Sunday drives that seemed completely unimportant at the time. You may be surprised by what comes back.

That, after all, is what *One Memory at a Time* is about. We don't chase memories with questions. We help them arrive. Because memories have a remarkable way of hiding inside the journeys we almost forgot. Sometimes, all they need is a little help finding their way home.

Just a reminder as you begin: this story, and all the stories that follow, are here to help you reconnect with your own experiences. There is nothing you have to remember perfectly, and there is no need to compare your life with mine. Memory is not about performance. It is about reconnecting with what it felt like to be you in those moments of your life. These stories simply offer familiar places to begin, allowing one memory to lead gently to another.

We don't chase memories with questions. We help them arrive. So, wherever these pages take you, enjoy the ride.

STORY ONE

Just a reminder: this and all the stories that follow are about your own personal experiences, not the authors', and not something you have to get right. Memory is not about performance; it is about reconnecting with what it felt like to be you in those same life moments as the authors. These stories are just some ideas of times in our lives to help your memory arrive. It did mine. ENJOY!

FEEDING MY CURIOSITY OF THE FUTURE

“The Journey That Opened My Eyes to Tomorrow”

THE STORY



The year 1967 probably changed the way I looked at the future. Before then, perhaps my vision had been focused mostly on the present and on the small community of Milford where I was growing up. This is not really a story about distance. It is about the feeling of leaving home on a family summer holiday and suddenly realizing that the world was much larger—and far more exciting—than the small part of it you already knew.



As part of Canada’s Centennial celebrations and the excitement surrounding Expo 67, a special Confederation Train travelled across the country presenting Canadian history and celebrating the nation’s first hundred years. In April 1967, it stopped in Saint John, New Brunswick. There were long lineups to tour the railcars filled with displays, exhibits, images, and ideas about Canada’s past and future. Even before stepping aboard, there was excitement in the air. To me, the train itself seemed futuristic. It was not simply carrying exhibits from one community to another. It felt as though it was carrying a glimpse of what Canada might become. I even remember a moving walkway that made the experience feel as though we were floating through time.

I am quite certain that visit helped convince my mother and father that we should travel to Montreal later that summer and experience Expo 67 for ourselves. So in August 1967, our family of six packed ourselves into the car and headed for Montreal. Dad, Mom, Mike, Bonnie, Mary Lou, and I left Saint John, stopped overnight in Upton, Maine, and continued on to Montreal the following day. For a thirteen-year-old boy from Saint John, even the drive was an adventure. It was the first time I had travelled on a four-lane toll highway. The speed, the traffic, the number of cars, and eventually the congestion around Montreal all seemed exciting.

No electronic maps directed us, no voice from the dashboard told Dad where to turn, and certainly no telephone sat in the car. Families travelled with paper maps, road signs, memory, and sometimes a passenger who was absolutely certain they knew the way—even when they didn't. Mom was usually part of that conversation. The journey was not simply about reaching Montreal. It was filled with anticipation because we had very little idea what we were about to see.

We stayed with my brother Doug on Dorchester Street for several days. Each day we boarded a city bus and travelled to the new Atwater Metro station. Montreal's subway system had only recently opened, and for the first time in my life, I rode through underground tunnels beneath the city toward the Expo islands. That subway ride alone felt like entering the future. I had travelled in cars and buses, and I had seen passenger trains, but this was completely different.

Even the creation of the Expo site fascinated me. Material excavated during construction of the Metro had helped enlarge Île Sainte-Hélène and create Île Notre-Dame. Something removed from beneath the city had literally helped build something new above it. Then we came up from the Metro and saw Expo 67 spread out before us.

The official theme was “**Man and His World**,” and to a thirteen-year-old boy, it truly felt as though the entire world had gathered in one place. Countries from around the globe proudly displayed their cultures, inventions, architecture, scientific achievements, industries, and visions of what the future might become. For someone who had rarely travelled more than a couple of hours from home, it felt like visiting the world in a single day.

One pavilion that made a particularly strong impression on me was the Soviet Union pavilion. During the Cold War, much of what we heard about the Soviet Union portrayed it largely as a political rival and military threat. Yet at Expo 67, I saw something different. The pavilion highlighted science, engineering, technological achievement, space exploration, and the people behind those accomplishments. For

the first time, I began to understand that countries were more than politics and newspaper headlines. Behind every pavilion were people who were proud of what they had created, curious about what might come next, and hopeful about the future.

Visitors could also purchase an Expo 67 passport and have it stamped at participating pavilions. Cathy still has hers today. It was a wonderful idea. Each stamp made you feel as though you had crossed another border and entered another part of the world. Sometimes the journey was cultural. Sometimes it was technological. At the Alcan pavilion, for example, you could learn how aluminum was produced. You may not have travelled thousands of miles, but by the end of the day your passport suggested that you had been almost everywhere.

What affected me most, however, was the technology. At the Bell Telecom pavilion, I encountered something called video conferencing. I could speak with my sister while she stood elsewhere in the pavilion and see her live image on a television screen at the same time. In 1967, it felt impossible. We could see one another and talk without standing in the same place. It seemed less like everyday technology and more like science fiction. Yet decades later, that same idea would become part of ordinary life. People around the world would use computers, tablets, and telephones to see and speak with one another instantly.

Expo 67 planted something important inside me: curiosity about the future. It taught me that tomorrow could look completely different from today if someone was first willing to imagine it. It also taught me that many of the things we think are impossible eventually become ordinary when imagination, science, determination, and the right people come together. Looking back, I can see that this curiosity remained with me. Throughout my life, I was drawn to new ideas, communication, technology, and better ways of connecting people. I often wondered not only how something worked, but what it might eventually become. Perhaps part of that began on those Expo islands.

But Montreal would influence my life again. My Aunt Kay and Uncle George were wonderful hosts during our visits there. Aunt Kay especially impressed me with her energy, laughter, and kindness. She seemed able to create fun wherever she went. Years later, in 1979, I returned to Montreal during a difficult period following the breakup of my first marriage. My cousins Louise, Bunny, and Guy helped pull me away from my sadness and reminded me that joy, adventure, and opportunity were still waiting beyond disappointment.

One experience from that visit has stayed with me ever since. We took a bicycle ride of nearly sixty kilometres from Pointe-Claire toward downtown Montreal along the

city's bike paths. By the end of the ride, I was exhausted and sore beyond belief. Parts of me hurt that I had not previously realized could hurt. But emotionally, I felt alive again. That ride changed something in me.

At twenty-five, I realized that life was not simply about recovering from disappointment. It was about continuing to seek experiences, adventures, people, and moments that reminded you how exciting life could still become. Perhaps that spirit had first taken hold in 1967. A thirteen-year-old boy stood wide-eyed at Expo 67, looking toward the future and wanting to be part of it. Twelve years later, a twenty-five-year-old man climbed onto a bicycle and rediscovered that same feeling. Sometimes a journey does more than take us somewhere new. Sometimes it reminds us that there is still somewhere ahead worth going.

THE GUIDED STORY

Feeding My Curiosity of the Future - *The Journey That Opened My Eyes to Tomorrow*

Before 1967, most of my world was centred around Milford and Saint John. Then came Canada's Centennial year, the Confederation Train, and eventually Expo 67. Suddenly, the future did not seem far away. It felt as though it had arrived right in front of me. **Memory Moment** - "Do you remember the first time you realized the world was much bigger than your own community?" **PAUSE OPTION**

The Train That Brought the Future to Town - *Something New Had Arrived*

In April 1967, the Confederation Train stopped in Saint John. Long lineups formed to tour the railcars filled with displays about Canada's past and future. To a thirteen-year-old boy, even the train itself seemed futuristic. I remember a moving walkway that made it feel as though we were floating through time. That visit helped plant the idea that our family should travel to Montreal and experience Expo 67 for ourselves. **Memory Moment** - "Did a travelling exhibition, fair, train, show, or special event ever come to your community?" **PAUSE OPTION**

The Family Car Was Part of the Adventure - *Getting There Mattered Too*

That August, Dad, Mom, Mike, Bonnie, Mary Lou, and I packed into the family car and headed toward Montreal. We stopped overnight in Upton, Maine, before continuing on. For me, even the drive was exciting. It was the first time I had travelled on a four-lane toll highway, and the traffic around Montreal seemed enormous compared with what I knew at home. **PAUSE OPTION**

Before GPS - *Maps, Road Signs and Family Opinions*

There were no electronic maps, no voice from the dashboard telling Dad where to turn, and certainly no telephone in the car. Families travelled with paper maps, road signs, memory, and usually someone in the passenger seat who was convinced they knew the way. Mom was often part of that conversation. Getting there was not simply transportation. It was anticipation. **Memory Moment** - “Who usually read the map or gave directions when your family travelled?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Going Underground - *The Metro Felt Like Science Fiction*

We stayed with my brother Doug on Dorchester Street and travelled by bus to the Atwater Metro station. Montreal’s subway was still new, and riding through underground tunnels toward the Expo islands felt like entering another world. I had been in cars and buses and had seen trains before, but this was different. **Memory Moment** - “Do you remember your first subway, train, ferry, airplane, or other form of transportation that felt completely new?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The World in One Place - *Man and His World*

When we arrived at Expo 67, it seemed as though the whole world had gathered in one place. Countries displayed their culture, architecture, inventions, industries, science, and hopes for the future. For someone who had rarely travelled more than a few hours from home, it felt like visiting many countries in a single day. **PAUSE OPTION**

Seeing Beyond the Headlines - *Countries Were More Than Politics*

The Soviet Union pavilion made a strong impression on me. At home and on TV much of what we heard about the Soviet Union came through Cold War politics. At Expo, I saw science, engineering, space exploration, and people proud of what they had accomplished. It was one of the first times I understood that countries were more than headlines. **Memory Moment** - “Did travel or meeting someone from another place ever change the way you thought about the world?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Passport - *A Stamp Made You Feel You Had Travelled Somewhere*

Visitors could purchase an Expo passport and have it stamped at different pavilions. Each stamp felt like another small journey. Cathy still has hers today. You might not actually have crossed an international border, but by the end of the day you felt as though you had travelled around the world. **PAUSE OPTION**

Technology That Seemed Impossible - *Seeing the Future Before It Arrived*

At the Bell Canada pavilion, I experienced video conferencing. I could speak with my sister while seeing her live image on a television screen from another part of the pavilion. In 1967, it seemed almost impossible. Today, we do the same thing on phones and computers without giving it a second thought. **Memory Moment** - “Do you remember seeing a new invention or technology for the first time and wondering what the future would become?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Curiosity Stayed With Me - *Tomorrow Could Be Different*

Expo 67 taught me that tomorrow did not have to look like today. Someone first had to imagine what might be possible. That curiosity stayed with me throughout my life. I remained interested in technology, communication, new ideas, and better ways of connecting people. Perhaps some of that began on those Expo islands. **PAUSE OPTION**

Montreal Called Me Back - *A Different Journey at Twenty-Five*

Years later, in 1979, I returned to Montreal during a difficult time following the breakup of my first marriage. My Aunt Kay, Uncle George, and cousins Louise, Bunny, and Guy reminded me that life still held laughter, adventure, and possibility beyond disappointment. **PAUSE OPTION**

Nearly Sixty Kilometres on a Bicycle - *Rediscovering the Feeling of Being Alive*

One day we rode bicycles from Pointe-Claire toward downtown Montreal along the city’s bike paths, about 60 km in total. By the end, I was exhausted and sore beyond belief. But emotionally, I felt alive again. At twenty-five, I began to understand that recovering from disappointment was not only about getting through it. It was also about continuing to look for experiences that reminded you there was still something ahead worth discovering. **Memory Moment** - “Was there a trip, outing, or unexpected adventure that helped you through a difficult time?” **PAUSE OPTION**

What It All Meant - *There Was Still Somewhere Ahead Worth Going*

A thirteen-year-old boy stood wide-eyed at Expo 67, looking toward the future and wanting to be part of it. Twelve years later, a twenty-five-year-old man climbed onto a bicycle and rediscovered that same feeling. Sometimes a journey does more than take us somewhere new. Sometimes it reminds us that there is still somewhere ahead worth going.

CORE MEMORY PROMPTS

YOUR TURN: The following questions will help you explore memories of travel, discovery, curiosity, family journeys, new technology, and those moments when the world suddenly seemed larger than you had imagined. These are gentle prompts. You do not need to remember everything. Allow one place, person, sound, feeling, or small detail to lead you wherever it wants to go. *You do not need to use all prompts. In most sessions, 2–4 prompts are more than enough. If time is limited, or to begin a discussion, start with these:*

- 1. Do you remember a family trip or outing that felt like a great adventure when you were young? Where did you go, and who travelled with you?**
- 2. What do you remember about the journey itself? Think about the car, train, bus, ferry, roads, maps, roadside stops, arguments over directions, or anything that made getting there memorable.**
- 3. Was there a fair, exhibition, concert, sporting event, festival, or special attraction that opened your eyes to something completely new?**
- 4. Do you remember the first time you experienced a form of transportation that felt exciting or unfamiliar, such as a subway, airplane, train, ferry, or highway?**
- 5. Was there a new invention or piece of technology that amazed you when you first saw it? Did it eventually become part of everyday life?**
- 6. Can you remember a journey later in life that helped you through a difficult period, changed your outlook, or reminded you that there was still something ahead worth looking forward to?**

SENSORY PROMPTS

CURIOSITY & DISCOVERY

Sometimes memories arrive because of something familiar

MUSIC – Link to YouTube

- The 59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy) — Simon & Garfunkel
- Those Were the Days — Mary Hopkin
- What a Wonderful World — Louis Armstrong
- The Expo 67 Song – New Canadians

SOUNDS

- A train whistle in the distance
- The click-clack rhythm of train wheels on the track
- Highway traffic and the hum of tires on pavement

- A car radio playing during a family trip
- Paper maps unfolding and rustling
- A subway arriving at a station
- The sound of an escalator or moving walkway
- Crowds talking in a busy fair or exhibition hall
- Public-address announcements echoing through a large building
- Children talking excitedly about what they had just seen

SMELLS

- The inside of a family car on a summer trip
- Gasoline at a service station
- Hot pavement on a summer day
- Food stands at a fair or exhibition
- Popcorn, candy, or fried food
- The metallic smell of a subway or train station
- Fresh air coming through an open car window
- A suitcase, hotel room, or relative's home that smelled different from your own

TOUCH & FEELING

- A paper map spread across your lap
- Vinyl car seats warmed by the summer sun
- A ticket, passport, brochure, or souvenir held in your hand
- The vibration of a train, subway, or bus beneath your feet
- Holding the railing on an escalator or moving walkway
- The excitement of arriving somewhere you had never been before
- The tired feeling at the end of a long day of walking and exploring

VISUALS

Begin with an old family vacation photo, road map, train ticket, postcard, Expo souvenir, travel brochure, or photograph of a place you visited when you were young. You might also look at pictures of an old family car, a train station, a subway platform, a world's fair, an exhibition pavilion, a motel, a roadside restaurant, or a highway map from the 1950s or 1960s. Pass the photo or object around and let it do the talking.

ONE SMALL MEMORY

Perhaps you do not remember the entire trip. Maybe all that returns is the sound of your father asking for directions, the feel of a paper map, the first time you saw a four-lane highway, the smell of a train station, the excitement of entering a huge exhibition hall, or the feeling that the world had suddenly become much bigger. That is enough. Sometimes one small sensory memory is all it takes to open the door to somewhere you thought you had forgotten.

STORY TWO

FREEDOM ON TWO WHEELS

“Independence - After curiosity comes freedom. It’s about growing up and taking those first rides away from home.”

THE STORY

Before kids had video games, cell phones, location trackers, or social media, we had bicycles. Looking back now, I sometimes think those bicycles gave us something children today may experience differently. They gave us our first real taste of freedom. They were also one of the first signs that our parents trusted us enough to let us venture a little farther from home on our own.



When I was growing up in Saint John NB during the 1950s and early 1960s, a bicycle wasn't simply another toy sitting in the driveway. It was transportation, adventure, independence, and a ticket to a much bigger world. The day you finally had a bicycle of your own, whether it was brand new or simply new to you, in my case the boundaries of your neighbourhood suddenly seemed to disappear. Streets that had once felt too far away were now only a few minutes down the road.

I can still remember climbing onto my bicycle early on a summer morning with absolutely no destination in mind. The air was fresh, the streets were quiet, and the whole day seemed full of possibilities. There were no schedules to follow and certainly no parents checking your location every few minutes. That technology simply didn't exist. It was just you, your bicycle, and wherever your curiosity decided to take you.

Our bicycles were basic back then. They had heavy steel frames, an uncomfortable seat, a chain that would not stay on and coaster brakes that seemed to announce every stop whether you wanted them to or not as they screamed. If you happened to own a three-speed bicycle, you were practically the envy of the neighbourhood. I knew of only one. It belonged to Marlyn U, and to the rest of us it might as well have been a sports car.

Of course, every kid wanted to personalize a bicycle. Baseball cards clipped to the spokes with clothespins made them sound like motorcycles, or at least we thought they did. Some had colourful streamers hanging from the handlebars. Others proudly showed off banana seats that somehow made the rider look just a little cooler. And for reasons only a child could understand, we were convinced that if we washed and polished our bikes and put a little more air in the tires, they would somehow go faster.

Our bicycles were also our social network long before anyone had ever heard of the internet. You always knew where everyone was because there would be six or seven bikes scattered across somebody's front lawn or a convenience store. One minute we might be playing road hockey and the next someone would yell, "Let's go to the store!" Within seconds, we would all be racing down the street together like our own little bicycle gang.

We rode to the corner store for candy, to the ball field, to the harbour, to the beach, to visit friends, or sometimes with no destination at all. Half the fun was simply seeing where the road might take us. Even the woods had bicycle paths and shortcuts that only the neighbourhood kids seemed to know.

Every neighbourhood also had that one hill every kid wanted to conquer. We would pedal as hard as we could, our legs burning as we fought our way to the top. Then came the reward. We would point the front wheel downhill, stop pedalling, let gravity take over, and convince ourselves we were travelling a hundred miles an hour and driving with no hands was just something you did to improve your balance.

Looking back, I'm amazed any of us survived.

Helmets were not part of our childhood. Scraped knees, skinned elbows, bruises, and the occasional torn pair of pants were simply part of growing up. If you fell off your bike, you got back on. Usually, of course, after first making sure none of your friends had seen you fall. But when I think about learning to ride a bicycle, I don't really think about the bicycle at all. I think about my brother Doug.

Doug was fourteen years older than me, but he never made me feel like I was simply his little brother. He treated me like a buddy. He was the one who ran beside me at age five with one hand on the back of the seat, encouraging me to keep pedalling while I tried desperately to convince myself that I wasn't going to fall. Like every child learning to ride, I eventually tipped over. I can still remember Doug smiling and saying, "You're going to fall sometime. What matters is how fast you get back up." At the time, I thought he was talking about riding a bicycle. Looking back now, I realize he was talking about life.

Years passed, and life quietly reversed our roles. Doug's health began to decline in his early 50s, and eventually he lost much of his eyesight. The brother who had once guided me through those uncertain first rides now found himself needing a little help from me. Sometimes it was solving another computer problem late at night. Sometimes it was running an errand, driving him somewhere, helping him with something he could no longer easily do for himself, or simply being there when he needed me. I never thought of any of it as paying him back. It was simply what brothers do.



As I look back now, I realize that for most of our lives, Doug and I rode a kind of tandem bicycle together. Sometimes he was at the front, doing the pedalling and showing me the way. Later, I found myself taking my turn at the front. Neither of us ever kept score. We simply helped each other through whatever stretch of road life happened to place in front of us.

Today, whenever I see a young child wobbling down the street on a bicycle for the first time, with a proud parent, grandparent, sister, brother, or friend running behind, I can't help but smile. I know exactly what that child is feeling. And I know something they probably don't. They aren't just learning how to ride a bicycle. They are learning confidence. They are learning independence. They are learning that falling doesn't mean the ride is over. And if they are fortunate, they are also learning something much more important. They are learning that someone who loves them is willing to run beside them until they find their balance.

My bicycle gave me freedom, adventure, independence, and memories that have stayed with me for a lifetime. But perhaps the greatest gift it gave me was my first real lesson in trust. And that lesson came from my brother Doug.



Even today, when I think about bicycles, I don't picture the baseball cards in the spokes, the banana seats, the corner store, or the steep hills we raced down. I picture Doug's hand on the back of the seat. And somehow, after all these years, I still feel it there.

THE GUIDED STORY

Freedom on Two Wheels - *The Bicycle That Made the World Bigger*

Before video games, cell phones, social media, and location trackers, many of us had bicycles. They were more than toys. They were transportation, adventure, independence, and perhaps our first real taste of freedom. They were also a quiet sign of trust from our parents: you can go a little farther now. Just be careful. **Memory Moment** - “Do you remember your first bicycle, or the first bicycle you regularly rode?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Day the Neighbourhood Got Bigger - *Freedom Was Just Down the Street*

When I was growing up in Saint John during the 1950s and early 1960s, getting a bicycle changed everything. Streets that once seemed too far away were suddenly only minutes from home. The neighbourhood became larger. The world became more interesting. And for the first time, you could decide where you wanted to go. **PAUSE OPTION**

No Destination Required - *Sometimes We Rode Just to Ride*

I can remember leaving home on a summer morning with no particular destination in mind. There was no schedule and certainly no parent checking a phone to see where I was. It was simply me, my bicycle, and whatever direction looked interesting. Sometimes we rode to a friend’s house. Sometimes to the ball field, the harbour, or the corner store. Sometimes we went nowhere at all. And that was the point. **Memory Moment** - “Where did your bicycle take you when you were young?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Making It Our Own - *Baseball Cards, Streamers and Imagination*

Our bicycles were pretty basic. Heavy steel frames. Coaster brakes. And if someone had a three-speed bicycle, they were practically neighbourhood royalty. But we knew how to improve them. Baseball cards clipped to the spokes with clothespins made them sound like motorcycles. Streamers hung from handlebars. Banana seats appeared later. And somehow, we were absolutely convinced that washing the bike, polishing it, and putting more air in the tires made it faster. **PAUSE OPTION**

Our First Social Network - *You Could Tell Where Everyone Was*

Long before anyone had heard of social media, our bicycles connected us. If six or seven bikes were lying on someone’s front lawn, you knew exactly where everyone was. One minute we might be playing road hockey and the next someone would shout, “Let’s go to the store!” Within seconds, we were gone. The bicycles told you where the kids were long before a phone ever could. **Memory Moment** - “Who did you ride or spend your free time with?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Hill - Every Neighbourhood Had One

There was always a hill. We would pedal as hard as we could to reach the top, legs burning, determined not to stop. Then came the reward. We pointed the front wheel downhill, stopped pedalling, and let gravity do the rest. We were certain we were travelling a hundred miles an hour. Helmets? Not likely. Scraped knees and bruised elbows were simply part of growing up. **PAUSE OPTION**

Falling Was Part of Learning - You Got Back On

If you fell off your bike, you usually got up, checked to see if anyone had witnessed the embarrassment, and climbed back on. We didn't think of it as resilience. We just called it riding a bicycle. **Memory Moment** - "Do you remember falling, getting hurt, or learning something the hard way as a child?" **PAUSE OPTION**

The Hand on the Seat - Someone Helped Me Find My Balance

When I think about learning to ride, however, I don't really think about the bicycle. I think about my brother Doug. Doug was fifteen years older than me, but he never treated me as though I were simply his little brother. He treated me like a buddy. He ran beside me with one hand on the back of the bicycle seat while I tried to keep my balance and stay upright. Eventually, of course, I fell. Doug smiled and said, "You're going to fall sometime. What matters is how fast you get back up." At the time, I thought he was talking about a bicycle. **Memory Moment** - "Who helped you learn something important when you were young?" **PAUSE OPTION**

Years Later - Life Reversed Our Roles

As the years passed, Doug's health declined and he lost much of his eyesight. The brother who had once helped guide me now sometimes needed my help. A computer problem. An errand. A drive somewhere. A small task he could no longer easily do himself. I never thought of it as paying him back. It was simply what brothers do. **Memory Moment** - "Was there someone who once helped you, whom you later had the opportunity to help?" **PAUSE OPTION**

A Tandem Bicycle Through Life - Sometimes We Take Turns at the Front

Looking back, I sometimes think Doug and I rode a kind of tandem bicycle through life. At first, he was at the front, helping me find my way. Later, I took my turn. Neither of us kept score. We simply helped each other through whatever stretch of road life placed in front of us. **PAUSE OPTION**

What It All Meant - *Freedom, Trust and Someone Running Beside You*

A bicycle gave me freedom. It gave me adventure. It made my childhood world bigger. But perhaps its greatest gift had nothing to do with transportation. It taught me trust. Even today, when I think about bicycles, I don't first picture the baseball cards in the spokes, the corner store, or the steep hills we raced down. I picture Doug's hand on the back of the seat. And somehow, after all these years, I still feel it there.

CORE MEMORY PROMPTS

YOUR TURN: The following questions will help you explore memories of bicycles, childhood freedom, independence, trust, and the people who helped you find your balance. Below are six gentle, memory-unlocking questions, written to feel inviting rather than demanding and inspired directly by the moments in this story. *You do not need to use all prompts. In most sessions, 2–4 prompts are more than enough. If time is limited, or to begin a discussion, start with these:*

- 1. Do you remember the first bicycle you owned or regularly rode? What did it look like, and was it new, used, borrowed, or handed down?**
- 2. Where did your bicycle take you? Think about the streets, stores, friends' homes, fields, parks, woods, schools, or other places you could suddenly reach on your own.**
- 3. Who taught you to ride or helped you learn something that gave you greater independence?**
- 4. Did you have a favourite hill, route, shortcut, or place you liked to ride? What do you remember seeing, hearing, or feeling there?**
- 5. Do you remember falling, getting hurt, becoming frightened, or doing something on a bicycle that would probably worry people today?**
- 6. Was there someone who helped guide you when you were young and whom you later had the opportunity to help in return? What did that relationship teach you about family, friendship, trust, or growing older?**

SENSORY PROMPTS - *Independence*

Sometimes memories arrive because of something familiar

🎵 MUSIC – Link to YouTube

- *Summertime, Summertime* — The Jamies
- *School Is Out* — Gary U.S. Bonds
- *You Are My Sunshine* — a familiar childhood song that may bring back family, summer, and simpler times

SOUNDS

- Bicycle tires rolling over pavement or gravel
- A bicycle bell ringing
- Baseball cards clicking against the spokes
- A coaster brake suddenly stopping the back wheel
- Children laughing or calling to one another from down the street
- Someone shouting, “Let’s go!”
- A parent calling you home for supper
- The sound of wind rushing past your ears while riding downhill

SMELLS

- Freshly cut grass on a summer day
- Warm pavement after the sun had been on it all afternoon
- Rubber bicycle tires
- Oil or grease from a bicycle chain
- The smell of the woods or a dirt trail
- Candy or pop from the neighbourhood corner store
- Fresh summer air after a rain

TOUCH & FEELING

- Rubber handlebar grips beneath your hands
- The hard bicycle seat beneath you
- Wind against your face as you picked up speed
- The vibration of gravel beneath the tires
- A scraped knee or skinned elbow after a fall
- Someone’s hand holding the back of the seat while you learned to balance

VISUALS

Begin with an old photograph of a bicycle, a childhood street, a neighbourhood corner store, or children riding together. If you have a family photograph showing a bicycle, a brother or sister, or the street where you grew up, pass it around and let the photograph do the remembering. You might also look at an old bicycle bell, basket, reflector, clothespin, baseball card, or even a photograph of a three-speed bicycle from the era.

ONE SMALL MEMORY

You don't need to remember the whole bicycle. Perhaps all that arrives is the colour of it. The sound of the spokes. The hill you were afraid to ride down. The corner store at the end of the street. Or the hand of someone holding the back of your seat until you found your balance. Sometimes that is enough. One small sensory memory can lead you all the way home.

STORY THREE

THE DRIVE-IN THEATRE

“The Best Seat in Town”

THE STORY

Before multiplex theatres, giant televisions, streaming services, and surround sound in our living rooms, there was the drive-in theatre. Looking back now, I sometimes wonder if it was ever really about the movies. For our family, it was about spending an evening together, and somehow that always seemed to make the movie a little better. It was usually on Tuesday nights in the summer called “Buck Night”. A carload for a dollar and boy did we have a carload!

Going to the drive-in was not something we decided to do at the last minute. It was an event. Dad packed the car as though we were heading off on a camping trip rather than to watch a movie. Blankets, pillows, homemade popcorn, potato chips, soft drinks in a cooler, and enough mosquito repellent to protect a small village all found their way into the car. Buying snacks at the canteen, at least according to Dad, bordered on financial robbery, so he made sure we brought enough food to feed half the neighbourhood. Looking back, I think we may have spent more time preparing for the drive-in than we did watching the movie.

As we entered the theatre grounds, the enormous screen rose above the field like a monument to summer nights. Rows of cars slowly filled the lot as families searched for the perfect spot before darkness settled in. Beneath the screen was usually a playground where children burned off what seemed like endless energy while parents watched from lawn chairs, enjoying the activity almost as much as they would later enjoy the movie.

Once Dad found what he considered the perfect parking spot, the next job was hanging the metal speaker on the partially opened window. It usually greeted us with a burst of static before settling into sound quality that could best be described as an old kitchen radio having a bad day. Somehow, none of us cared. That little speaker was part of the experience, and even today it is difficult for me to imagine a drive-in without one.

For us kids, the movie was almost secondary until it actually started. We climbed over the seats, played tag between the rows of cars, chased one another around the playground, and tried our best to avoid mosquitoes that seemed large enough to carry us away. Every so often, one of our parents would call our name, just loudly enough to remind us that they still knew where we were.

Then came one of my favourite parts of the evening: the cartoons, the dancing hot dogs, the popcorn and soft drink commercials, and the famous intermission countdown. The windows would sometimes fog up, forcing Dad to start the car and turn the fan high enough that we could see the screen again, even if hearing the movie became a little more difficult. And then came the song that almost every senior can still hear in their head today: *“Let’s all go to the canteen...”*

It is remarkable how a few words can carry someone back fifty, sixty, or even seventy years. As the evening wore on, the younger children usually curled up under a blanket in the back seat and fell asleep long before the second feature ended. The rest of us fought to stay awake, although I am not entirely convinced the adults did much better. I suspect more than one father quietly nodded off while pretending to be deeply interested in the movie.

Teenagers, of course, experienced the drive-in somewhat differently. The movie often mattered less than who was sitting beside you. Cars sometimes arrived carrying more people than anyone thought possible, helped along by a few adventurous passengers hiding in the trunk. Fogged-up windows became part of drive-in folklore. As children, we were far too young to understand why. To teenagers, apparently, they were blackout curtains.

Looking back now, I cannot remember most of the movies we watched, although Abbott and Costello come to mind. What I remember instead is the experience around them. I remember sitting beside my family on warm summer nights. I remember Dad proudly saving a few dollars by bringing enough snacks to last through a weekend camping trip. I remember the mosquitoes, the playground, the scratchy speaker hanging from the car window, and the slow parade of headlights as everyone tried to leave at exactly the same time.

Most of all, I remember something we probably did not appreciate then. For a few hours, we were simply together. Nobody was looking at a phone. Nobody was rushing off to the next activity. Nobody was being pulled in five different directions. We sat beside one another, laughed together, shared food, watched the same screen, and spent an evening under the stars.

Maybe that is why drive-ins still make me smile. It was never really about the movie. The best seat in town was the one beside the people you loved.

THE GUIDED STORY

The Best Seat in Town - *The Drive-In Was Never Just About the Movie*

Before multiplex theatres, giant televisions, streaming services, and surround sound, there was the drive-in theatre. For our family, it was never simply about watching a movie. It was about spending an evening together, sharing food, laughter, and time under the stars. **Memory Moment** - “Do you remember going to a drive-in theatre, or another family outing that felt like a special event?”

PAUSE OPTION

Packing the Car - *Half the Fun Happened Before We Left Home*

Going to the drive-in required preparation. Dad packed blankets, pillows, homemade popcorn, potato chips, soft drinks, and enough mosquito repellent to protect a small village. Buying snacks at the canteen, according to him, was far too expensive, so we brought our own. Sometimes it seemed as though we packed more for the movie than for a vacation. **Memory Moment** - “What foods or treats did your family always bring on outings?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Finding the Perfect Spot - *Dad Had a System*

As we entered the theatre grounds, the giant screen stood above the field while rows of cars slowly filled in. Dad always wanted the perfect parking space, one where everyone could see the screen properly. Once we settled in, the car became our little family theatre for the night. **PAUSE OPTION**

The Speaker on the Window - *Crackle, Static and Somehow Perfect*

The metal speaker hung on the partially opened car window and usually began with a loud crackle before settling into sound quality that left a lot to be desired. But none of us cared. That scratchy little speaker was part of the drive-in experience. **Memory Moment** - “Can you remember a particular sound that instantly takes you back to an earlier time?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Playground Under the Screen - *The Movie Could Wait*

Before the movie began, the playground beneath the giant screen was often full of children. We ran, climbed, chased one another, and burned off as much energy as possible before darkness arrived. Every so often, one of our parents called our name just to make sure we were still somewhere nearby. **Memory Moment** - “Where did you play while the adults talked or waited?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Cartoons, Canteen and Intermission - *Part of the Show*

The cartoons, dancing hot dogs, popcorn commercials, and intermission countdown became almost as memorable as the movie itself. Then came the familiar invitation: “*Let’s all go to the canteen...*” A few seconds of music could make an entire field of people think about popcorn and soft drinks at the same time. **Memory Moment** - “Is there a song, jingle, advertisement, or sound from your younger years that you can still hear clearly?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Trying to Stay Awake - *The Second Feature Was a Challenge*

As the evening wore on, younger children curled up under blankets in the back seat and fell asleep. The rest of us tried to stay awake through the second feature. I am not convinced the adults always succeeded either. More than one father probably nodded off while pretending to be completely absorbed in the film. **PAUSE OPTION**

Teenagers Saw Things Differently - *Sometimes the Movie Wasn’t the Attraction*

Teenagers had their own version of the drive-in experience. The movie often seemed less important than who was sitting beside them. Cars sometimes arrived carrying more people than expected, with the occasional adventurous passenger hidden in the trunk. Fogged-up windows became part of drive-in folklore, although as children we had no idea why. **PAUSE OPTION**

What I Remember Most - *Not the Movie*

I cannot remember most of the movies we watched. What I remember is the family car, the homemade snacks, the mosquitoes, the playground, the scratchy speaker, and the slow parade of headlights when everyone tried to leave at the same time. Those small details became the real memory. **Memory Moment** - “When you think about a family outing, what small detail do you remember more clearly than the main event?” **PAUSE OPTION**

What It All Meant - *The Best Seat Was Beside Someone You Loved*

For a few hours, we were simply together. Nobody was staring at a phone. Nobody was rushing off to another activity. We laughed, shared food, watched the same screen, and spent an evening under the stars. It was never really about the movie. The best seat in town was the one beside the people you loved.

CORE MEMORY PROMPTS

YOUR TURN:

The following questions will help you explore memories of family outings, drive-ins, movies, summer evenings, shared traditions, and the people who made ordinary experiences feel special. *You do not need to use all prompts. In most sessions, 2–4 prompts are more than enough. If time is limited, or to begin a discussion, start with these:*

1. **Do you remember going to a drive-in theatre, movie house, fair, picnic, or another family outing that felt like a special occasion?**
2. **What did your family bring with you? Think about food, blankets, drinks, chairs, coolers, games, or anything else that was always part of the experience.**
3. **What sounds do you remember? A movie speaker, music, advertisements, children playing, car engines, laughter, or someone calling your name?**
4. **Was there a place where children gathered and played while the adults waited or visited? What did it look and feel like?**
5. **Do you remember a song, jingle, commercial, cartoon, or other small detail from those outings that still brings the memory back?**
6. **When you think about those evenings now, who do you remember sitting beside you? What made simply being together important?**

SENSORY PROMPTS

FAMILY TOGETHERNESS

Sometimes memories arrive because of something familiar

MUSIC – Link to YouTube

- *Let's All Go to the Lobby* — classic theatre intermission jingle
- *Mr. Sandman* — The Chordettes
- *Wake Up Little Susie* — The Everly Brothers

SOUNDS

- The crackle of a drive-in speaker hanging from the car window
- Car engines idling before the movie began
- Children laughing and playing beneath the screen
- The sound of a movie beginning through an outdoor speaker
- Intermission announcements
- Pop bottles opening
- Parents calling children back to the car
- The slow rumble of hundreds of cars leaving at the end of the night

SMELLS

- Fresh popcorn
- Potato chips and candy
- Mosquito repellent
- Warm vinyl seats
- Summer grass
- Car exhaust
- Hot pavement after a warm day
- Food from the drive-in canteen

TOUCH & FEELING

- A blanket across your lap
- A pillow against the car window
- The metal drive-in speaker clipped to the glass
- Warm summer air through an open window
- Sticky fingers from candy or pop
- Mosquito bites on your arms or legs
- Climbing over car seats to find a comfortable spot
- Curling up in the back seat when you became tired

VISUALS

Begin with a photograph of an old drive-in theatre, a family car, an outdoor movie screen, a playground beneath the screen, or an old metal drive-in speaker. You might also use an old popcorn box, movie ticket, soft drink bottle, cooler, blanket, or photograph of a family outing. Pass the photograph or object around and let it do the talking.

ONE SMALL MEMORY

Perhaps you do not remember the movie at all. Maybe what returns is the sound of the speaker crackling, the smell of popcorn, the feel of a blanket in the back seat, the sight of children running beneath the giant screen, or the person sitting beside you. That is enough. Sometimes the memory is not the movie. Sometimes the memory is simply who was there with you.

STORY FOUR

THE BEST DRIVER I EVER KNEW

“Family, travel & fatherhood - The Family Car”

THE STORY



There was something magical about the family car when I was growing up in the 50s and 60s. It wasn't just transportation. It was our living room on wheels, our Sunday adventure machine, our family meeting place and, every now and then, our battlefield. It was where we laughed, argued, went to church, sang, sweated through

hot summer afternoons, shivered on cold winter mornings, and somehow grew a little closer mile after mile. In many ways, it was a memory engine.

Our family car was a 1958 Chevrolet Biscayne. It had no seatbelts, no air conditioning, no cup holders, lots of second-hand smoke and certainly no entertainment system except for an AM radio. What it did have were two big bench seats, a car full of four and sometimes five noisy kids squeezed together like sardines, and two parents who somehow managed to keep the peace. Looking back now, I'm not sure how they did it.

The biggest battle on almost every family outing was deciding who got the window seat. That argument could begin before the engine was even started. Fortunately, Dad was the judge, jury, and Supreme Court of all family car disputes. Usually one look from him—what we affectionately called “the stink-eye”—was enough to restore law and order. Mom had her own form of discipline. Her famous warning, “Just wait until your father gets home,” had the remarkable ability to improve our behaviour long before Dad actually arrived.

Sunday mornings followed a routine that rarely changed. We piled into the Chevy and headed to St. Rose Catholic Church for Mass. It didn't matter if the roads were covered in snow or the weather was miserable. Church wasn't optional. Dad and Mom believed faith came before comfort, and somehow surviving the trip through a major snowstorm almost made us feel holier when we finally reached the church and discovered how few others had made it.

After Mass—and after finally being allowed to eat because fasting before Communion was still the rule—we climbed back into the car for what became one of my favourite family traditions. Our Sunday drive usually included visits to Gram's house and to aunts and uncles scattered throughout Saint John. Coffee was always brewing somewhere, the adults could talk for hours, and we kids found our own adventures with cousins while quietly hoping there would be one final stop before going home: Rona's convenience store.

To most people, it was just a little neighbourhood store. To us, it was paradise. A small bag of chips and a chocolate bar could make an entire week feel complete. As I grew older, I began to notice something else about those Sunday drives. I began to notice my father.

Dad worked at the Saint John Iron Works as a carpenter for nearly forty years. He worked overtime, weekends, and long hours to support our family on one income. What amazed me was that after putting in those exhausting hours, he still found time to help relatives build shelves, repair kitchens, finish basements, or tackle whatever project needed doing. I remember visiting family members who proudly showed Mom something Dad had built for them. Mom would smile, congratulate them, and then quietly remind Dad that our own house still had a few unfinished projects waiting for his attention. Dad would just smile. Looking back, I realize he never really knew how to say no when someone needed help.

One of the greatest gifts Dad ever gave me wasn't something he built with wood. It was confidence. When each of us reached about fifteen, Dad began teaching us to drive. Professional driving lessons would never have fit comfortably into our family budget, so Dad created his own driving school. Our driveway became the classroom. We learned how to back up, park, judge distance, and ease the car into the garage without taking half the garage with us.

Sitting behind the steering wheel for the first time felt like freedom. Starting the engine, adjusting the mirrors, resting your arm on the open window, driving eight or nine car lengths, and then backing up to do it all over again could make you feel like the coolest kid in Saint John.

By the time we turned sixteen, driving on the road didn't seem nearly as frightening because Dad had already given us something more important than technique. He had given us the confidence to believe we could do it.

Of course, I eventually realized Dad's driving school may not have been completely selfless. Once the boys had their licences, Mom—who never drove—suddenly had her own chauffeurs. Grocery shopping, Scout meetings, appointments, and errands became our responsibility instead of Dad's after another fifty-hour work week.

Looking back, I think Dad may have been a better strategist than any of us realized. Some of my earliest memories of that old Chevy came from family trips. One took us to Boston when I was very young. Today it would be an easy day's drive, but back then it felt like crossing the continent. We travelled the old Route 1 through Maine with children bouncing around the seats while Mom and Dad smoked cigarettes for much of the way.

Different times. Different rules. Or perhaps hardly any rules at all.

On another trip through Salem, my older brothers convinced me that witches lived there and that one of them was coming to get me. That night, lying on my uncle's sun porch outside Boston, I don't think I slept very much. It's funny how memory works. Thousands of ordinary days disappear, yet somehow you remember being terrified by a witch who never existed.

Every year, the old Chevy also carried us north to Rexton for family reunions. Dad came from an enormous family of 24, and my grandmother had well over a hundred grandchildren. You had a better chance of getting an audience with the Pope than getting a turn sitting on Gram's lap. There was laughter everywhere, cousins running in every direction, and enough lobster to convince me that heaven probably looked a lot like Rexton.

Looking back now, I realize the old Chevrolet wasn't really what made those journeys special. It was the man behind the steering wheel. Dad wasn't simply driving us from one place to another. Mile after mile, he was quietly teaching us what mattered: faith, family, responsibility, hard work, generosity, and keeping your word. He showed us that if you started something, you finished it. He showed us that family wasn't something you squeezed into your schedule when it was convenient. You made time for it because it mattered.

Today's cars are quieter, safer, faster, and far more comfortable than anything we could have imagined back then. Some can practically drive themselves. But every once in a while, when I slide behind the steering wheel, I still find myself thinking about my father. He taught me far more than how to drive. He taught me how to travel through life. And when I think about the best driver I ever knew, I don't think about the car he drove. I think about the family he carried.

THE GUIDED STORY

The Family Car Was More Than Transportation

Growing up in the 1950s and 60s, our family car was part transportation, part meeting place, part playground, and occasionally part battlefield. We laughed, argued, went to church, visited relatives, travelled, and learned about one another while sitting shoulder to shoulder. In many ways, the car was a memory engine.

Memory Moment - “What family car do you remember most clearly from your childhood?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Window Seat Battle - Some Things Never Changed

With a car full of children and only so many good seats, deciding who got the window could become a serious negotiation. Dad usually settled things with one look. We called it “the stink-eye.” Mom had her own famous warning: “Just wait until your father gets home.” Somehow, both worked. **Memory Moment** - “Did your family have arguments over seats, space, or who sat where?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Sunday Mornings - Faith Came Before Comfort

Every Sunday, we piled into the Chevrolet and headed to St. Rose Catholic Church. Snowstorms did not change the plan. Bad roads did not change the plan. Church was simply part of family life. After Mass, the day usually continued with visits to relatives and the familiar rhythm of Sunday driving. **PAUSE OPTION**

Visiting Family - Coffee for the Adults, Adventure for the Kids

Sunday drives often meant stopping at Gram's house or visiting aunts and uncles around Saint John. The adults sat with coffee and talked for what seemed like hours while we disappeared with our cousins. If we were lucky, the day ended with a stop at Rona's convenience store for chips and a chocolate bar. **Memory Moment** - “Who did your family visit on Sundays or special days?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Man Behind the Wheel - I Began to Notice My Father

As I grew older, I started paying attention to Dad in a different way. He worked long hours as a carpenter at the Saint John Iron Works, yet somehow still found time to help relatives with repairs, shelves, kitchens, basements, and whatever else needed doing. Dad rarely said no when someone needed help. **Memory Moment** - “Was there someone in your family who was always helping others?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Dad's Driving School - *The Driveway Became the Classroom*

When we reached about fifteen, Dad began teaching us to drive. Our driveway became the practice ground. We learned how to back up, park, judge distance, and ease the car into the garage. Driving only a few car lengths could make you feel incredibly grown up. **Memory Moment** - "Who taught you to drive, or taught you another skill that gave you independence?" **PAUSE OPTION**

Confidence Before the Licence - *He Made Us Believe We Could Do It*

By the time we were old enough to drive on the road, Dad had already given us something important: confidence. He had taught us that if we practised, paid attention, and stayed calm, we could handle the responsibility. Later, I realized his driving lessons also created a few new family chauffeurs for Mom. Dad may have been wiser than we thought. **PAUSE OPTION**

The Long Family Trips - *Before Seatbelts and GPS*

The old Chevrolet carried us on longer journeys too. Trips to Boston felt enormous in those days. We travelled Route 1 through Maine with children moving around the car and no seatbelts, GPS, air conditioning, or modern safety features. Different times. Different rules. **Memory Moment** - "Do you remember a long family car trip from your childhood?" **PAUSE OPTION**

The Witch in Salem - *Some Memories Refuse to Disappear*

On one trip through Salem, my older brothers convinced me that witches lived there and that one of them was coming to get me. That night, I barely slept. It is funny how memory works. Whole years can fade, yet a childhood fear can remain perfectly clear. **PAUSE OPTION**

The Road to Rexton - *Family Waiting at the Other End*

Every year, the Chevrolet also carried us to Rexton for family reunions. Dad came from an enormous family, and there were cousins everywhere. Laughter filled the day, food seemed endless, and getting a turn on Gram's lap required patience and luck. **Memory Moment** - "Was there a place your family travelled to again and again because family was waiting there?" **PAUSE OPTION**

What It All Meant - *The Family He Carried*

Looking back now, I realize the Chevrolet was never the most important part of those memories. Dad was. He was not only driving us from one place to another. He was teaching us faith, responsibility, hard work, generosity, and the importance of making time for family. He taught me far more than how to drive. He taught me how to travel through life. And when I think about the best driver I ever knew, I do not think about the car he drove. I think about the family he carried.

CORE MEMORY PROMPTS

YOUR TURN:

The following questions will help you explore memories of family cars, Sunday drives, road trips, learning to drive, family traditions, and the people who quietly taught you important lessons along the way. *Facilitator Note: You do not need to use all prompts. In most sessions, 2–4 prompts are more than enough. If time is limited, or to begin a discussion, start with these.*

1. What family car do you remember most clearly? What did it look, sound, or even smell like?
2. Were there family traditions connected to the car, such as Sunday drives, church, visiting relatives, shopping, vacations, or stopping for a favourite treat?
3. Who usually drove in your family, and what do you remember about the way they drove or behaved behind the wheel?
4. Who taught you to drive, or taught you another important skill that made you feel more independent?
5. Do you remember a long car trip, family reunion, roadside stop, wrong turn, breakdown, or funny incident that has stayed with you?
6. When you think about your family car now, is the strongest memory really about the vehicle, or about the people who were inside it?

SENSORY PROMPTS

Family, Travel & Fatherhood

Sometimes memories arrive because of something familiar

MUSIC – Link to YouTube

- *Que Sera, Sera* — Doris Day
- *You Are My Sunshine* — familiar family song
- *King of the Road* — Roger Miller
- *Those Hazy, Lazy, Crazy Days of Summer* — Nat King Cole

SOUNDS

- A car engine starting on a cold morning
- Tires rolling over gravel, snow, or wet pavement
- A turn signal clicking
- Wind coming through an open car window
- Children arguing over the window seat
- A parent saying, “Settle down back there”
- The car radio playing softly

- Church bells on a Sunday morning
- Doors closing as everyone piled into the car
- The sound of relatives talking and laughing after arriving

SMELLS

- Vinyl car seats warmed by the sun
- Gasoline at a service station
- Cigarette smoke in an older family car
- Coffee brewing at a relative's house
- Freshly cut wood or sawdust from a carpenter's work
- Winter coats and damp mittens inside the car
- Potato chips, chocolate bars, or treats from a corner store
- The smell of a garage or workshop

TOUCH & FEELING

- Sliding across a wide bench seat
- Cold vinyl seats on a winter morning
- Resting an arm on an open car window
- Gripping the steering wheel for the first time
- Adjusting a rear-view mirror
- The nervous feeling of backing up for the first time
- Snow under your shoes as you climbed into the car
- Being squeezed beside brothers, sisters, or cousins
- The feeling of a parent beside you while learning to drive

VISUALS

Begin with a photograph of an old family car, a parent behind the wheel, a Sunday family outing, a church parking lot, or a family gathered around a car before a trip. You might also use an old road map, car key, licence plate, service station photo, family reunion picture, church bulletin, or photograph of a neighbourhood convenience store. Pass the photograph or object around and let it do the talking.

ONE SMALL MEMORY

Perhaps you do not remember the whole trip. Maybe what returns is the sound of your father starting the car, the feel of a bench seat, the smell of coffee at your grandmother's house, the argument over the window seat, or the first time someone trusted you with the steering wheel. That is enough. Sometimes the strongest memory is not where the car took you. Sometimes it is who was sitting beside you.

STORY FIVE

SERVICE AND NEIGHBOURHOOD

“The Gas Station Was a Social Event”

THE STORY

There are some places that quietly disappear from our lives before we realize how much we are going to miss them. For me, one of those places was the neighbourhood gas station—Art Morrell’s Shell station on Main Street, to be exact.

Today, filling your car with gas is about as exciting as standing in line at the bank. You pull up to the pump, tap your credit card, fill the tank yourself, and drive away without speaking to another human being. In less than five minutes, you are back on the road. Fifty or sixty years ago, it was a completely different experience. Back then, a gas station was not simply a place to buy gasoline. It was part of the neighbourhood. I can still remember Dad’s car rolling over the rubber hose stretched across the driveway.

Ding... Ding... Before the car had even stopped, an attendant wearing a crisp uniform and cap appeared at Dad’s window with a smile. “Fill ’er up, Harry?” Those four words probably fuelled half the cars in North America for forty years. While the gas flowed into the tank, the attendant cleaned the windshield until it sparkled, checked the oil, looked at the tires, and sometimes looked at the engine if Dad mentioned a strange noise. Nobody considered these things extras. They were simply part of the service. And if no one was waiting behind us, there was usually time for a conversation.

Most of the attendants knew Dad by name. They knew what kind of gasoline he bought, how much he might put in before payday, and often how the family was doing. Looking back, I sometimes think the local gas station attendant knew almost as much about the neighbourhood as the barber. Dad particularly admired Art Morrell and his Shell station. It wasn’t simply because Art sold gasoline. It was because people trusted him. If your car broke down, someone helped. If you needed directions, someone knew the way. If you had a flat tire, someone fixed it. If something did not sound right under the hood, someone would at least take a look. The service station was not just servicing cars. It was serving people.

The stations also had a smell all their own. Gasoline, grease, warm rubber, motor oil, cigarette smoke, and hot pavement baking in the summer sun somehow blended together into something unmistakable. It is remarkable how a smell can unlock a memory that has been tucked away for decades. Even today, walking into an old repair garage can take me instantly back to those childhood road trips. Dad's order was often the same. "Five dollars regular please."

It is hard to believe now that five dollars seemed capable of carrying a family almost anywhere, we wanted to go. While the attendant looked after the car, Mom might go inside to ask for directions for a future trip. Long before GPS and smartphones, service stations kept stacks of free folding road maps near the counter. Those maps often became the centrepiece of the next family discussion about where we were going and how we intended to get there. Dad usually insisted he knew exactly where he was going. Mom was not always quite as confident.

And somewhere along the road, one of us in the back seat would inevitably ask the two questions that generations of parents have heard: "Are we there yet?" and "How much longer?" Those questions have survived every improvement in transportation technology. I suspect the first children to ride in an automobile probably asked Henry Ford the same thing.

Gas stations were fascinating places for kids. There were shiny pumps, colourful oil-company signs, racks filled with road maps, Coca-Cola coolers, and stacks of brand-new tires. Then there were the promotional giveaways: beach balls, fire chief hats, drinking glasses, and all sorts of things that had absolutely nothing to do with gasoline but somehow made a child excited about which station Dad chose. Looking back, the oil companies may have understood brand loyalty better than we realized. They were attracting future customers long before we were old enough to have a driver's licence.

The repair bays were even more fascinating. Mechanics worked beneath cars raised high on hydraulic lifts. Air wrenches rattled. Toolboxes rolled across concrete floors. Greasy hands reached into engines and somehow made broken things work again. As a boy, I thought mechanics looked like magicians disguised as ordinary men.

Of course, cars today are remarkable. They tell us when the tire pressure is low, when the oil needs changing, when another vehicle is in our blind spot, and even when we begin drifting out of our lane. A voice tells us exactly where to turn. We can pay without entering the building and leave without speaking to anyone. We have become incredibly efficient but not so in admiring that human contact. I am just not sure we have become more connected. Looking back now, I think the real product those old neighbourhood gas stations sold was not gasoline at all. It was service. It was conversation. It was trust. It was community.

Every now and then, when I pull into a modern self-serve station, I can almost hear that old rubber hose beneath the tires one more time. **Ding... Ding...** But the bell is gone now. And somehow, I think we lost a little more than the bell. Perhaps when we pay with our credit card it would make that sound just to remind us of what service sounded like.

THE GUIDED STORY

The Gas Station Was a Social Event - *When Service Meant Knowing Your Name*

There was a time when stopping for gasoline was more than a quick transaction. The neighbourhood service station was part of the community. People talked there, asked directions, checked on one another, and trusted the person behind the pump. **Memory Moment** - “Do you remember a gas station or service station from your childhood or younger years?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Ding... Ding... - *The Sound That Brought Someone Running*

As Dad’s car rolled over the rubber hose across the driveway, the bell rang inside the station. Before we had fully stopped, an attendant was usually already walking toward the car. “Fill ’er up, Harry?” That greeting was part of the experience. The attendant often knew who you were before you even opened the window. **Memory Moment** - “Was there a store, station, or business where people knew your family by name?” **PAUSE OPTION**

More Than Gasoline - *Service Came With the Fill-Up*

While the tank was filling, the attendant cleaned the windshield, checked the oil, looked at the tires, and sometimes lifted the hood if Dad mentioned a strange sound. No one thought of those things as extras. They were simply part of good service. **PAUSE OPTION**

Everyone Knew Everyone - *The Station Was Part of the Neighbourhood*

The attendants often knew what Dad usually bought, how much he might put in before payday, and how the family was doing. Dad admired Art Morrell because people trusted him. If your car broke down, someone helped. If you needed directions, someone knew. If you had a flat tire, someone fixed it. **Memory Moment** - “Who were the local business owners or workers everyone trusted?” **PAUSE OPTION**

A Smell You Never Forget - *Gasoline, Grease and Hot Pavement*

Old service stations had a smell all their own. Gasoline, motor oil, warm rubber, grease, cigarette smoke, and pavement heated by the summer sun somehow mixed together. Even today, an old repair garage can bring those memories back in an

instant. **Memory Moment** - “Is there a smell that immediately takes you back to a place from your past?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Five Dollars Regular - *When a Little Seemed to Go a Long Way*

Dad’s order was often simple: “Five dollars regular.” Somehow that seemed enough to keep the family moving. While the attendant looked after the car, Mom might go inside to ask for directions or pick up one of the free folding road maps stacked beside the counter. **PAUSE OPTION**

Before GPS - *The Road Map Was Part of the Trip*

Family travel depended on road signs, paper maps, memory, and sometimes a disagreement between the driver and the passenger about which road was the right one. Dad usually believed he knew exactly where he was going. Mom was not always so sure. **Memory Moment** - “Who usually read the map or gave directions in your family?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Are We There Yet? - *Some Questions Never Change*

No matter how well the trip was planned, sooner or later one of us in the back seat asked the two questions every parent knew were coming: “Are we there yet?” and “How much longer?” Those questions have probably travelled farther than any family car ever did. **PAUSE OPTION**

A Kid’s View of the Gas Station - *There Was Always Something to Look At*

Gas stations fascinated children. There were shiny pumps, colourful signs, road maps, Coca-Cola coolers, stacks of tires, and promotional giveaways like beach balls, fire chief hats, and drinking glasses. Somehow, oil companies managed to make children loyal to a brand before we were old enough to drive. **Memory Moment** - “Do you remember a giveaway, sign, cooler, map, or other small object from a local business?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Repair Bay - *Mechanics Looked Like Magicians*

Inside the repair bays, cars rose high on hydraulic lifts. Air wrenches rattled. Toolboxes rolled across the floor. Mechanics with greasy hands reached into engines and somehow made broken things work again. To a young boy, they looked like magicians disguised as ordinary men. **PAUSE OPTION**

What It All Meant - *We Became More Efficient, But Maybe Less Connected*

Today, cars tell us when the oil needs changing, when the tire pressure is low, and where to turn. We pay at the pump and can leave without speaking to another person. We have become incredibly efficient. I am just not sure we have become

more connected. Looking back, I think that old service stations sold something more valuable than gasoline. They sold service. Conversation. Trust. And Community. And every now and then, I can still hear it. **Ding... Ding...**

CORE MEMORY PROMPTS

YOUR TURN:

The following questions will help you explore memories of neighbourhood businesses, gas stations, family travel, service, trust, and the people who made ordinary places feel personal. *Facilitator Note: You do not need to use all prompts. In most sessions, 2–4 prompts are more than enough. If time is limited, or to begin a discussion, start with these.*

- 1. Do you remember a gas station, garage, store, barber shop, or other local business where people knew you or your family by name?**
- 2. What sights, sounds, or smells do you remember most clearly from an old service station or repair garage?**
- 3. Was there a local owner, mechanic, clerk, or attendant your family trusted? What made that person memorable?**
- 4. Do you remember using paper road maps, asking for directions, or getting lost on a family trip before GPS?**
- 5. Were there promotional giveaways, signs, coolers, uniforms, or other small details from local businesses that stayed in your memory?**
- 6. When you think about the businesses from your younger years, what do you miss most: the place itself, the service, or the people who were there?**

SENSORY PROMPTS

SERVICE & COMMUNITY

Sometimes memories arrive because of something familiar

🎵 MUSIC – Link to YouTube

- *Route 66* — Nat King Cole
- *King of the Road* — Roger Miller
- *On the Road Again* — Willie Nelson

🔊 SOUNDS

- The **ding... ding...** of a car rolling over the service-station hose
- An attendant calling, “Fill ’er up?”
- A gas pump clicking as the tank filled
- An air hose inflating a tire

- Air wrenches rattling in the repair bay
- A mechanic dropping tools into a metal tray
- Car doors closing and engines starting
- A bell above the station door
- People chatting while the car was being serviced

SMELLS

- Gasoline
- Motor oil and grease
- Warm rubber tires
- Hot pavement on a summer day
- Cigarette smoke
- The smell of an old garage or repair bay
- Car wax or windshield cleaner
- Coffee brewing inside the station office

TOUCH & FEELING

- A paper road map unfolding in your hands
- A cold glass pop bottle from a cooler
- The smooth handle of an old gas pump
- Warm vinyl car seats while waiting
- A tire-pressure gauge in your hand
- The vibration of the car while the engine idled
- The dusty or greasy feel of a garage counter
- A promotional giveaway such as a drinking glass, hat, or beach ball

VISUALS

Begin with a photograph of an old neighbourhood gas station, uniformed attendant, vintage gas pump, repair bay, oil-company sign, road map rack, or family car parked at a service station. You might also use an old folding road map, vintage oil can, service-station receipt, promotional glass, gas-station sign, or photograph of a mechanic at work. Pass the photograph or object around and let it do the talking.

ONE SMALL MEMORY

Perhaps you do not remember the name of the station. Maybe what returns is the sound of the bell as the car arrived, the smell of gasoline and grease, the attendant cleaning the windshield, the road map your mother held, or the familiar face who knew your father by name. That is enough. Sometimes the memory is not the place itself. Sometimes it is the feeling of being known when you arrived.

STORY SIX

THE VACATION MY GUARDIAN ANGELS NEVER FORGOT

*“Sometimes a vacation becomes more than postcards,
photographs, and souvenirs. Sometimes it becomes a
story you tell for the rest of your life.
This is one of those stories.”*

THE STORY

In 1985, while working for Picker X-ray, I won the company’s top salesperson in Canada award. It remains one of the proudest accomplishments of my career. Forty-three sales representatives from across the country competed in a six-month national sales contest designed not only to increase sales, but also to expand market share across Picker’s full range of radiology products. Extra points were awarded when a customer switched from a competing supplier to Picker.

That kind of challenge was right up my alley as I have always enjoyed puzzles, strategy, and numbers. Rather than simply trying to work harder than everyone else, I sat down and developed a ninety-day sales plan. I studied my customers, matched the right products to the right opportunities, and concentrated my efforts where I thought they would have the greatest impact on the contest results. To my delight, it worked. I finished first in Canada. It was just a numbers game.

The prize was extraordinary. Picker rewarded Cathy and me with a trip to London, where we would visit the company’s headquarters and MRI manufacturing facility. From there, we would join a guided tour through Portugal, Spain, and Morocco. The three-week vacation also included a gold Picker Presidents ring and \$2,000 in spending money.



It sounded like the vacation of a lifetime. And it was. Just not for the reasons we expected. Our adventure began before we ever reached Europe. On June 23, 1985, Cathy and I boarded a Wardair flight in Toronto bound for London. That same

day, Air India Flight 182 had also begun its journey from Canada toward Europe.

Very early into our flight, the captain announced that we would be making an unexpected landing at Mirabel Airport near Montreal. As soon as we stopped, RCMP vehicles surrounded our aircraft. Nobody told us what was happening. Nobody explained why we had landed. Passengers stared through the windows trying to make sense of the police presence outside. Cathy and I looked at each other, shrugged our shoulders, pulled out our little backgammon board, and started another game while we waited. We thought it was a last-minute dignitary that had to get to London right away.

Looking back now, I can smile at how completely unaware we were. At the time, we had absolutely no idea what was unfolding around us. Canada was a very safe place. When we finally arrived in London, it was about five o'clock in the morning by our body clocks. A few hours later, we called home to let everyone know we had arrived safely. Instead of excitement, we heard relief and tears.

Our families had been following news reports of a passenger aircraft travelling from Toronto at 7PM toward London had exploded over the Atlantic after a terrorist bomb. They knew we had left Toronto that evening. They knew we were flying to London. And because the early reports did not immediately provide them with all the details they needed, for several terrifying hours they feared we might have been on that aircraft. Only then did we begin to understand why our own flight had been diverted and surrounded by police at Mirabel.

For Cathy and me, it was a frightening realization. For our families back home, it had been hours of uncertainty. And that should have been enough excitement for one vacation. It wasn't. That incident became only the first of seven unsettling experiences that followed us during those three weeks. By the end of the trip, it began to feel like the aviation version of that children's song, *"The Song That Never Ends."* Every time we thought the adventure was settling down, something else happened. That should have been enough excitement for one vacation. It wasn't.

The trip had barely begun when arriving in London at Victoria Station we were welcomed with a private taxi ride that cost about eight times what it should have. We thought the driver was being kind when he "discounted" the fare. The hotel staff later explained that we had been taken for a very expensive ride when we told them it took us 45 minutes for a five-minute fare. It was our first lesson that sometimes the danger on a trip is not in the air. Sometimes it is sitting behind the steering wheel.

The next day, we joined our Trafalgar tour and met a tour director who had been called back from holidays at the last minute due to another tour director calling in sick. She was clearly not happy about it, and for the next sixteen days she made certain the rest of us understood exactly how she felt. Fortunately, we made our own fun with the people on the tour.

Then came our flight from London to Lisbon. Halfway through the flight, passengers on our side of the aircraft noticed a black liquid running off the wing. The flight attendant gasped, the pilot came back to look, said nothing, and returned to the cockpit. For the rest of the flight, we sat there imagining every airplane disaster movie we had ever seen. We landed safely, but I would have appreciated a small announcement such as, "Everything is fine." Apparently, silence was considered reassuring.



A few days later in Madrid, we stayed in a hotel beside the British Airways and TWA offices. The next morning, we checked out and left for Granada. A couple of hours later, a terrorist bomb exploded in those offices and damaged the hotel killing one person and injuring twenty-seven others. By this point, Cathy and I were beginning to wonder whether our guardian angels were travelling with us or simply trying desperately to keep up. This was Cathy looking over the balcony of our room. Behind her is the TWA sign.

We were shaken enough that we decided to skip the planned excursion to Tangiers, Morocco, and travel ahead to Seville instead. When our tour friends rejoined us, they told us their Tangiers hotel had suffered an electrical fire at 12:45 AM. They had been forced to carry their luggage down six floors in the dark and move to another hotel late at night before leaving again the next morning. For once on this trip, deciding not to go somewhere turned out to be an excellent travel decision. Surely that had to be the end of it. Not quite.

On our flight home, severe thunderstorms near Toronto kept our 747 circling for more than an hour. The aircraft rose, dropped, and swayed so much that it felt like an amusement-park ride no one had volunteered to take. People were using the airsickness bags, and the rest of us were too frightened to bother. Then came the grand finale.

Our last flight from Toronto to Saint John arrived in dense fog. The pilot announced that he would make two "attempts" to land. I did not particularly like the word *attempts*. The first one failed and we climbed sharply back into the darkness. On the second approach, we still could not see the ground. Suddenly the front wheels slammed the runway, followed by the rest of the aircraft coming down hard behind

them. It remains the first and only time I thought my spine might leave my body by an entirely unexpected route.

By the time we finally arrived home, Cathy and I had survived the aftermath of the Air India tragedy, a taxi scam, a leaking aircraft wing, a bombing beside our hotel, a hotel fire we narrowly avoided, violent turbulence over Toronto, and a foggy landing in Saint John that I still remember far too clearly. And somehow, we had also managed to have a wonderful vacation. That may be the real lesson.

Travel does not always give us the stories we planned to bring home. Sometimes it gives us the stories we never expected—and occasionally makes us wonder whether staying home and looking at the travel brochures might have been safer. But perhaps that is why these stories stay with us. Looking back, Cathy and I have often joked that our guardian angels must have needed a vacation after ours.

THE GUIDED STORY

The Vacation My Guardian Angels Never Forgot - *When the Trip of a Lifetime Became Something Else*

Sometimes a vacation becomes more than photographs, postcards, and souvenirs. Sometimes one unexpected moment changes the way you remember the entire journey. In 1985, Cathy and I set off on what was supposed to be the vacation of a lifetime. It became that—but not for the reasons we expected. **Memory Moment**

“Have you ever taken a vacation where one thing after another seemed to go wrong—and years later, those problems became the stories you remember and tell the most?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Winning the Trip - *A Reward I Had Worked Hard For*

While working for Picker X-ray, I entered a ninety-day national sales contest involving forty-three representatives across Canada. I built a careful sales plan, matched products to customers, and focused on winning new business. To my delight, I finished first in Canada. **Memory Moment** - “Was there ever a prize, award, promotion, or accomplishment that made you especially proud?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Journey Began With a Surprise - *An Unexpected Landing at Mirabel*

On June 23, 1985, we boarded a Wardair flight in Toronto bound for London. Early in the flight, the captain announced that we would be making an unexpected landing at Mirabel Airport near Montreal. When we stopped, RCMP vehicles surrounded the aircraft. Nobody explained why. **Memory Moment** - “Have you

ever had a flight, train trip, or road journey suddenly interrupted without knowing why?" **PAUSE OPTION**

Waiting Without Knowing - *Sometimes You Don't Understand the Moment Until Later*

Passengers looked through the windows trying to make sense of what was happening. Cathy and I simply pulled out our little backgammon board and started another game. At the time, we had no idea how serious the situation around us really was. **PAUSE OPTION**

The Phone Call Home - *Relief Instead of Excitement*

When we finally reached London, we called home to say we had arrived safely. Instead of excitement, we heard relief. Our families had been listening to reports about an aircraft travelling from Canada toward Europe that had exploded over the Atlantic. They knew our route and departure city, but they did not yet have enough information to know whether we were safe. **Memory Moment** - "Do you remember waiting for news about someone you loved, or realizing later that someone had been worried about you?" **PAUSE OPTION**

What Our Family Had Been Through - *The Same Journey Looked Very Different From Home*

For Cathy and me, the delay had been confusing. For our families, the same hours had been frightening. Only after speaking with them did we begin to understand why our aircraft had been diverted and surrounded by police. Sometimes the people waiting at home experience a journey very differently from the people actually taking it. **PAUSE OPTION**

And That Was Only the Beginning - *One Incident Became Four*

That should have been enough excitement for one trip, but it was only the first of four unsettling airplane experiences during those three weeks. Each time we thought things had settled down, something else happened. Eventually, it began to feel like the aviation version of "*The Song That Never Ends.*" **Memory Moment** - "Have you ever had a vacation where one thing after another seemed to go wrong?" **PAUSE OPTION**

Guardian Angels Working Overtime - *Fear Can Become Humour With Time*

Looking back now, Cathy and I can laugh about parts of that trip that were certainly not funny at the time. Perhaps that is one of the strange things about memory. Fear can soften with the years, and sometimes the stories that frightened us most become the ones we tell most often. **PAUSE OPTION**

What It All Meant - *The Journey Became More Important Than the Destination*

The trip began as a reward for a career accomplishment. It became something much more memorable. I still remember the places we visited, but I also remember uncertainty, relief, gratitude, and the realization that a journey can change meaning in an instant. And after everything that happened, Cathy and I reached one conclusion. Our guardian angels deserved a vacation of their own.

CORE MEMORY PROMPTS

YOUR TURN:

The following questions will help you explore memories of vacations, travel surprises, accomplishments, unexpected danger, relief, and the journeys that became stories you told for years afterward. *Facilitator Note: You do not need to use all prompts. In most sessions, 2–4 prompts are more than enough. If time is limited, or to begin a discussion, start with these.*

- 1. Do you remember a trip or vacation you had looked forward to for a long time? What made it special before you even left home?**
- 2. Was there ever a journey connected to a prize, work achievement, honeymoon, anniversary, retirement, or other important event?**
- 3. Did anything unexpected happen while you were travelling that changed the mood or direction of the trip?**
- 4. Can you remember a time when your family or friends were worried about you while you were away, or when you were waiting anxiously for news about someone else?**
- 5. Have you ever experienced a travel delay, diversion, missed connection, mechanical problem, bad weather, or other incident that became a family story later?**
- 6. Is there a frightening or difficult travel memory that feels different now because enough time has passed for you to see humour, gratitude, or meaning in it?**

SENSORY PROMPTS

Travel, uncertainty & gratitude

Sometimes memories arrive because of something familiar

🎵 MUSIC – Link to YouTube

- *Leaving on a Jet Plane* — Peter, Paul and Mary
- *Come Fly with Me* — Frank Sinatra
- *The Song That Never Ends* — a playful reminder of how one travel incident seemed to follow another

SOUNDS

- An airport departure announcement
- The roar of jet engines during takeoff
- The click of seatbelts fastening
- A captain's voice making an unexpected announcement
- Luggage wheels rolling through an airport terminal
- Police or emergency vehicles outside an aircraft
- Passengers quietly talking and wondering what was happening

SMELLS

- Jet fuel on the airport tarmac
- The inside of an airplane cabin
- Coffee served during a long flight
- Airport food and terminal restaurants
- A hotel room in a foreign city
- Perfume or aftershave from fellow travellers
- The unfamiliar smells of arriving in a different country

TOUCH & FEELING

- Holding an airline ticket or boarding pass
- Carrying a passport for an international trip
- The vibration of the aircraft during takeoff
- The pressure in your ears as the plane climbed or descended
- Holding a travel companion's hand during an uncertain moment
- The tired feeling after an overnight flight
- The relief of finally hearing a familiar voice from home

VISUALS

Begin with an old airline ticket, passport, boarding pass, travel brochure, suitcase, photograph of an airport, or picture from a memorable vacation. You might also use a photograph of an older passenger aircraft, an airport departure board, a travel game, a hotel room key, or a souvenir from an international trip. Pass the photograph or object around and let it do the talking.

ONE SMALL MEMORY

Perhaps you do not remember every detail of the trip. Maybe what returns is the sound of the captain's voice, the view through an airplane window, the feel of a passport in your hand, the relief in someone's voice when you called home, or the moment you realized that the journey had become something you would never forget. That is enough. Sometimes the strongest travel memories are not about where we went. They are about how grateful we were to arrive.

STORY SEVEN

THE RETIREMENT DREAM THAT RAN OFF THE ROAD

“Expectations versus Reality”

THE STORY



One of the greatest gifts of retirement is the freedom to dream again as time is no longer dictated by your employer. After years of working, raising a family, and putting responsibilities first, Cathy and I finally had the chance to think about all the things we had always wanted to do. One of those dreams was travelling in a motorhome. We thought that if we liked it, perhaps we might even buy one. **Well... let's just read the story.**



Like so many people, we pictured ourselves parked beside quiet lakes, enjoying campfires beneath the stars, and waking each morning to a different view. Every television commercial and motorhome dealer made it look like the perfect retirement lifestyle. Fortunately, before spending a small fortune buying one, we decided to do something sensible. We rented one for a week.

Looking back now, that may have been the smartest decision we ever made next to deciding against skydiving without a parachute. So on August 10, 2018, I arrived at the rental company excited to pick up our twenty-eight-foot motorhome. They went over an extensive list of inventory in the motorhome including every knife and fork and at one point I thought they would count the toilet paper squares. After signing what felt like enough paperwork to buy a house, a service employee gave me a quick orientation. In about ten minutes, he pointed out the propane controls, explained the black and grey water tanks, showed me how the slide-out worked, demonstrated the awning and handed me the keys. Then he smiled and wished me good luck.

Good luck? Those two words should have been my first warning. There was no instructional video, no driving lesson, no supervised test drive, and no opportunity to get comfortable behind the wheel. Apparently, driving a fourteen-thousand-pound apartment on wheels required about the same amount of preparation as borrowing your neighbour's lawn mower. The rental office sat beside the Trans-

Canada Highway, so getting onto the road was easy. Staying on it was another matter.

Cathy followed me in our Jeep. It suddenly seemed tiny. The motorhome weighed more than three times as it, stretched twenty-one feet longer, stood nearly eleven feet high, and caught every gust of wind like a giant sail. The first transport truck that passed me nearly ditched my retirement plans altogether. The blast of air pushed the motorhome sideways, and for a brief moment I wasn't sure whether I was driving or simply negotiating with the laws of physics.

From that point on, every passing transport truck became an event. I gripped the steering wheel so tightly that I probably left fingerprints in it. There was no gentle learning curve. One minute I was signing rental papers; the next, I was piloting what felt like a seven-ton condominium through highway traffic at 110 kilometres an hour. I honestly couldn't understand why no one had suggested a supervised practice drive before sending customers on their way. Bus drivers and truck drivers spend weeks learning to handle vehicles that size. Apparently, all I needed was a valid driver's licence and a credit card.

Even before leaving home, I had already spotted another problem with the dream. If we wanted to drive from the campground to buy groceries or do a little sightseeing, we couldn't simply jump into the motorhome and go. First, we would have to disconnect the water and sewer hoses, roll up the outdoor carpet, store the lawn chairs and barbecue, retract the slide-out, secure everything inside, and then reverse the entire process when we returned. All that effort... just to buy milk and a loaf of bread? Having Cathy bring the Jeep along was a good idea.

Our first stop was Fundy National Park. When we arrived early Friday afternoon, everything looked exactly like the television commercials. We found a beautiful campsite surrounded by mature trees, enjoyed the fresh air, and sat outside thinking that perhaps we had discovered our new retirement lifestyle after all.... **for about three hours.** Then Friday evening around six o'clock arrived. Children now ran through the campground laughing and screaming. Music drifted from nearby campsites. Someone organized what seemed to be an endless game of Washers, where heavy metal washers slammed against wooden targets every few seconds. **Clang. Clang. Clang.** If you have never heard the game before, imagine someone banging two frying pans together until quiet time at ten.

At our next campground in Sussex a couple of days later, another neighbour decided to entertain everyone with a guitar at eight o'clock while his friend up the road joined in on harmonica. I am sure they were having a wonderful time. The rest of us became unwilling members of the audience till quiet time at 10PM. To make matters worse, the motorhome was not sitting perfectly level. Sleeping felt less like lying in bed and more like spending the night on the side of a gently sloping hill headfirst.

By the fourth morning, with three rental days still remaining, Cathy and I had both reached the same conclusion without saying very much. We had had enough. We packed up three days early and headed home. There would be no refund, but by then our peace of mind was worth far more than the money we were going to lose. Unfortunately, the adventure still had one final chapter. Before returning the motorhome, I had to stop to refill the propane tank, just as the rental agreement required. After paying the grand total of \$2.37 for the gas, I pulled away from the refill station. That was when I discovered something the rental company had apparently forgotten to mention. **Rear swing.** As I turned, the back corner of the motorhome swung outward and scraped against one of the concrete safety posts protecting the propane tanks. More than seventeen hundred dollars in damage. When I returned the motorhome and explained what had happened, one employee looked at me and casually said, "You have to remember there's a dragon tail behind you."

A dragon tail? Now there was a piece of information that might have been useful four days earlier. Preferably before they handed me the keys. By the time we added up the rental fee, campground costs, propane, insurance deductible, and repair bill, our four-night adventure had cost nearly \$4,300. It was undoubtedly one of the most expensive lessons I had ever purchased.

But here is the interesting part. I do not regret a single dollar. That four-day experiment probably saved us tens of thousands of dollars, perhaps much more. For years, Cathy and I had imagined ourselves owning a motorhome. Four days behind the wheel taught us something we could never have learned from brochures, commercials, or walking through a dealership. The motorhome lifestyle simply was not for us. Sometimes life does not give you the vacation you expected. It gives you the education you needed.

I have always believed in the power of wanting something badly enough that you are willing to work hard to achieve it. That belief has opened many wonderful doors throughout my life. But every now and then, the smartest thing we can do is test a dream before investing in it.

Ours did not end beside a peaceful lake. It ended beside a concrete post. And strangely enough, that was one of the best investments we never made. So if you are ever tempted by those beautiful television commercials showing smiling retired couples sitting around a campfire beneath the stars, do yourself a favour. Rent one first. You may discover exactly what we did. A really comfortable hotel room with room service can suddenly look awfully good.

THE GUIDED STORY

The Retirement Dream That Ran Off the Road - *Sometimes a Dream Needs a Test Drive*

Retirement gave Cathy and me the freedom to think about things we had always wanted to try. One of those dreams was travelling in a motorhome. We pictured quiet lakes, campfires, beautiful scenery, and the freedom to go wherever we wanted. Before buying one, we decided to rent one for a week. That decision turned out to be far more valuable than we ever expected. **Memory Moment** - “Was there ever something you dreamed about doing in retirement or later life?”

PAUSE OPTION

Good Luck - *Two Words That Should Have Worried Me*

At the rental company, I received a very quick orientation. I was shown the propane controls, the tanks, the slide-out, and the awning. Then I was handed the keys and wished good luck. There was no driving lesson, no supervised test drive, and no time to get comfortable behind the wheel. **Memory Moment** - “Have you ever been handed responsibility for something before you really felt ready?”

PAUSE OPTION

A Seven-Ton Condominium - *The Highway Was the Classroom*

The motorhome was much larger and heavier than anything I was used to driving. The first transport truck that passed me pushed us sideways with a blast of air. From then on, every truck became an event. I gripped the steering wheel so tightly I probably left fingerprints in it. One minute I was signing papers; the next, I was negotiating with the laws of physics. **PAUSE OPTION**

Just to Buy Milk - *Freedom Came With a Checklist*

We soon discovered that motorhome freedom came with a surprising amount of work. A simple trip to the store meant disconnecting hoses, storing chairs and the barbecue, rolling up the outdoor carpet, retracting the slide-out, securing everything inside, and then setting it all up again when we returned. **Memory Moment** - “Have you ever discovered that something which looked simple from the outside was much more work than you expected?” **PAUSE OPTION**

For About Three Hours - *Then the Campground Came Alive*

At Fundy National Park, the setting looked exactly like the advertisements. Trees, fresh air, a beautiful campsite—it seemed perfect. Then Friday evening arrived. Children ran through the campground, music drifted from nearby sites, and someone began an endless game of Washers. Clang. Clang. Clang. If you have never heard it, imagine someone hitting two frying pans together until bedtime.

Memory Moment - “Do you remember a vacation spot that turned out very differently from what you expected?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Our Unplanned Concert - *Everyone Was Invited Whether They Wanted to Be or Not*

At the next campground, one neighbour began playing guitar while another joined in on harmonica. I am sure they were having a wonderful evening. The rest of us became unwilling members of the audience. Meanwhile, our motorhome was not quite level, so sleeping felt like spending the night on the side of a hill. **PAUSE OPTION**

We Had Had Enough - *Sometimes Going Home Is the Best Part of the Trip*

By the fourth morning, Cathy and I had quietly reached the same conclusion. We packed up and headed home three days early. There would be no refund, but by then peace and quiet seemed worth considerably more than the money we were losing.

Memory Moment - “Have you ever shortened a trip, changed your plans, or simply decided that enough was enough?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The \$2.37 Propane Refill - *The Most Expensive Bargain of the Trip*

Before returning the motorhome, I stopped to refill the propane tank. The bill was \$2.37. As I pulled away, I misjudged the rear swing and scraped the back corner against a concrete safety post. The damage came to more than seventeen hundred dollars. **PAUSE OPTION**

The Dragon Tail - *Useful Information Arrived Four Days Late*

When I explained what had happened, an employee casually told me, “You have to remember there’s a dragon tail behind you.” A dragon tail? That was certainly information I would have appreciated before leaving the rental lot. Preferably before they handed me the keys. **Memory Moment** - “Can you remember learning an important lesson just a little later than you would have liked?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Best Investment We Never Made - *A Costly Lesson That Saved Us Money*

By the time we added the rental fee, campgrounds, propane, insurance deductible, and repairs, our four-night experiment had cost nearly \$4,800. Yet I do not regret

it. That short trip probably saved us tens of thousands of dollars by teaching us that the motorhome lifestyle simply was not for us. **PAUSE OPTION**

What It All Meant - *Sometimes the Dream Is Worth Testing*

I have always believed in working hard for the things you really want. But there is another lesson worth remembering. Sometimes the smartest thing you can do is test a dream before investing everything in it. Ours did not end beside a peaceful lake. It ended beside a concrete post. And strangely enough, that became one of the best investments we never made.

CORE MEMORY PROMPTS

YOUR TURN:

The following questions will help you explore memories of retirement dreams, vacations, unexpected lessons, changing plans, and the times when reality turned out to be very different from the picture in your imagination. *Facilitator Note: You do not need to use all prompts. In most sessions, 2–4 prompts are more than enough. If time is limited, or to begin a discussion, start with these.*

- 1. Was there ever something you dreamed about owning, doing, or trying because it looked wonderful from a distance?**
- 2. Did you ever rent, borrow, test, or try something first and discover it was not quite what you expected?**
- 3. Can you remember a vacation or adventure where one small problem seemed to lead to another?**
- 4. Have you ever changed your plans, returned home early, or decided that your peace of mind was more important than the money already spent?**
- 5. Is there a mistake or expensive lesson that later saved you from making a much bigger mistake?**
- 6. Looking back, was there ever a dream that did not work out—but still taught you exactly what you needed to know?**

SENSORY PROMPTS

Expectations, adventure & reality

Sometimes memories arrive because of something familiar

MUSIC – Link to YouTube

- *On the Road Again* — Willie Nelson
- *Take It Easy* — Eagles
- *King of the Road* — Roger Miller

SOUNDS

- A motorhome engine starting
- The rattle of dishes and cupboards while driving
- A transport truck roaring past on the highway
- Wind pushing against a large vehicle
- Campground children laughing and calling to one another
- Music drifting from a nearby campsite
- The metallic clang, clang, clang of a game of Washers
- A guitar and harmonica carrying through the campground
- The hiss of propane being filled
- The scrape you never want to hear when leaving a service station

SMELLS

- Campfire smoke
- Fresh pine and forest air
- Propane
- Barbecue food cooking nearby
- Damp grass in the morning
- The inside of a motorhome after a day on the road
- Coffee brewing at a campsite
- Fresh air coming through an open window

TOUCH & FEELING

- Gripping a large steering wheel tightly
- Feeling the vehicle move when a transport truck passes
- Pulling out an awning
- Connecting water and sewer hoses
- Setting up folding lawn chairs
- Walking across an outdoor camping mat
- Trying to sleep in a bed that is slightly off level

- Packing everything away before moving again
- The relief of climbing back into your own car afterward

VISUALS

Begin with a photograph of a motorhome, campground, campfire, forest campsite, highway, or a retired couple setting off on a road trip. You might also use a campground map, folding chair, road atlas, RV key, camping mug, propane receipt, photograph of Fundy National Park, or even a picture of a concrete safety post. Pass the photograph or object around and let it do the talking.

ONE SMALL MEMORY

Perhaps you do not remember the whole trip. Maybe what returns is the roar of a transport truck passing, the smell of a campfire, the sound of Washers clanging, the feeling of sleeping on a slope, or the moment you realized the dream was not quite what you imagined. That is enough. Sometimes a memory does not bring back the dream. Sometimes it brings back the lesson.

STORY EIGHT

THE JOURNEY THAT CHANGED MY UNDERSTANDING OF FREEDOM

“Reflecting on Something Larger Than Ourselves”

THE STORY

When Cathy and I began planning a thirty-four-day vacation through England, France, Belgium, Scotland, and Ireland in the summer of 2014, we expected it to be like many of our other trips. We looked forward to seeing famous landmarks, meeting interesting people, enjoying local food, and filling another photo album with memories.

We had no idea that one part of the journey would leave a far deeper impression than anything we could have imagined. This was supposed to be a vacation. Instead, it became an education in supreme sacrifice—and in the freedom we enjoy today.

Growing up in New Brunswick during the 50s and 60s, Remembrance Day was one of the most meaningful days of the school year. We coloured paper poppies and crosses and proudly taped them to our classroom windows. Veterans visited our schools, ceremonies were held before we went home for the holiday, and teachers spoke to us about courage, sacrifice, and service. At the time, I doubt many of us fully understood what those words meant. But our parents and teachers made sure we understood one thing: **Freedom had never been free.**

As I grew older, I learned that the story of Canada's wars was not simply something found in history books. It was also part of my own family's story. My Uncle Tom and my Uncle Frank had both served during the First World War. Like so many Canadian families, ours quietly carried the legacy of service and sacrifice from one generation to the next.



I had always been proud of that connection. But pride and understanding are not always the same thing. By pure coincidence, we arrived in London while Britain was preparing to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the First World War. One afternoon, we visited the Tower of London, where an extraordinary art installation had transformed the historic grounds into something almost

impossible to describe. Surrounding the Tower were **888,246 ceramic red poppies**. One for every British or Colonial serviceman who lost his life during the First World War.

I had seen photographs of the installation before leaving home, but nothing prepared me for standing there in person. The sea of red seemed to flow across the grounds like rivers of blood. Thousands of visitors walked quietly through the display, many speaking only in whispers. It wasn't simply beautiful. It was overwhelming.

For the first time in my life, those enormous casualty figures stopped being numbers in a history book. Each poppy represented a son, a husband, a father or a brother. Someone whose family waited for a letter that would never bring him home. That image stayed with me as we continued our journey through France and Belgium. We visited Normandy, Juno Beach, military cemeteries, and the small towns where Canadian soldiers had fought to liberate people they had never met. Each stop seemed quieter than the last.

You found yourself speaking more softly, walking more slowly, and thinking more deeply. Then we arrived at Vimy Ridge. I had read about the Battle of Vimy Ridge many times over the years, but reading about history and standing where history happened are two very different experiences. The monument rises from the landscape with a dignity that almost demands silence. It does not celebrate war. It honours sacrifice.



A few years earlier, while researching my family's history, I had discovered something I had never known. According to his military records, my Uncle Tom fought at Vimy Ridge and was seriously wounded there on April 10, 1917. Somehow, he survived. Standing on the very ground where my uncle had fought changed the entire meaning of that day. History was no longer something distant that had happened to strangers in another time. History had suddenly become personal.

As I looked across those fields and later went below ground into the tunnels, I could not help wondering what had been going through his mind. Was he frightened? Was he thinking about home? Did he ever imagine that nearly a century later, one of his family members would stand in the very place where he had risked everything? Of course, I will never know the answers to those questions. And perhaps that is not the important part. The important part is that he went.

Like thousands of other young Canadians, he answered a call that asked more of him than most of us will ever be asked to give. He left behind his family, his future, and the comfort of home to protect freedoms that people like me would one day enjoy

without ever having to earn them ourselves. There was another detail in Uncle Tom's military records that stayed with me. When he was wounded, his medical records noted that he was deaf in one ear. The truth was, he had been deaf in that ear all his life. He simply had not told them when he signed his sign-up papers. And it had not stopped him from going.

We also toured the preserved trenches and underground tunnels. As our guide described the conditions, it became impossible not to imagine the fear those young soldiers must have lived with every day. They fought only a few hundred yards from the enemy, surrounded by mud, noise, exhaustion, disease, and uncertainty. It was difficult to comprehend how anyone endured such hardship, let alone found the courage to keep going.



When we left Vimy Ridge, I realized I was not bringing home another vacation memory. I was bringing home a different understanding of freedom. Before that journey, freedom was something I appreciated because I had been taught to appreciate it. After that journey, it became something I understood because I had stood where its price had been paid. That understanding has stayed with me ever since.

When we arrived home, people asked me what I had enjoyed most about our European vacation. They expected me to mention the castles, museums, beautiful countryside, or wonderful cities we had visited. Those were all memorable, and I am grateful we experienced them. But they are not what I remember most. I remember standing before hundreds of thousands of red poppies. I remember walking through the trenches at Vimy Ridge. I remember going below ground into the tunnels. I remember thinking about my Uncle Tom and Frank. And I remember feeling an overwhelming sense of gratitude for every Canadian who wore our country's uniform—not only during the First World War, but in every conflict and every peacekeeping mission that followed.

That journey also made me think differently about the responsibility we have to tell these stories. My generation grew up hearing veterans speak in our schools. We saw them at Remembrance Day ceremonies. Many of us knew someone in our own families who had served. But with each passing generation, those direct connections become fewer. That makes preserving their stories even more important. A name in a military record is history. But when a young person discovers that the name belongs to an uncle, grandfather, great-grandfather, neighbour, or someone from their own community, history can suddenly become something else. It becomes personal.

Perhaps that is one of the greatest gifts one generation can give another: not simply the facts of what happened, but the stories that help someone understand what those facts meant. For that reason, this is the longest story of my memory program. This journey taught me that freedom is one of the few gifts we receive that was paid for by someone else. Before that journey, freedom was something I appreciated. After that journey, it became something I understood. **And understanding the difference changed me forever.**

THE GUIDED STORY

The Journey That Changed My Understanding of Freedom - *When History Became Personal*

Cathy and I began our thirty-four-day journey through England, France, Belgium, Scotland, and Ireland expecting a memorable vacation. We looked forward to landmarks, food, photographs, and new experiences. Instead, one part of the trip became something much deeper. It became an education in sacrifice, remembrance, and the meaning of freedom. **Memory Moment** - “Was there ever a trip that changed the way you understood something important?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Remembrance Day at School - *The Lessons Began Long Before the Journey*

Growing up in New Brunswick in the 1950s and 1960s, Remembrance Day was one of the most meaningful days of the school year. We coloured paper poppies and crosses, veterans visited our schools, and teachers spoke about courage, service, and sacrifice. We may not have fully understood those words, but we were taught that freedom had never been free. **Memory Moment** - “What do you remember about Remembrance Day when you were young?” **PAUSE OPTION**

A Family Connection to War - *History Was Already Part of Our Story*

As I grew older, I learned that war was not simply something found in history books. My Uncle Tom and Uncle Frank had both served during the First World War. Like many Canadian families, ours carried a quiet connection to service and sacrifice from one generation to the next. **Memory Moment** - “Did anyone in your family serve in the military, wartime service, or another form of national service?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Sea of Red - *888,246 Poppies at the Tower of London*

By coincidence, we arrived in London as Britain was preparing to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the First World War. At the Tower of London, 888,246 ceramic red poppies covered the grounds, one for every British or Colonial serviceman who had lost his life during the war. The display seemed to flow across the ground like rivers of blood. **PAUSE OPTION**

When Numbers Became People - *A Son, a Husband, a Father, a Brother*

Standing before those poppies changed the way I thought about casualty numbers. They were no longer statistics. Each one represented a person and a family. Someone had waited at home for news. Someone had lost a son, husband, father, or brother. **Memory Moment** - “Have you ever seen a memorial, cemetery, photograph, or object that suddenly made history feel personal?” **PAUSE OPTION**

Following the Canadian Story - *Normandy, Juno Beach and Beyond*

As we continued through France and Belgium, we visited Normandy, Juno Beach, military cemeteries, and towns where Canadian soldiers had fought to liberate people they had never met. Each stop seemed quieter than the one before it. You found yourself speaking more softly, walking more slowly, and thinking more deeply. **PAUSE OPTION**

Then We Arrived at Vimy Ridge - *Standing Where History Happened*

I had read about Vimy Ridge many times, but reading about history and standing where it happened are two very different experiences. The monument rises from the landscape with a dignity that almost demands silence. It does not celebrate war. It honours sacrifice. **Memory Moment** - “Have you ever stood in a place where an important historical event happened?” **PAUSE OPTION**

My Uncle Tom Had Been There - *The Past Suddenly Had a Face*

While researching my family history, I had discovered that Uncle Tom fought at Vimy Ridge and was seriously wounded there on April 10, 1917. Standing on the same ground where he had fought changed everything. History was no longer distant. It belonged to someone in my own family. **PAUSE OPTION**

Questions I Could Never Ask Him - *What Was Going Through His Mind?*

Looking across the fields and walking through the tunnels, I wondered what Uncle Tom had been thinking. Was he frightened? Was he thinking about home? Did he ever imagine that nearly a century later, someone from his own family would stand where he had once fought? Those are questions I will never be able to ask him.

Memory Moment - “Is there someone from your family’s past you wish you could sit with today and ask questions?” **PAUSE OPTION**

The Important Part Is That He Went - *He Answered the Call*

Like thousands of other young Canadians, Uncle Tom left his family, his future, and the comfort of home to serve. His medical records later noted that he was deaf in one ear. In fact, he had been deaf in that ear all his life. He simply had not told them. It had not stopped him from going. **PAUSE OPTION**

The Trenches and Tunnels - *Trying to Imagine What They Endured*

We toured preserved trenches and underground tunnels while our guide described the conditions soldiers had lived through. They were surrounded by mud, noise, exhaustion, disease, fear, and uncertainty, with the enemy only a short distance away. It was difficult to comprehend how anyone endured it. **Memory Moment** - "Has hearing one person's story ever helped you understand a larger historical event?" **PAUSE OPTION**

Freedom Felt Different When I Left - *I Had Stood Where Its Price Was Paid*

When we left Vimy Ridge, I realized I was not simply bringing home another vacation memory. Before the trip, freedom was something I appreciated because I had been taught to appreciate it. After the trip, it became something I understood because I had stood where its price had been paid. **PAUSE OPTION**

What I Remember Most - *Not the Castles or the Cities*

When people asked what I had enjoyed most about the trip, they expected me to mention castles, museums, cities, or countryside. Those were wonderful, but they were not what stayed with me most. I remembered the poppies, the cemeteries, the trenches, the tunnels, and Uncle Tom. Above all, I remembered the sense of gratitude. **Memory Moment** - "What is one journey or place that stayed with you long after the trip was over?" **PAUSE OPTION**

Why These Stories Must Be Passed On - *One Generation Can Help Another Understand*

My generation grew up hearing veterans speak in schools and seeing them at Remembrance Day ceremonies. Many of us had direct family connections to those who served. As those connections become fewer, preserving the stories becomes even more important. A name in a military record is history. But when that name belongs to someone in your family or community, history becomes personal. Perhaps that is one of the greatest gifts one generation can give another: not simply the facts of what happened, but the stories that help someone understand what those facts meant.

What It All Meant - *Understanding the Difference*

This journey taught me that freedom is one of the few gifts we receive that was paid for by someone else. Before that journey, freedom was something I appreciated. After that journey, it became something I understood. And understanding the difference changed me forever.

CORE MEMORY PROMPTS

YOUR TURN:

The following questions will help you explore memories of Remembrance Day, military service, family history, sacrifice, gratitude, and the stories one generation can pass to the next. *Facilitator Note: You do not need to use all prompts. In most sessions, 2–4 prompts are more than enough. If time is limited, or to begin a discussion, start with these.*

- 1. What do you remember about Remembrance Day, veterans, poppies, or school ceremonies when you were young?**
- 2. Did someone in your family or community serve during a war, military operation, peacekeeping mission, or other form of national service? What do you know about their experience?**
- 3. Is there a family photograph, medal, letter, uniform, record, or story connected to someone who served?**
- 4. Have you ever visited a battlefield, military cemetery, memorial, museum, or historic place that changed the way you understood the past?**
- 5. If you could sit down today with a relative from an earlier generation who lived through war or another major historical event, what would you want to ask?**
- 6. What story about sacrifice, service, freedom, or family history do you believe younger generations should hear before the people who remember it are gone?**

SENSORY PROMPTS

Sacrifice, Remembrance & Freedom

Sometimes memories arrive because of something familiar

🎵 MUSIC – Link to YouTube

- *The Last Post* — traditional remembrance bugle call
- *Abide with Me* — traditional hymn often associated with remembrance
- *In Flanders Fields* — spoken or musical interpretation

SOUNDS

- The quiet murmur of people gathered at a memorial
- A bugle playing *The Last Post*
- Church bells or ceremonial bells
- A guide speaking softly in a tunnel or historic site
- Wind moving across an open battlefield
- The echo of footsteps underground
- A moment of complete silence during a remembrance ceremony

SMELLS

- Damp earth in preserved trenches
- Cool stone inside tunnels or memorials
- Old paper from military records, letters, or photographs
- Fresh flowers or wreaths at a memorial
- The faint smell of dust in a museum or historic site

TOUCH & FEELING

- Holding a paper poppy or remembrance pin
- Running your fingers across an engraved name on a memorial
- Holding an old military photograph or service record
- Walking along uneven ground where soldiers once stood
- Feeling the cool air inside underground tunnels
- Standing quietly beside a grave marker
- The weight of a medal, badge, or family keepsake in your hand

VISUALS

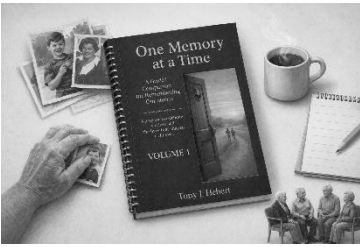
Begin with a photograph of a poppy, military cemetery, memorial, battlefield, service medal, wartime photograph, or family member in uniform. You might also use a military service record, old letter, medal, photograph of Vimy Ridge, image of Juno Beach, Remembrance Day program, or a family photograph connected to someone who served. Pass the photograph or object around and let it do the talking.

ONE SMALL MEMORY

Perhaps you do not remember every detail of the history. Maybe what returns is a paper poppy taped to a classroom window, a veteran visiting your school, the sound of *The Last Post*, a photograph of someone in uniform, a name on a memorial, or a story once told by someone in your family. That is enough. Sometimes the best memory prompt is not a question. It is something you can hold in your hand. And sometimes one small family story is enough to help another generation understand what freedom cost.

FROM PHOTO...TO MEMORY...TO STORY

A Gentle Memory Companion Idea: Using Photos of Your Past to Assist in Memory Recall



Start Here

You don't need to remember everything. You don't need the right words. You don't need a perfect story. Just begin with one photo... and let it do the talking.

Step 1 — Choose a Photo

Pick any photo that means something to you. There's no such thing as the "right" photo. It could be:

- A family moment
- A place you loved
- A celebration or holiday
- A quiet, ordinary day

Step 2 — Sit With It

Before trying to explain anything... just look. Let the photo bring something back. Take your time. Ask yourself gently:

- What do I notice first?
- Who is with me?
- Where am I?
- What feels familiar?

Step 3 — Let the Memory Arrive

You don't need to "search" for memories. Even a few words is enough. Let them come to you. You might begin with:

- "This reminds me of..."
- "I remember..."
- "Back then..."

Step 4 — Use a Few Gentle Prompts (If You Need Them)

If the memory feels stuck, try one or two of these. You don't need to answer them all. One is often enough.

- What was happening just before or after this photo?
- What sounds or smells do I remember?
- What kind of day was it?
- Who mattered most in this moment?
- What did this time in my life feel like?

Step 5 — Say It, Write It, or Share It

There's no one right way to capture your memory. Every memory counts. You can:

- Say it out loud
- Write a few lines
- Share it with someone
- Or simply sit with it

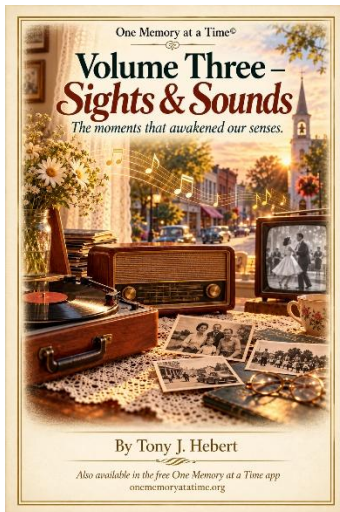
A Gentle Reminder

This is not about getting it right. It's about feeling something real. Sometimes one small memory opens the door to many others.

A FINAL REFLECTION

Our lives are made up of journeys we often did not recognize as important while we were taking them. A bicycle ride that carried us beyond the end of our street. A Sunday drive squeezed together in the family car. A gas station where someone knew our father by name. A vacation that frightened us, surprised us, or taught us something we never expected. A road that led to family. A flight that reminded us how quickly life can change. A battlefield that helped us understand the price someone else paid for the freedom we enjoy today. At the time, many of those moments seemed ordinary. Looking back, we discover they were anything but.

The small things were never small. They were the rides, roads, people, places, sounds, conversations, and unexpected turns that helped shape us. Sometimes the destination mattered. Sometimes it hardly mattered at all. What stayed with us was who travelled beside us, who taught us along the way, and how a journey changed us. That is what *Planes, Trains & Automobiles* has really been about. Not transportation. Life. But underneath them were other stories: curiosity, independence, family, fatherhood, community, gratitude, humour, disappointment, sacrifice, and freedom. And perhaps, as you travelled through these pages, one of my journeys led you back to one of your own. That is the purpose of One Memory at a Time©. We do not ask you to search harder or remember perfectly and **we don't chase memories with questions. We help them arrive.**



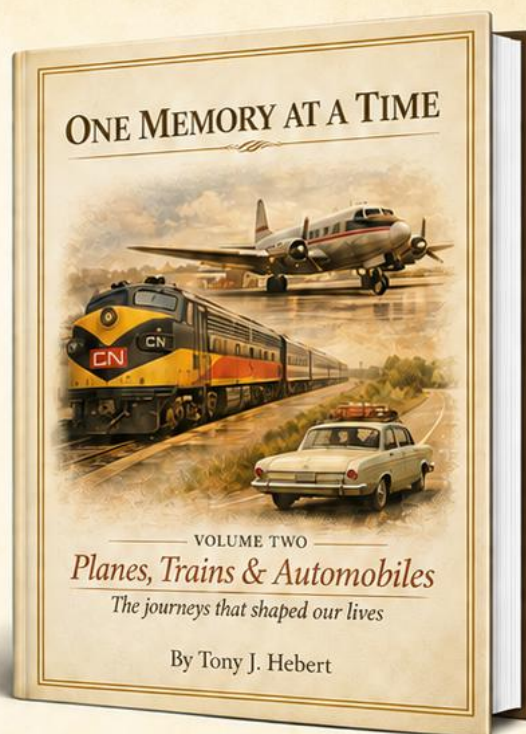
And Our Journey Continues... In **March 2027**, One Memory at a Time© will continue with: **Volume Three – Sights & Sounds - *The moments that awakened our senses.*** Volume Three will explore the sights and sounds that have travelled with us through life: the music we grew up with, familiar voices, television and radio, neighbourhood sounds, celebrations, places we recognized from a distance, and those ordinary sights and sounds that can suddenly unlock a memory we thought had disappeared. And until then, there are still stories waiting to be found.

Thank You

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples of Canada as the first storytellers and knowledge keepers of this land. We are grateful for their wisdom, traditions, and the stories that continue to guide us all.



Preserving the Stories That Built Canada.
One Memory at a Time®
By Tony J. Hebert

