



"You really could not have taken better care of my wife and myself"
HRH Prince of Wales, Prince Charles



"I would have to give my stay at Ryan Mansion a 10 out of 10"
Camellia, Duchess of Cornwall



"Another great discovery"
DR. Robert Ballard



"You come highly recommended by my brother"
The Princess Royal, Princess Anne



"Id rather go to the other place than worship a homophobic God"
Archbishop Desmond Tutu



"Extraordinary"
International Songstress K. D. Lang



"We have a group in the city in need accomadations can you assist" SNC Lavallin

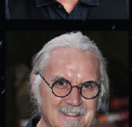
"Any help you can offer will be greatly appreciated." "They have bagfuls of cash"
Muammar Gaddafi



"He loves me, he loves me not"
Meg Ryan



"Whats gonna happen if we split"
John Cougar Mellencamp



"You gotta get me on an iceberg"
Sir Bily Conolly



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A Collision of Tragedy, Nobility, Harmony, Comedy and Madness

By Kevin Vincent Nolin

1 DEGREE OF SEPARATION

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HRH Prince Charles



HRH Duchess of Cornwall



Sir Billy Conolly



Archbishop Desmond Tutu



HRH Anne,
Princess Royal



John Cougar Mellencamp



Meg Ryan



Muammar Gaddafi



K.D. Lang



Dr. Robert Ballard

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Comedy and Madness

1 DEGREE OF SEPARATION

SIX DEGREES of separation is the idea that all people in the world are six, or fewer, social connections away from each other. As a result, a chain of "a friend of a friend" statements can be made to connect any two people in a maximum of six steps. ONE DEGREE of Separation brings you that much closer.

The Titanic, a 1911 mansion, an underwater archaeologist, a royal princess, an archbishop, a duchess and future king, a movie star, a British knight, a Libyan dictator, and Billboard's Top 40. A manifest of very separate individuals linked by one man - the author.

One Degree of Separation chronicles one man's collision course with tragedy, nobility, harmony, comedy and madness and some of the most intriguing people of our lifetime - Dr. Robert Ballard, of RMS Titanic fame, Anne, Princess Royal, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall, award-winning actress Meg Ryan, Sir Billy Connolly, Colonel Gaddafi, music super-stars John Cougar Mellencamp and k.d. lang, proving the connections we seek are even closer than we think. Just alter your course... by One Degree.



Kevin was born in St. John's, Newfoundland, the sixth of eight children to an Irish Newfoundland father and a Scottish mother. He spent the last few years of school in a windowless basement classroom with the slow learners. He left school behind after 8th grade to pursue a lifelong education in a world full of windows. He spends spring summer and fall between Newfoundland and Cape Breton escaping winters in Northern Thailand. He is currently working on his next book "Disco Bus" tales of a 1970's Discotheque DJ. Part of © A Drive in Time Series

1 DEGREE OF SEPARATION

*A Collision of Tragedy, Nobility,
Harmony, Comedy and Madness*

By Kevin Vincent

1 DEGREE OF SEPARATION

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INTRODUCTION

St. John's, The capital city of Newfoundland, An island in the North Atlantic half way between Southampton and New York. It has had inhabitants for over 9000 years. Although Canada's most recent province it is closer to Ireland than it is Ottawa, Canada's capital. It is where Marconi received his first wireless and Titanic met its fate off its shores after colliding with an Iceberg. The ship which sank with over 1500 souls on board rests off shore to this day.

Over the years many merchants made their fortunes from the islands fishery. Some of whom built gracious mansions along the upper sections of downtown St John's.

One such merchant James Ryan who had acquired over 200 schooners became one of the most successful of them all.

After almost 50 years in business with his base of operations in Bonavista Newfoundland. (the landing place of John Cabot in 1497) James Ryan relocated his main residence to St. John's, there he arranged for the construction of one of the largest and most imposing residences in the city. Located at 21 Rennie's Mill Road in what was then and still is now one of the wealthiest parts of the city. It took approximately two years (1909 - 1911) to build.

Ryan Mansion a three - storey, wooden - frame structure, with it's massive front doors framed on either side by three columns that beckon the visitor up the front steps by way of its wrought - iron gates. Bay windows on either side of the main entrance go all the way to the third floor where each are capped with a gable roof.

Inside the mansion was even more impressive than it was on the outside. The main floor consisted of huge parlours, dining room, breakfast room, butlers pantry and service kitchen with back staircase. The massive foyer cloaked in hand carved oak panel warmed by a fireplace with an oak carved pillar mantle ushered you towards the stunning staircase of English white Oak, built by the same craftsmen that built the staircase for the Titanic which was being built the same time as Ryan Mansion 1909 - 1911.

Climb The English oak staircase to the landing with a towering beveled glass window shipped from Waterford over looking the harbour. Then continue on to the bedrooms and sitting rooms with floor to ceiling walk out bay windows. Marble bathrooms with bathtubs carved from solid granite fireplaces with hand carved mantles and intricate plaster ceilings adorning each room. It was the first house of it's time wired with a telephone connecting each room from a main switchboard in the butlers pantry to the outside world. The kitchen housed above the door towards the back staircase is the servants call center. Rotating numbers signaled which rooms required immediate service. Call buttons were concealed on sides of fireplaces or in the dining room by the master's chair.

James Ryan died in 1917. His immediate family relocated to England. They retained ownership of the mansion and it remained in the family for close to 80 years. Most of that time it was left vacant. It was in 2006 that the property came back up for sale. It

took but one viewing and the spell of Ryan Mansion took over and the restoration to a 5 star Boutique Hotel began.

Ryan Mansion the South Wing consisted of 6 suites, main staircase, servants staircase, kitchen, butlers pantry, dining room, front room parlours, library, main foyer with fireplace. The North Wing housed 8 suites, a third staircase, a lower level which housed laundry, linen and storage. As well entrance to the tree lined stone terrace with loins head water fountain and rock gardens.

The south wing already had its history. English white oak staircase fashioned by the same craftsman as that of the Titanic showcased with a 10 foot high beveled glass window from Waterford. An adjoined Carriage House where the first automobile delivered to St. John's was housed.

The North Wing which required massive changes converting to the eight suites had little history. As the South had the Titanic connection brought in by James Ryan The North was owned by James younger brother and was built 20 years earlier 1887. There was no English White Oak. The staircase was more like the servants staircase in the South wing. The task was now that both wings were being combined they had to compliment each other. The North Wing renovations took 2 years to complete. The south wing renovations were completed a year earlier and now ready for the first special guest to arrive.

CHAPTER ONE
Drip, Drip, Drip Titanic

Dr. Robert Ballard

As a young boy I would make the trek to the harbour front downtown on Water Street in St. John's, Newfoundland to see the many ships that would seek shelter in the protected harbour during a storm. I would watch as they came through the Narrows, the narrow opening between the cliffs at the entrance to the harbour, that would be drenched in fog.

I would stand on the wharfs engulfed with the stench of fish waste, watching the ships, and wondering what sailors saw from afar as they approached the cliffs and the island.

Fast forward several decades (I won't admit from the other side how many), and I was on a ship myself, sailing on Holland America's Voyage of the Vikings. I had boarded the ship in Southampton and, while the scheduled stops promised to be quite interesting, my sole motivation for embarking on the journey was to approach the entrance into St. John's harbour, to see that very same spot where I stood as a young boy wondering in amazement what life looked like from the other side.



Above: *St. John's Harbour, Newfoundland*

Now I had that opportunity. As a bonus, the ship spent the night docked in the harbour. I stayed on board for the night and dined while observing the city from the selfsame waters I used to view all those years ago. It felt like the end of a very long journey. Little did I know it was just the beginning.

It wasn't my first voyage overseas. Several years before this trip, I was in Sydney, Australia enjoying a break from winter. I took a tour through one of their many prisons. Australia has as many prisons as Thailand has temples!

One prison bordered the water. Drawn to the shore, I moseyed down to the water's edge where I was struck by the sight of dozens of multi-coloured fish. Scarlet reds, the deepest blues, sunny yellows, and every possible colour of the rainbow. As I observed the fish flitting freely among the rocks and enjoyed the warm sun on my back, I had to wonder.

Here I was in a land free of snow, with warm, beautiful sunshine, and this brilliant rainbow of fish in the bluest of water. Why, in the name of Jesus, did my ancestors end up in Newfoundland, a rugged jagged rock in the middle of the wind-swept Atlantic Ocean?

What kind of crazy people had I descended from?

My ancestors, a strong seafaring people, had left Belfast in search of a better life. If only they had stolen a few cobs of the governor's corn like in the song *Fields of Athenry*, they could have called this balmy paradise home instead being surrounded by massive icebergs smack in the middle of nowhere! During the prison tour, I had learned of Australia's dubious history and settlement as a penal colony for murderers, thieves, and the like. From what I could see, it was like Club Med for jailbirds!

All jokes aside, Newfoundland is my home. It is in my bones, no matter where I travel in this world. The fog, the breeze of the salt water, the icebergs, the sound of the whales, the smell of the colourful, wild rose flowers kissed with the spray of sea salt all fill me with a yearning to come home. When I am there, I can truly understand why my ancestors attached their roots to its shores.

The Voyage of the Vikings cruise spent five days at sea after our last port of call rolling on the same open ocean where Leif the Lucky traveled over a thousand years ago with nothing but oars,

a hearty crew, and a sail. John Cabot traversed the same stretch for the King of England nearly five hundred years later in only slightly more comfort.

And now here I was, five hundred years later, another bold traveler braving treacherous seas on a ship with only three dining rooms, starched white table cloths, four pubs, a piano bar, a casino, a 700-seat theatre, a hospital, more satellite dishes than a small city, internet, cable television, nightly turn down service, enough navigation equipment to take you around the world on automatic pilot, and, an automatic teller machine.

Oh, the harsh and brutal life of the seafaring sailor.

The next morning after breakfast, I headed for my chosen spot which serve as my lookout. A few hours later, a tiny speck materialized in the middle of nowhere. I gauged the speck to be far enough away to allow for a quick, triple hot espresso, so I nipped below decks. Even though it was July, we were in the North Atlantic. A warming espresso would be welcome.

By the time I had returned to the deck, the speck had grown into a large outcrop. It was difficult to envision how, over five hundred years ago, explorers had found their way with only a compass and the stars. I found my spot and truly felt I was “king of the world.”

Take that DiCaprio.

As we got closer, you could see the small narrow opening in the cliffs, the entrance to the harbour, and Cabot Tower, from where Marconi sent the first wireless while sitting proudly on top.

You could still see the ball cannons that would have protected the

port and town from invasion. As we drew closer one questioned whether this ship could even fit. A pilot boat came out to meet us and escorted the ship into the safety of the harbour. And the view?

It was stunning.

I had read that National Geographic had named St. John's "Top 3 of 10" Ocean Front Cities in the world. I could proudly see why.



Above: The Narrows, St. John's, Newfoundland

While it did feel wonderful to have my feet touch solid ground after being at sea, I could also understand why the sea is a calling for many. Fishermen. Sailors. Scientists. Explorers.

The sea and science were certainly a calling for the first celebrity guest at the Ryan Mansion. The Mansion opened its doors to accomplished and well-known world deep sea explorer, Dr. Robert Ballard, famous for his historic discoveries of the *Titanic*, and numerous other wrecks around the world. In 1985, he found the remains of the *Titanic* 350 miles southeast of St. John's, Newfoundland, a place I proudly call home.

A call came in from the University of Rhode Island requesting a reservation of rooms for Dr. Ballard and his assistant. There had been a few write-ups by travel writers and Tourism Canada about the Ryan Mansion's connection to the *Titanic* and it had piqued Ballard's interest enough to secure a reservation. He was coming to St. John's to appear at the Johnson Geo Centre for his lecture presentation of «Deep Sea Exploration».

Dr. Ballard took a tour of the Ryan Mansion. I walked him around. He was quite taken by many of the mansion's details and features, like the rose carvings in the English white oak mantels. As we slowly climbed the staircase, he stopped at the landing and turned back.

“Another great discovery?”

He started to describe the actual staircase on the *Titanic*. “Although smaller, this is *much* more like the original than the one in the movie.”

It was no wonder, I thought. The Ryan Mansion staircase was built during the same period 1909 to 1911 by the same craftsman that built the one on *Titanic*.

He paused on the landing and looked out the ten-foot-high bevelled glass window into the Atlantic Ocean. He posed for a picture on the staircase and went on to describe the different scrolls on the staircase and the background of the hand-carved roses in the mantels. His information was very helpful to us in completing the history of the mansion.

Dr. Ballard fed our minds with his knowledgeable information, but the real feast was yet to come.

After the tour, another call from the university asking if we could do a *Titanic* dinner for Dr. Ballard and five of his guests. We had previously purchased replica White Star Line china from England. We had complete settings for the *Titanic*'s First, Second, Third Class and Captain's Table designs. That was the easy part.

We had just twenty-four hours to prepare for the dinner!

Using a copy of the last dinner menu used on the *Titanic* for inspiration, we put together a special menu for the occasion. We had to eliminate several courses as we only had ninety minutes reserved for the dinner service. Dr. Ballard's lecture at the GEO CENTRE was scheduled for that evening. While the menu was condensed, it was an authentic *Titanic* service. Menus were designed to replicate the actual menus from the doomed vessel. Remarkably, I recognized many of the items on the hundred-year-old menu as staples from my childhood.



Above: *Dr. Robert Ballard with Ryan Mansion owners Kevin Nolan and Robert Hall*

The *Titanic's* menu called for things like pureed or mashed turnip. It was the only way my mother could get me to eat them. However, I'm certain the *Titanic's* chef never once had to tell his guests "it will improve your eyes" or "no dessert until you finish".

So, we had the china. We had the menu. There was no extraordinary or exotic food item we be unable to provide. A full-time chef?

That was a slightly different story.

At the time of Br. Ballard's visit, we did not employ a full-time chef. Our food service was limited to breakfast. So, we threw our own brand of lifeline into the water.

We called in a huge favor from one of our best friends, Barbara Fong. Barbara was a business executive by day and an exemplary closet chef by night. She was also an organizer, welcomed on many boards for her expertise, skills, and knowledge.

After a trip to China with Barbara and a group of close friends, I quickly learned exactly why. Her skills were so invaluable I suggested Barbara's countenance might have replaced Chairman Mao's on the posters displayed in Tiananmen Square.

"I swear if her parents had not left China before she was born, it would have been her picture up there instead of Mao's."

Well, within hours, Barb had researched the menu and given marching orders to three other talented culinary friends whom she had wisely enlisted. Karen, Gail, and Gerri were each an amazing chef in their own home. Gail's husband, Paul, acted as our sommelier and carefully curated the wines to closely match

those served one hundred years ago, right down to the *aperitif* and *digestif*.

We bought a case of appropriate wine as directed for the meal and another case for our kitchen volunteers. We plopped four bottles down on the kitchen island with one caveat: “Don’t you dare come out of this kitchen.” That’s exactly what I said and that’s exactly what they did.

Every now and then you could hear howling laughter emanating from within. When I moved to investigate, the tables were suddenly turned. I was told I couldn’t come in! The blockade only lasted until the last wine bottle was emptied, though. Only then I was summoned to appear.

The food was spectacular and when the time came to compliment the chefs at the end of the meal, they had a little too much spice in them to appear. They had had a well-earned ball and without them the following remarks from Dr. Ballard may never have transpired.

“This is one of the best, if not *the* best *Titanic* dinners I have ever attended,” Dr. Ballard said without hesitation. “And I have been to many.”

It was an honor to hear.

As soon as the dining room was cleared of Dr. Ballard and his guests, the chefs emerged with their war stories along with trays of mouth-watering food for the staff to enjoy.

The fires were still glowing. Robert opened a few more bottles of wine, while the large iceberg carving of the *Titanic* slowly melt-



Above: Table set and waiting for Dr. Ballard and guests

ed alongside two vases of lush red roses. Later that evening, Dr. Ballard signed copies of the books that he had published on the *Titanic* and other discoveries credited to him. It was a night for all to remember.

Barb and company did return for one more favor, and that was to offer the same dinner to a group of travel writers hosted by the Provincial Tourism Department.

This time, the staff was not relegated exclusively to the kitchen. We insisted on them joining the table when the Waldorf pudding was served. A sweet end to another sweetly successful event. In the words of one of the attendees, Nancy Wigston:

“In its day, Ryan Mansion was a glittering treasure; Nolan and Hall have restored it to its former glory. In the ground floor office, a cabinet of curiosities displays Titanic- related items: replica gold-rimmed china from the Captain’s Table, blue patterned plates from Second Class, and white plates from steerage printed with the White Star flag. Souvenirs gathered from around the world include opium pipe and objects d’art from the Far East, Pompeii and the Acropolis. Every room shines with an array of striking paintings and sculptures, most by Newfoundland artists.

This disaster at sea has inspired countless books, films and legends, but the dinners at Ryan Mansion may well be a first ... Ah yes, the meal. The menu offers somewhat lighter fare than the 1912 version: potage Saint-Germaine, asparagus vinaigrette, mousseline-sauced salmon with creamy turnips, a seductive Waldorf pudding and cheeses and a local eau-de-vie. Reminiscent of Titanic-era splendour, it is definitely a night to remember – but one with a happy ending.”

(Reprinted with permission from the author; original article printed on September 25, 2008,)

I truly get inspired by the story of the *Titanic*, frequently getting lost in its details. Nancy gave our Titanic dinner a fantastic write-up and Dr. Ballard gave us incredibly insightful information on the tiger-striped English white oak woodwork infused throughout the mansion, in everything from the mantels, the wainscoting, the staircase, and the massive bevelled glass window from Water-

ford on the staircase landing. So many craftsmen connected to a single project. Much like the *Titanic* herself.

The window, the staircase, the ship off our shores which dragged over 1500 bodies with it to the bottom of the deep dark cold North Atlantic Ocean, the souls which rest there to this day, the telegraph station at Cape Race Newfoundland where the first S.O.S. distress signal from the *Titanic* was received. The life jacket of the last body recovered from the disaster all clearly show Newfoundland's importance to the *Titanic* and its role in keeping respect for its memory. These connections were but the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

The Ryan Mansion was constructed from 1909-1911 at the same time the *Titanic* was being built. In those days the ocean was our road. We didn't go shopping in Montreal, Toronto, or New York. There were no roads nor planes and those were foreign lands. Newfoundland was a Dominion loyal to the King. We traded in London, Belfast, Dublin, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and beyond and we relied on vessels be them smaller then *Titanic* to get us there. Today, we can hop on a plane and hours later be on the other side of the world. Dr. Ballard was scheduled to catch one of those planes early on the morning following the *Titanic* dinner.

Dr. Ballard had requested breakfast to be served by 6: AM. No problem, or so I thought. Life always has a way of putting little icebergs in your way though, doesn't it?

As it turned out, our breakfast cook called in sick at 5: AM. I had no choice, I had to go down and cook Dr. Ballard's breakfast. I have a variety of talents, but cooking is not one. I slapped together some O'Brien potatoes with eggs over medium, crispy bacon and toast. Typically, the breakfast cook also serves as waiter, so I had

to come out and pour his coffee. It was then that he asked me to join him for breakfast. So, I made enough for two, laid the coffee pot on the table, and informally joined him. As I sipped my coffee, Ballard complimented me on the coffee and the O'Brien potatoes. Perhaps there was hope for me in the kitchen yet, I mused. I asked him what it was like to finally lay eyes on the wreck.

“The world’s fascination is with the *Titanic*, and rightfully so, but to me my best discovery was the *Bismarck*’s finding. It was my biggest thrill,” he replied.

To be honest I didn’t even know what the *Bismarck* was. I had to pinch myself. There I was, sitting at a table in the Ryan Mansion dining room with its massive fireplace glowing. It’s early dawn and still dark outside the windows. Across from me, I am sitting one-on-one with Dr. Robert Ballard, world-famous deep-sea explorer, who has just begun taking me on a voyage with him, fathom by fathom in his tiny sub, down to the depths of the cold, dark North Atlantic Ocean.

During the next forty-five minutes, as I filled with amazement, excitement and intrigue, the coffee pot emptied. I scooted to the butler’s pantry to refill it, eager to get back to the tale. He described it in such vivid detail I was going need more coffee or a blanket to ease the chills traveling up my spine.

He described his feelings as he overlooked the wreck and the debris surrounding it.

“I was in awe with excitement,” he began, “and tranquil respect to be in the place where so many had lived the last desperate moments of their lives.”

He spoke of gazing at the portholes through the darkness without being able to see inside, of viewing the staircase opening. Again, he referenced how closely the Ryan Mansion staircase resembled the original structure, unlike Hollywood's grandiose invention. He also drew parallels between the Captain's bathtub and the porcelain tubs brought to the mansion from Glasgow in 1911.

During the massive renovations to restore Ryan Mansion and convert it into a 5-star boutique inn, it was an invigorating challenge to add modern conveniences while keeping the charm and authenticity of its history. We installed heated Carrera marble bathroom floors with walk-in marble showers, added sound proofing between suites, and concealed sprinklers, fire alarm systems, along with phone, cable and internet services all the while protecting the antique plaster moldings, the staircase and all the English white oak throughout the mansion. There were also bathtubs in their original, aged state, one like that discovered in Captain Smith's stateroom resting at the bottom of the ocean.

The tub at Ryan Mansion rested on the second floor in what would have been the master's suite, complete with all its heavy chrome fittings from 1911. We decided to have the tub restored to its original beauty. The porcelain had many fine cracks webbing over its surface. The chap from the shop that I called came by and advised it would be impossible to do the job on site. He could accomplish the job, but the tub would simply need to be transported to his shop where it could be kept for a few days to be submerged in a vat of acid.

Well, what sounded like a simple task turned into a monumental one. The tub, when disconnected, was close to 500 kilograms, much heavier than expected for a porcelain-coated, cast iron tub. Taking it down the oak staircase would have done massive dam-

age if it were to slip. The staircase was the highlight of the mansion and in the middle of being hand-buffed and polished. I decided to remove the second-floor window, hire a local crane service, and have them hoist the tub through the window and lower it to a waiting truck flatbed below.

Simple.

Off it went to the shop. After a few days the shop guy called. "You'd best come take a look at the tub. Got it stripped naked and not cast iron at all."

When I got to the shop, I saw this beautiful tub, not formed from cast iron at all, but chiseled out of a solid piece of granite. No wonder it was so heavy!

"It would be a sin to coat this," the shop guy said. I ran my hands over its surface, and you could feel the roughness of the granite.

"If you got in stark naked, you'd be scraped to pieces. It has to be coated," I insisted. Begrudgingly, he obliged and three weeks later it was back in its place at the mansion, never to be moved again.

Halfway through the second pot of coffee Dr. Ballard moved onto a much lighter subject than our antique, solid granite tub

Seems the good doctor not only had a grand sense of adventure, but he also was possessed of a great sense of humor. He shared a particular practical joke he liked to play on new crew members on his submarine.

"When we take someone down in the sub for the first time, we have this little betting game at the new comers' expense. I have gone



Left: *The restored solid granite tub in its final resting place*

down many times and this adds a little intrigue. As we descend down, the air in the sub gets moist. About $\frac{3}{4}$ an hour into the dive, the outside gets Cold and eventually water begins to drip right over the new guy's seat. The outside pressure gets stronger and stronger. It turns out there is miniscule leak or an anomaly in the sub that causes water to drip over a particular seat which just happens to be where we intentionally position the new guy. Whenever we would take a new passenger down to the wreck site, we would sit them in that chair and watch with anticipation, wondering how long the new crew hand was going to last before they started to panic. Every time this would happen. Drip, drip, drip, first slow and then faster. It would always frighten the new crew and eventually they would do as expected; panic in their voice alarming us. To make it a little more fun I would scream out before we would bust into laughter. It made the long journey down to the site much less boring! The leak was nothing to be alarmed about but the new crew never knew that. It was a bit of comic relief."



Above: *King George V Building, Water Street, St. John's Newfoundland*

I found it admirable that on Ballard's last trip to the site, he left a plaque honouring the 1500 victims hoping future explorers will not disturb their grave. He further expressed his support for a Titanic monument in St. John's and even said he would be delighted to come back to officially open it. The people on the Titanic lost their lives off our shores. It was important to have something to commemorate the tragedy and allow visitors to pay their respects at a memorial standing on the closest point of land to the wreck. Our obligation to history extends past the erection of a memorial, however. We are the librarians of the past and it is our responsibility to preserve and record history in our own sort of captain's log – our historical sites and buildings – like the King George Building.

A few years back, we purchased the King George V Building on Water Street in St. John's, less than 500 meters from Ryan Mansion. The building was constructed by Sir Wilfred Grenfell as a



Left: King George V Seamen's Institute Plaque

mission. It was left vacant for many years with large holes in the roof, allowing the weather in and, tragically, it fell into disrepair.

It was at risk of being demolished until our purchase. Once the sale was finalized, we immediately set out repairing the damaged roof, removing the excess moisture that was encouraging mold, and restored the crumbling roof parapets.

We went on to redesign the building, while maintaining the historical aspects, and adapted it for use as a thirty-room boutique hotel. A plaque placed there in 1911 proudly tells its history.

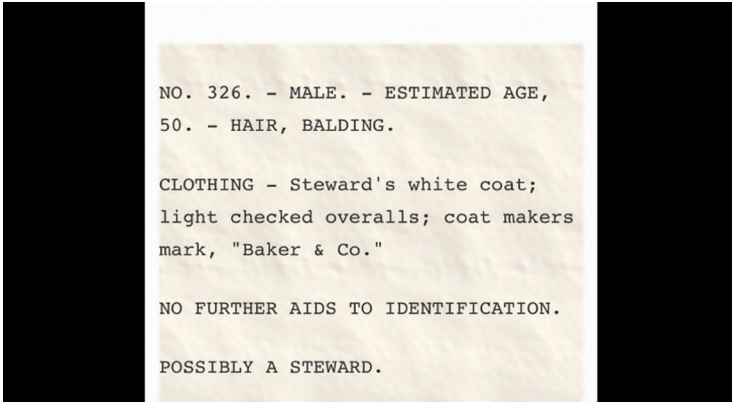
The memorial we had in mind for the Titanic would be more than a plaque. It would serve as a remembrance of those lost as well as the survivors. We had been considering it for quite some time and Ballard's visit reinforced the idea. We reached out to the last living survivor of the *Titanic*, Eliza Gladys "Millvina" Dean, who was ready to do an electronic laying of the foundation stone on the site as she was too frail to travel.

Millvina Dean wanted to be part of this because her father and brother were lost on the *Titanic* and their souls rest at the bottom of the cold North Atlantic. The youngest survivor herself, she was only an infant at the time, a mere two months old. On a card, she wrote: “*With this you see, remember me, the baby who was saved from the sea.*”

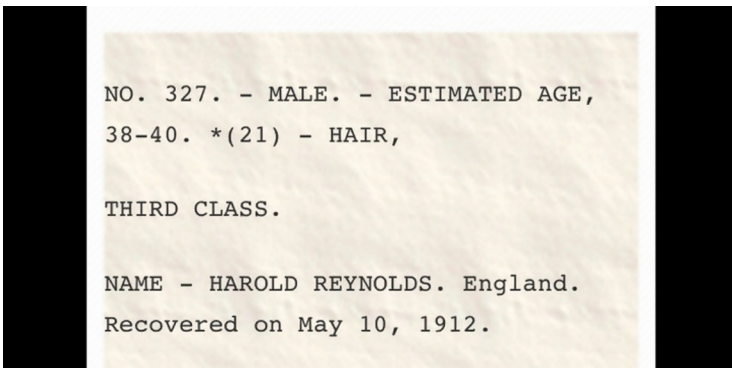
We hired a local sculptor, Morgan Macdonald to develop a concept for the memorial. The City of St. John’s was prepared to donate the land. There was a plot plan prepared by the city and a lot of work went into it. I met with the Provincial Minister of Tourism at Ryan Mansion along with a private donor who offered to fund the \$100,000 needed for the project on the condition that the city agree to the land donation and provide perpetual maintenance once the site was completed.

The city agreed, providing the Provincial Government would agree to match support. Although the Provincial Minister left with the promise of full support, his department did not carry the torch. The province couldn’t be moved. As such, Newfoundland still does not have a monument for the *Titanic*. This is a profound disappointment. I hope that one day the provincial government, the municipal government and the private sector will work in tandem and make this legacy happen for future generations. We must remember our past.

In the weeks that followed the sinking of the *Titanic* in April 1912, the *CGS Montmagny*, a Canadian resupply ship, was chartered to recover the victims’ corpses. The expedition allowed a number of corpses to be pulled from the ocean, The *Montmagny* recovered four bodies from the water after the *Titanic* sank. The bodies were assigned numbers 326, 327, 328, and 329.



Above: Body No. 326, Anonymous - Identification Tag



Above: Body No. 327, Harold Reynolds – Identification Tag

NO. 328. - FEMALE. - ESTIMATED AGE,
14. *(15) - HAIR, GOLDEN BROWN.

CLOTHING - Lace trimmed red and
black overdress; black underdress;
green striped underskirt; black
woolen shawl; black slippers.

NO MARKS - Very dark skin; refined
features.

THIRD CLASS.

Above: Body No. 328, Anonymous – Identification Tag

NO. 329. - MALE. - ESTIMATED AGE,
38. - HAIR,

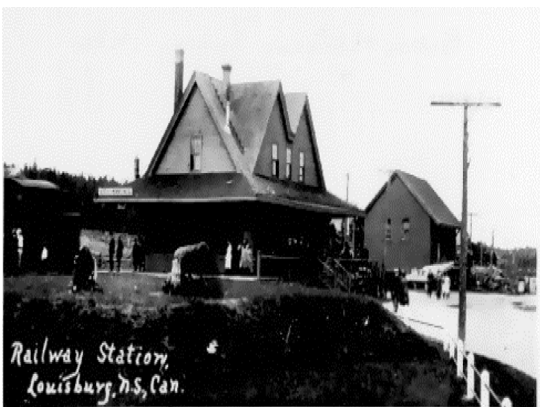
BEDROOM STEWARD.

NAME - CHARLES SMITH. Hollydene,
Portsmouth Rd., Woolston.

Recovered on May 10, 1912.

Above: Body No. 329, Charles Smith – Identification Tag

These were the last four of five bodies recovered. Body 326 was buried at sea. The remaining three bodies were delivered to Louisbourg, Nova Scotia on Monday, May 13, 1912, where they were entrusted to the S&L Railway Station.



Left: S & L Railway Station 1900's
Louisbourg, Cape Breton, N.S.

Two years later, the *Montmagny* shared the same tragic fate as the *Titanic*. Struck by the collier *Lingan*, she went down leading to the death of an officer and two passenger families. Since then, the *Montmagny* has disappeared from memory.

STRANGE BUT TRUE!!

The fifth and final body recovered from the *Titanic* was James McGrady. His body was listed as #330.

The *SS Alergine* picked him up took him to St. John's and there transferred to the *Florizel* for his final voyage and resting place in Halifax, Nova Scotia.



Right: Arrival of hearse at Halifax pier



Above: James McGrady

NO. 330. - MALE. - ESTIMATED AGE,
50 (*27) - HAIR, DARK; BALD.

SALOON STEWARD.

NAME - JAMES McGRADY. Platform
Tavern, Town Quay, Southampton.
Recovered by the Algerine/Florizel

Above: Body No. 330, Mr. James McGrady – Identification Tag
The Last Body Recovered from Titanic

The SS Aergine sunk just months later after Titanic, the *Florizel* served as a first-class passenger ship from St. John's to Halifax then on to New York (Titanic's destination) with 138 passengers and crew. She ran aground on the rocks near Cape Race which was the first to receive the *Titanic's* S.O.S. signal. Only forty-four survived. The *Florizel* and the *Titanic* Had near the same percentage (30%) of survivors.

Some say both ships were cursed by Body 330.

We must remember our past. For now, there is a story of a man who found a ship lost beneath the cold dark waters and how he came to share the tale in Newfoundland and the Ryan Mansion.

I think the *Titanic* story still resonates with people because it was a ship of dreams. It was the epitome of luxury, predicted as unsinkable. It was also the first modern catastrophe, and you never forget your first, so to speak. While there have been larger disasters, the *Titanic* story captures people's hearts, whether it is because of the wealthy, the famous, or the grit and character of the third-class passengers. All who boarded that historic voyage, however, no matter their creed or status, set sail on the same adventure. They were connected, if only by that one degree.

While we certainly hope ours does not meet with a similar tragic end, as humans we, too, are all set out on a similar voyage, this grand adventure we call life. As we cruise along, we may meet people from all walks of life, the wealthy, the famous, those with grit, and certainly those with character. Whether we sink or sail on the voyage, however, depends largely on what we choose to do with those meetings. Do we let the opportunities sail right on past, or do we make a meaningful connection and realize, after all, we are all truly only separated...by one degree.

CHAPTER TWO
The Perfect Guest
Muammar Al Gadafi

Three Planes, A Camel, A Tent, 30 Female
Bodyguards, Bags Full of Cash

Gaddafi the perfect guest, why? I attended classes at Queens University as a mature student in the 90's and I remember one of the Profs questioned me. "What papers do you read?"

I responded, "The local *Daily Telegram*."

He advised that it would be in my best interest to stop reading the local one and switch to a daily national. "Don't get caught up in local politics and gossip. If something demands attention locally, you will find it in the national edition. Broaden your horizons."

So, from then on, I did. I would read a daily national as well as the local one. Since I was into real estate development on the local scene, I needed to be aware from a business perspective. I regarded myself as reasonably well-informed.

My strong suit is paying attention to heritage and history. Nolan-Hall (Kevin Nolan and Robert Hall), are without equal at developing heritage properties, while simultaneously paying attention to history

and period detail. We always want to deliver a certain product. If you look at the properties we have done, we've restored things back to their natural beauty. We haven't tried to implement our own design. We take something from the past and restore it to its former glory,



Left: *U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at the signing of the Atlantic Charter, Placentia Bay*

adding modern amenities while not disturbing the past, whether it was the Ryan Mansion or Benevolent Irish Society buildings.

We take all the things that people have crucified over the years and bring them back to what someone designed as a gorgeous piece of architecture, say 130 years ago, in the middle of the city. Our work stands out because we celebrate the past. We bring back what the original designer envisioned. My interest in history ended up playing a role in the full story of our perfect guest. No matter how I may have felt about Gaddafi after my quick research, we had an opportunity to host the Head of State while he visited Canada. As we do with all our guests, we wanted to provide an exceptional accommodation experience but with a head of state the pressure is on to do much more.

At the time of the Gaddafi booking, the renovations of the North Wing at the Ryan Mansion were about 90% complete. While the South Wing oozed with history from the *Titanic* connection, especially now that Robert Ballard had been a guest and he highly praised both the mansion and the *Titanic* dinner as the best yet, this gave us additional confidence that its history was established. The eight 2 room suites in the North Wing were being upgraded to the same standards as those in the South Wing. We were researching how we could bring history to these newly minted rooms.

One Saturday, I was having breakfast at the Marriott Hotel in downtown St. John's, and reading the National newspaper, when I saw a story about the auction at the Ritz Carlton in Montreal. It was happening two days later. The Ritz was built in 1912, so the thought of getting a few items of the same vintage as the Ryan Mansion to incorporate into the North Wing was exciting. What caught my eye was the former suite occupied by Winston Churchill.

The legendary leader had a long-standing relationship with Newfoundland, and there are tributes to him throughout the island. Churchill's most significant moment in Newfoundland was the signing of the Atlantic Charter when Roosevelt and Churchill met in Placentia Bay near the Argentia naval base on August 14, 1941. That Atlantic Charter significantly shaped the free world we know of today and the start of the United Nations.

To be able to purchase pieces of history from where Churchill stayed was good reason enough to go to the auction. I called my partner, Robert, immediately and, just as excited, he quickly arranged for air tickets and off we went the next day. After a two and a half hour flight and a cab ride to downtown Montreal, we were in the main ballroom of the Ritz with a bidding number, a paddle, as well as a copy of the hotel register from the previous years. Fortunately, the

suites we wanted were being auctioned on the second day giving us time to go through the suites of interest as well as practice a bit of my basic French, which consisted of graphic body and facial gestures with the odd French sounding word thrown in. Robert had a little more understanding, or so it seemed the way he was raising that paddle the next day. I was convinced he did.

The auction was conducted in French and was way too fast with no subtitles. Come day two, though, we were ready and up came the old tired furniture of the suite that once served as the official residence for Churchill while in Montreal. There was a great looking writing-desk and a chair, period light fixtures, a large gilded mirror, a vintage headboard, nightstands, an antique overstuffed chair (desperately needing repairs), along with a battered, but period, cocktail table. The musty old smells in the room even had me half-heartedly thinking of cigars. The mattresses and electronics would be left behind as of no value. Three flat screens were to be installed in each of the suites at Ryan Mansion including one at the bottom of the tubs in the marble bathrooms. The old, thick, faded draperies that looked like they were used in *Gone with the Wind*, ended up making good padding for the chandeliers and lamps being shipped across the ocean to Newfoundland.

Up went the bidding paddle many times until finally the auctioneer bangs the gavel. “*Vendu.*” Sold. We were the successful bidder. The suites that followed were previously occupied by Sofia Lauren, David Bowie, Andrea Bocelli, George H. W. Bush, Shania Twain, Tiger Woods, and the Rolling Stones. The Royal Suite had housed the likes of TRHs Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip. It’s also the same suite in which Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton honeymooned.

We bid on them all and after what seemed like a game of ping pong with the paddle, we had enough to fill a tractor trailer. We

only had twenty-four hours to remove everything we wanted from each suite: chandeliers, light fixtures, accessories including drapes, writing desks, lamps, gilded mirrors, and even the metal suite door numbers. We had everything shipped and three weeks later it arrived. All nicely wrapped and ready to store until reconditioned. We had it all delivered to our country property called Athenry, just an hour from the city which we were in the process of turning into a seasonal resort. There was a huge storage barn on the site which allowed lots of room to unwrap our treasures piece by piece. All that was going to bring history to the North Wing...we would do up the suites with paraphernalia from different guests who would have stayed at the Ritz in the suites we purchased. Who could have predicted the first time we used our Ritz purchases would have meant that Gaddafi would have been sleeping in Churchill's bed?

It all started one day when the doorbell rang. Tina, one of our staff members, came to me when I was in the kitchen. It was about 4:30 in the afternoon as the banks were already closed. That's why I remember. Tina entered with a business card indicating that the Libyan ambassador, along with another gentleman were in the front sitting room and they wanted to rent the mansion for a week.

To be honest, I didn't know where Libya was on the map. I had been to the Middle East. I been to Dubai, Amman, Abu Dhabi, Jordan, Bahrain, Oman, and others but I really couldn't tell who was on first base and who was on second base. I didn't relate to any of that. What I did know was that we already had rooms booked on the south side wing of the Ryan Mansion. They had been booked and paid for by the travel writes from England, doing a tourism feature on the *Titanic's* connection with Newfoundland. So, renting the whole place would be difficult because the tourism people were arriving in two days' time. If we were to cancel them, that wouldn't

be very good for the province or for us. Tina went on to say that the ambassador said, “Money not an issue.”

What we did have, but still under construction, was the North Wing, which consisted of eight two-room suites. That day we were just installing the toilets. There was no furniture, still lots of things to do like window coverings and that sort of stuff. The plaster was done, and the walls were primed and whitewashed at that stage of the game. A lot of the floor coverings were not laid. Meanwhile, majority of the suites had hardwood floors. So, the decision was made that we offer to rent out the eight suites in the North Wing and give them exclusive use of the dining and living rooms in the South Wing. Since there was a private sitting room in the South Wing to the right of the staircase, it would allow the travel writers use through the main entrance and staircase. The kitchen had full access from the servant's staircase while the main dining room and parlour that the Libyan group would be using was separated by the butler's pantry. The travel writers were only receiving breakfast service and would allow for the kitchen to be devoted to Gaddafi's group.

I instructed Tina to charge \$80,000, \$10,000 per room because we really didn't care if we got it or not, even though we could have really used the money. I didn't give it a lot of thought. It was just instant. Eight suites. Eighty thousand dollars, and she went right out and told them. Tina was a very bubbly person who enjoyed speaking her mind. She rolled her eyes at me and out she went returning in minutes with a smile on her face and said they want it. I nearly got a heart attack but instantly recovered with “plus taxes”. This added another \$12,000. Tina went out and returned in what seemed like seconds with an agreement.

“Tina, get fifty percent upfront.”

Out she went again. To be honest, I was sort of trying to get them to leave as we weren't even ready with the next door and they wanted it in 48 hours. We would have a lot of work to do equipping eight suites...no ifs, ands, or buts...it was a major undertaking to complete in 48 hours.

Immediately, my partner Robert said we could use the furniture that we had out in Athenry that came from the Ritz and was still all wrapped in the barn. All this furniture was in desperate need of restoration, but he felt he could make it work. So, he ordered the new mattresses for the eight suites right away. We had all the bed frames, headboards, desks and chairs from the Ritz Carlton. And we did have it ready within the 48 hours.

Backing up a little...Tina came back and said they agreed to our terms and they gave us a credit card. However, it didn't work. So, we were like, "Holy God!" He gave the credit card for the deposit, which would have been near \$50,000, and it didn't work!

A second card didn't work. We wondered what kind of game this was. We gave the cards back. He apologised to Tina and said he wanted to speak with me. I went out into the room. He introduced himself and said they must have this accommodation.

"We have looked at other properties, but Ryan Mansion is the one we must have no matter the cost." He banged his chest on every word. "*My word is gold!*"

He said he would be back in the morning with a cheque as soon as the banks opened. He put out his hand for me to shake as a sign of agreement, which I did. Then, on they went.

I didn't trust him. We were not going to give him anything unless

the cheque arrived in the morning. Did I really expect him to come back? No, I did not. I was having negative thoughts, after all it was a very weak first impression, but his business card did say he was the ambassador, so I was willing to wait and see. Meanwhile, by the time Tina and I got back in the kitchen, Robert had googled Gaddafi.

“Look at this!” he exploded. Gaddafi had just made his roar at the United Nations in sunglasses and full regalia.

“Jesus, Mary and Joseph!” I choked.

The piece went on talking about his thirty female security guards with machine guns and the whole nine yards.

“What are we getting into?” I asked.

Up until this point, I hadn't related Gaddafi to anything or any place and then the story went on about his Bedouin tent setup in Donald Trump's driveway. There were also stories of protestors throwing Molotov cocktails at it. Needless to say, we were taken aback. Then we considered. There was nothing to worry about until they come back with the cheque.

At 10:20 in the morning, two big black Suburban's hauled in the driveway. Tina said, “The black Suburban's are back.” Sure enough, they had come to give us the cheque. Well, we were in the hospitality business. You don't say, “We are NOT taking a cheque of that size.” And, to be honest, it *was* a nice cheque.

Once we had the cheque in hand, Robert ordered all the mattresses for next door. St. John's is not a big city and we were worried we wouldn't find eight top qualities in stock, but we did. We would also need them for our next guest, His Royal Highness, the following

month. We rented a big U-Haul truck and went out to the barn in Athenry and loaded her up. I give Robert full credit because he was amazing in the way he assembled everything right down to throw rugs, and Ritz Carlton drapes. The eight suites had to be fully furnished by 6pm the next day. That included couches, chairs, beds, floor coverings, and fixtures. Fortunately, the Ritz stuff had a load of area rugs. Everything had to come together by the end of the day. Normally, you don't put in eight rooms in a day with desks, flowers, fixtures, everything that goes with a room, drapes and all, but we did. We had about 12 people working on it and it was a very full 36 hours. We ended up having to put in shower curtains instead of glass shower doors installed as a temporary measure because of time constraints.

Robert lost no time in taking the cheque to the bank to get it certified. He was back within an hour and we set about hiring a chef. We knew time was of the essence. The thought was that Gaddafi may only be here for one night, but they didn't know what night, so they booked it for a week for security reasons. They added that, Gaddafi makes his own decisions.

They presented to Robert and me a daunting list of things they required. For food they approved pasta but stipulated the meat had to be *halal*. The Islamic form of slaughtering must be completely *halal* compliant. Animals must be alive and healthy at the time of slaughter and all blood is drained. I unfamiliar with the practice, but we were lucky to be referred to someone who had just come back to Newfoundland, who did. We were encouraged to call him. He came for an interview and said he had done *halal* meat before, when he did banquets attended by Arab guests.

“That’s perfect you’re hired. Set it up! No more than that.”

He was really good getting into it and setting up the kitchen and ordering food knowing fully well we could have as many as twelve guests in 36 hours. At the time we were only doing breakfasts at the Mansion and there was no chef on staff. The new chef worked out great as he only could give us a week due to other commitments which was perfect for us as we weren't expecting to sell any more blood- drained meat in the near future. Keep in mind, we were only going to have the food here for a few days and we didn't even know the date of occupancy.

As you can imagine, a head of state visiting St. John's was big news and with all the shenanigans associated with Gaddafi, even more so. The news of a possible visit was travelling fast through the local media. Of course, we didn't tell anybody who it was that was coming. We have a house rule that we never tell. We knew the Gaddafi people would want it that way. Discretion is a big part of this business. When Prince Charles came here, we were asked not to divulge the information. Our then Lieutenant Governor, however, went on with the news and told everyone who was coming and where they were staying. We, however, had honored the request. In fact, with Gaddafi we were getting all kinds of phone calls from the media: *The Globe*, *Toronto Star*, *New York Times*, and others. Our practiced response became "Sorry, you have been misinformed. They are not staying here. You may want to try the Fairmont."

For us, the biggest reason we would not divulge it was that our next guest was going to be the future King of England. We did not want to jeopardize that opportunity. We were concerned that if word got published of Gaddafi's visit, after seeing what was happening in New York, the Prince's security detail might renege on their decision to keep him here and move him somewhere else. We didn't want that to happen.



Above: Aerial view of main house at the Fields of Atherny

We had 48 hours to “G Day” or “Gaddafi day”. We had to be ready because that’s when the actual rental contract kicked in. The two black Suburban’s were outside and again it was the ambassador. Now he was looking for a place to pitch a Bedouin tent for Gaddafi.

Accompanying the ambassador was his sidekick, a companion who spoke no English and was a rather thin, nervous guy. Very nervous. They needed to find a place for the tent and wanted a property in Portugal Cove around 10 miles from Ryan Mansion. One of the reasons why they wanted it was because it had a helicopter landing pad and was only six miles from the airport. As a courtesy, I called the owner of the property who I knew personally. They controlled a helicopter company with branches all over the world. He told me that it might not be a good decision for his international company to rent the property directly to Gaddafi. If there was a request by the Government of Canada, he would rent to the them and whatever the government decided to do would be their business.

In hindsight, it is interesting that up to this point, we had had no contact with any Canadian officials. I gave the ambassador the news that the Portugal Cove site would only be available if requested by Canadian government.

The ambassador's phone rang and after a short conversation in Arabic, he turned to me and said, "You must help us find a property."

I advised him of the Athenry property, located around 50 miles from the city, on the ocean with plenty of room for a helicopter.

He asked, "Can we see it now?"

"Sure, no problem." I replied.

Ryan Mansion had two Mercedes, one a sedan and the other an SUV, both recently cleaned, polished and gleaming in black splendour. I checked out through the window, and the SUV was gone, so I



Above: *Sunrise on the winding drive to Athenry*

had no choice but to take the sedan. I discreetly called Robert and advised him that I was taking the ambassador around the 150-acre site and suggested that would be best done in the SUV, in order to appreciate the sights, which included striking views of the whales jumping offshore. He told me to take it slow and he would meet us at the Salmonier Line, a halfway point where we could do a switch.

The Salmonier Line is a highway crossroads and a favourite site of fishmongers and vegetable growers who sell fresh goods from the back of a string of trucks. Robert was waiting as I pulled in. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the fish and vegetable sellers staring in amazement. I am sure they wondered what was going on. Robert got there a little ahead of me and I pulled in with the two Libyans. He's there with the black SUV, us in the black sedan. We hustled our guests into the back of the SUV and Robert got in the sedan and off we went in separate directions. Swift cross-over made, then, zoom! We were off.

I, the ambassador, and his nervous sidekick drove on to Athenry. Going up the long, treed driveway, past the stables and the horses, we approached the large white manor house, complete with red roof and turrets. The views of the ocean, the meadows and the gardens were spellbinding. As renovations were still ongoing, there were no guests on site to deal with. Gaddafi's staff was seeking a site to house a Bedouin tent, a camel, a helicopter, their leader, his entourage, a thirty female strong security detail, and God knows what else. To them, it was clear to see Athenry was perfect. Even the resident Newfoundland ponies had a smile on their faces as this meant they needed to be relocated to greener pasture in the North meadows sooner than expected.

The Libyans were becoming more and more impressed by what the property had to offer. They also were very excited to have all their problems solved. I was delighted to hear their satisfied "ahs"

at the end of the tour. So, it was set. Gaddafi would be coming to Athenry for perhaps as little as an hour and no more than 24 hours.

While driving back, I get a call from the Prime Minister's Office. Actually, the first call I received was from SNC-Lavalin, the international Canadian engineering firm. I picked up the phone and listen to their sales pitch.

“You have a reputation around town for high end real estate, and there is a group coming into the city...da da da...and they're from Libya and...is there anything you can do for them? It's going to be rather quick...”

I cut them off and said, “As it so happens, the ambassador is with me now”

The SNC representative replied, “Oh, yes. Oh, yes. If there's anything you can do...”

“It's being dealt with,” I replied curtly.

I remembered. Athenry is near the Come by Chance Oil Refinery, and there were talks at the time about a second oil refinery being built for three or four billion dollars. Now, everything fell in place for me. Gaddafi wasn't coming here for whale-watching or icebergs. I thought that maybe SNC-Lavalin was going to be meeting with him inside the tent!

There has to be some sort of connection there.

I was still in the SUV heading back to St John's when I receive another call. This one was from Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Office.

What in the name of Jesus are they doing calling me?

It's not like I normally talk to the Prime Minister's Office, after all.

He went on to say that there was a Libyan contingent in town looking for high end accommodations. The best in the city.

"They've got bags full of cash. Money is no object."

Why didn't the Prime Minister's Office call me yesterday?

However, one can be *too* greedy. My father, a fisherman by trade, would always say to me while I was growing up: "You're like the gannet, crying with its gut full."

That old adage came to mind and I realized I was full. This was enough for what we were doing. So, I gave a more considered reply.

"As it happens, the Ambassador is sitting next to me."

"Ooh. Thank you. We will leave it with you. Any help you can provide will be greatly appreciated."

Appreciated. The Prime Minister's Office was saying they owed me which gave me a feeling of relief. If the Government of Canada was actually calling, it assured me we were not doing anything wrong. Obviously, the Government of Canada was well aware of Gaddafi's visit. It turned out the Ambassador was quite happy that I was dealing with the same person at the PMO office that was his contact.

The Nolan-Hall brand in St. John's was well-established for high-end properties. SNC-Lavalin and the Prime Minister's Office called us because they knew the Libyans would want the best. And in



Above: Views of Atherry

Athenry, there is no council, so we wouldn't need permission to raise a tent. The Libyans liked that about us. We were able to say "yes" without having to meet with a council or get permission. It was funny that after they had agreed to use Athenry a cadre of stuff about Government House came out in the media. There were stories in the local media that Gaddafi was to pitch his Bedouin tent on the lawns of Government House, official residence of the Lieutenant Governor, the Queens official representative but it was vetoed. It turned out there was no such request, according to the Ambassador. Had I known that SNC-Lavalin and the Prime Minister's Office were interested in our assistance to the Libyans, at whatever cost, I would have upped the price to \$250,000 for the Ryan Mansion and \$150,000 for Athenry.

I would have gotten it.

When I look at it now, I can think that way, but there was also an ethical part to this. We could have gotten rid of those travel writers in the south wing, but we just couldn't do it. The Libyans already agreed to pay for half and if they could have had full-exclusivity to all of this, certainly they would have paid more. We didn't have a contract signed with the tourism people, so we could have very simply cancelled their reservations and put them in the Fairmont. We could have done that, and there *was* a temptation to do it as it would have doubled our money. The Libyans really wanted the whole place. But like my father the fisherman would say: "You are like the gannet crying with your gut full."

From a long-term perspective, these travel writers would be writing about the Ryan Mansion, the province, and the *Titanic* connection. Their stay was confirmed six months prior, as well, it would ultimately put the province in a bad light if we barred them from our doors. Looking back at it now, I think we undercharged the Libyans as



Above: Gaddafi's tent pic. given to Kevin by the AMB for a thenry set up.

the price quoted didn't even make them blink. And then the Prime Minister's office confirmed they had "bags full of cash".

Driving back in the SUV with the Ambassador, he and his nervous sidekick conduct a five-minute conversation in Arabic. The ambassador then turns to me and says, "Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi, Brotherly Leader is very happy and grateful for what you are doing for us."

I could see their relief as they secured both the accommodations and the Bedouin tent location. They were obviously feeling very pleased with themselves. The nervous guy in the back again spoke to the Ambassador in Arabic and the Ambassador turns to me.

"You will be having a private audience with Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi, Brotherly Leader of the Great Socialist

People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in the tent!"

I freeze for a second.

Oh, Jesus, Mary and Joseph! I don't want to go into that tent with Bucko.

It was bad enough being responsible for getting the *hatab*, the all-important collection of wood for the fire pit. If anything happened involving the wood, I was responsible. All I could picture was a change of draft in the Newfoundland wind and he would be choking in there as I walked into the tent past 30 guards armed with machine guns.

I didn't want to meet with Gaddafi!

I didn't know what to do. I turned around and hit my chest with my fist the same way he did a day earlier when he said, "My word is as good as gold!"

Banging on my chest, I trumpet, "I'm honoured!"

I thought replicating the Ambassador pounding his chest would be good, but I was feeling a little tense. I just wanted everything to work out. Plus, I have the ambassador, next to me, not Tommy Toe the tractor driver. I've got the Canadian Ambassador from Libya and my role is to accommodate and give them proper service.

To every request, I replied in a calm voice, "No problem."

In my head, I was screaming.

Jesus, I've got to get a grader up there now and upgrade that road! I've got to get the horses moved over! I've got to get the horse shit

picked up and the hay cut in Athenry! I've got to make sure the lamb is bled right in St. John's!

All this was going on and on top of that I left strict instructions. If the media called, not one word was to be mentioned. The call was to be referred to me. It was basically a stressful time made more stressful when the calls came from SNC-Lavalin and then the Prime Minister's Office.

What was I into here?

Things were getting weirder by the minute. There was a lot of potential for danger in this rental. We had Gaddafi and the BBC tourism writers all arriving at the same time. We did have the two sections of the Mansion secured and the two parties would enter separately, but how were we going to make sure none of these media travel people saw what was going on? How are we going to hide it? How do we make sure that they don't see him? I mean it *was* the BBC!

Additionally, we very much wanted the Prince Charles' visit because it would give a nice notch in the Ryan Mansion belt. We didn't want to jeopardize that in any way shape or form in terms of the long run for the Mansion.

The whole Gaddafi affair was nerve-wracking. The world came to know that he downed the Pan-Am plane. I immediately thought, "Holy Shit!" But at the same time, our role was not to judge. Our role was to be a service provider and that's what we were doing. The fact that the Prime Minister's Office called us was a sort of sanction as the Government of Canada wanted this to happen, too. Besides, the British government had already welcomed him back, and doing business with Libya.

Okay.

I was later asked if Gaddafi was the most demanding guest. I had to say no, because *we* were the demanding ones. We were demanding, insisting on all that had to be done before the guests arrived. So, when asked who was demanding, I must admit it, we were the ones who wanted it done right. Take the furniture at Athenry from the Ritz. I'd believed we never get the rooms ready. But the furniture worked perfectly. Robert did a great job. You'd walk into the rooms, and you'd say, "This looks good." And it was. It was looking *very* good. We knew the Libyans were going to like it.

To distract me from my terrifying thoughts regarding the honour of private time with Muammar, the Ambassador suggested we should have lunch at some restaurant in town to discuss the additional details regarding the Gaddafi site visit. I reminded him that the meter was already ticking back at the Ryan Mansion and a chef was on call to prepare food he would love! He smiled as I called the chef and announced: "Three for dinner! Tomato sauce over gluten free pasta for me, but our guests would like theirs with *halal* meat."

I must say it was lovely. The nervous assistant didn't stop shaking, however. So, I sat him next to the cast-iron radiator and turned up the heat, but still he continued shaking. Everything was good and, thanks to Robert, next door was looking wonderful.

I took yet another lesson from my father and, instead of focusing on the potential problems, I focused on the goal.

My father was handicapped from his service in the British Royal Navy during World War II, part of his body paralyzed. He was under full disability pension, but I can still hear his words.



Left: *The Server Girl*
Grant Boland
painting commissioned
for Ryan Mansion

“Kevin, you don’t have to beat the wall down. Find a way around it, above it, or under it, but never try to beat it down.”

Growing up, I watched that man make a little contraption to help him get his pants on over his ankles. Amazingly, he got his driver’s licence, but he had to rig up mirrors as he couldn’t turn his neck. He also made rigs for the gas because he couldn’t use his legs. Same for the brakes. Dad made it all himself but, more importantly, he made it *work*.

As a fisherman, he had a boat and a wharf. He also had made rigs to help him get in and out of his boat. I look back at all that now.

People usually ask, “Do you ever take no for an answer?” Fact is, I don’t. But I didn’t realize that about myself. I always just say “no problem.” Do I worry about delivering? Yes, but I just say, “no problem” and get on with the job.

While sitting in the dining room, the Libyans noticed a large Grant Boland painting on the wall and had a conversation in Arabic. The Ambassador asked if we would be willing to part with it. The nervous man indicated Gaddafi was going to want that painting and suggested, I think, that “what Gaddafi wants, Gaddafi gets.” Apparently, you didn’t say no to Gaddafi.

“We’ll have to look at that,” I replied. I wasn’t concerned about the cost of the painting, but they kept referencing that painting. Each time we met, they mentioned it. I didn’t know why they had such attraction to it, but there was something about that painting.

I asked about the tents. The Ambassador replied he was not allowed to reveal information about the tents. I expressed my concern. How I was to furnish them if I didn’t know the specifications? So, he gave me a picture, along with the information needed and, boom, we made it happen. We had to locate and provide furniture as quickly as possible as well as furnish a fire pot pit and *hatab*. Then I had to get the wood all properly cut and ready. The tent needed chairs, rugs, and a couch that would position people at a point lower than Gaddafi’s chair. I purchased the fire pits. That was easy, but we had to make sure the logs were all sized to three-foot lengths so they could stay upright while burning.

There would also have to be twenty fully-fitted cots for the security personnel. Like any advance team for a Head of State, they wanted to be prepared for any contingency. They liked the Athenry property as it gave them options. And still, I kept offering them *more* things,

giving them *more* choices. We had a number of options for connecting electricity to the tent site for heating purposes, but they wouldn't hear of it. They said Gaddafi sits near the stove and there would be no need for artificial heat. The thought of the stove prompted me to revisit my earlier concern. The damned wind would change and fill the goddamned tent with smoke while I was in it.

What have I got myself into!?!?

I don't mind admitting it now, but the whole thing made me very nervous. I can laugh about it now, but at the time...not so much.

I spent a lot of time with the ambassador over the two days, including a four-hour site visit to Athenry. After lunch, his attention turned to Ryan Mansion and many questions.

How large is the mansion?

14,000 square feet (140 square meters). Fifteen bedrooms. Seventeen bathrooms. This large dining room plus a breakfast room. Two large parlours. A library. A lower floor service and staff accommodations.

"This is much larger than our embassy house in Ottawa. And I get lost in it. Can I have a tour?" he requests.

Robert was going to kill me!

He was busy next door setting up the finishing touches for the evening's deadline. But "what Gaddafi wants (and by extension, his staff), Gaddafi gets." So, we commenced our tour. As we walked about, the ambassador stopped, admiring the large woven rug in the front parlour.

“Where did you get this?” he asked.

“Montreal,” I replied.

“This is a very good, original Islamic carpet. You should have on the wall not the floor.”

“Should we use this for the tent?” I inquired.

“No. They will bring the rugs. You, just furniture.”

We continued our tour. He revisited the concept of renting both sides of the mansion. “We pay more.”

I explained that it would be impossible. On the subject of impossible tasks, I expressed concerns over the ability to properly outfit Gaddafi’s tent. We would not know what tent will be used until the last moment. Gaddafi would decide from the three on board his plane.

“Not to worry. Our people will install,” he replied. “You have furniture ready. They will put furniture in place.”

With that he pointed to the picture he had given me of the tent he expected would be chosen. I mentioned having power established to the site for lighting and heat.

“No, no, no. Not needed. Just wood and stove. Colonel Gaddafi will be holding meetings in tent. No worry about food. Just water.”

“What about for the camel?” The word sounded surreal for St. John’s.

“Not to worry. That will all be taken care of by our people.”

“Okay. No problem.”

What’s coming? A plane, or Noah’s Ark?

Now, I battled visions of me walking up to a tent with a camel outside, through a gauntlet of machine-gun armed women clad in full battle gear. All I could see before me was an indistinct figure stretched out in an over-stuffed chair from the Ritz. Smoke obscured everything but two arms hanging loosely and two legs from the knees down.

Did I mention the machine-guns?

As we ordered another round of non-alcoholic drinks, my mind leaped to the reassuring sound of one of my favorite songs by Procol Harum. To keep myself calm and soothe my frayed nerves, I hummed the lines I could remember to myself.

We skipped the light fandango...

It helped calm the disturbing visions in my head...at least temporarily. An hour after the ambassador departs, Robert tells me Molotov cocktails were thrown at Gaddafi’s tent in Trump’s driveway in New York.

Mental note. Tell Robert to please stop googling things.

Furnishing the tent wasn’t part of the original agreement. It wasn’t until we were talking at the Ryan Mansion that the ambassador requested, we furnish the tent as well. We’d never set up a tent before. The ambassador assured me his people would take care of that. He just needed us to furnish it.

No problem.

I supposed the request had something to do with security and customs. Easier to use our materials than bring their own. security and customs. So, I said “no problem, no problem.” Nothing was a problem. Even if it *was* a problem.

For example, at the time we served iceberg water to guests. The ambassador fell in love with it and asked if we could get more of it. He wanted a case for Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi, Brotherly Leader’s plane.

Holy shit!

We called the plant in St. Anthony where it was harvested and bottled. St. Anthony is approximately 600 miles from St. John’s and, incidentally, twenty miles from the landing place of the Vikings over 1,000 years ago in L’Anse aux Meadows, a UNESCO world heritage site. The iceberg water plant in St Anthony said they could only deliver it if we bought a full pallet. I asked how much was that?

“2,500 bottles, or so.”

But I needed it by the following day. Could it happen?

No problem.

True to their word, it was brought to mansion later the next day and stored in the carriage house. When the ambassador and his sidekick drank the iceberg water, they agreed.

“He is going to want this.” I was being constantly primed. They kept preparing me to be ready for everything just in case Gaddafi wanted it.

“Don’t say no to him.”

Before the Libyans left, they asked if we could make a reservation for them at a spa, which we did. Just for the two of them, the ambassador and his companion. All I can think of is this little man always shaking. The ambassador cut a much stronger figure. His companion reminded me of the frail mob accountant you’d see in the movies testifying on the stand at a trial...the one’s that usually end up getting shot.

Then came G-Day.

It may have been 10:30 or 11 at night when black Suburbans hauled up.

Oh Jesus, this is it.

We had all the lights on and all the fires glowing. We were ready. As of this moment they had the place booked. The doorbell rang. Odd. Nobody else was staying here. This was just for Gaddafi and his crew. Even the ambassador was staying at the Fairmont. The three men who got out of the Suburbans entered the front room. Despite the warmth of the thirteen fire places in the north wing main dining room and parlour and the brightness of the lights and music playing, the three thirty-something Libyans look positively terrified.

As the driver ushered them in, I thought surely Gaddafi must be on the next one. And why was the ambassador not in attendance? He had been my point man from the outset.

Who were we supposed to put in which room? There was no list. No established hierarchy. Who was important? Who should get

the best rooms? The new arrivals seemed to know only two words of English.

“Not hotel. Not hotel.” They appeared truly terrified. Thinking it odd, I asked the driver if there were other hotels the Libyans were using.

“The Fairmont. They have a bank of 60 or 70 rooms down there.”

“I think you should take these guys to the Fairmont.”

They knew this was not for them. This was their leader’s accommodations. They wanted off the property as quickly as possible. Off they went.

“Thank. Thank. Thank.”

Three words.

They repeated their gratitude as they exited. They were polite enough and very relieved when they got back into the black suburban. So, one false alarm. But he was bound to show up any minute...or, maybe two in the morning. We were told to expect no notice. Every time the doorbell rang, or a car door opened, we were on alert.

I headed out to Athenry. I had already been out there getting things arranged. The horses had to go and so did the stuff that horses make and leave on the ground. The horses’ current meadow was where the helicopter was to land. I had to make sure the hay was cut low enough and that it would be safe, that there was a nice solid patch for that to happen. The tents were to be set up very close, and I had to ensure all that was ready to go. Everything had to be perfect, like the graded driveway. The 3000-foot lane leading up to the

property had to be graded and filled within 48 hours. We were able to do it because we already had ten people working, renovating the site. However, we had to get everyone off site before Gaddafi came.

No problem.

Nothing has ever stopped me in my tracks. I always go back to the sayings of my father, even though I don't even know what a goddamned gannet was!

“You're like the gannet crying with your gut full!”

But he was right. I had the use of my legs, my arms, my head, and my back so I *was* like the gannet crying with my gut full. He was not that. He had all these issues he had to deal with in life. It was a big challenge just putting his pants on. That was the way he lived his life because of his condition. My father could only see you when he was seated, he got around in a hunched position so he could only see you when he sat, and he couldn't turn his head.

But he never complained. Never.

The first time I saw a gannet, I was shocked. The weather was nice that day and I was thinking about one of my favourite restaurants, the Dildo Dory. They have great fish and chips and my plan was to have some at the Dildo Dory restaurant and then make sure all the wood was split correctly for the tent. I had just turned off the highway access road and the phone rings. Tina was calling. It was the Suburban's again, with two different Libyans.

Two different Libyans?

“They're big tall fellows, and they want to see you. Gaddafi is

cancelling. They want to know what else they need to do,” Tina continued.

I told her I would be back at four o'clock. I was going to have my goddamned fish and chips. Cancel, or no cancel. Not to mention, I wanted to get my thoughts in order before I returned.

Tina had underestimated the size of the two men. They were huge!

“Gaddafi has decided not to come,” they said. “What do we need to do?”

“Pay your bill,” I stated.

“We already gave you fifty percent.”

“Yes. But you had a contract with us for a week, and we hired a chef and did other things you required, plus many extras.”

Their voices got lower.

I considered all we had done in preparation for this visit. During the first 48 hours, Robert and I rented a U-Haul and went to Kmart and Sears, and everywhere else in the city to procure twenty good cots complete with good mattresses with duvets and pillows, sheets, blankets - all the linen. We delivered it all on site to Athenry. Those were for security. And they were *good* cots. Then there was the pallet load of iceberg water and all the preparations for Athenry.

“We didn't use the beds,” one of the men grumbled.

“Regardless, we got them for you. You can take the beds and the water with you.”

“We didn’t use the rooms, or the dining rooms except for the ambassador’s dinner.”

“It doesn’t matter. And where is your Ambassador?”

“He’s already left. He’s gone back.”

“The ambassador assured me,” I pounded my chest. “My word is gold!”

As soon as I said that, they passed me the cheque book to fill in!

“Very good,” I replied, and I filled it in. The final bill totaled \$100,000. When I put it in, the cheque was already signed, and they thanked me.

I should be thanking them.

They must have known the ambassador did business this way, because I had no more said “my word is gold” and, boom, there was the cheque book in front of me. Everything had been “no problem” for me, whatever they asked. If they had wanted a cow to slaughter in the yard, I would have had it there in the morning. I would only consider the *how* after they turned their back.

I wrote the amount on the cheque and the man told me to tear it off the book. I did so, returned the book, and they sat down, tension no more. They were actually very nice, or perhaps relaxed is the better word. The deal was done, and business was finished.

“The ambassador would like to thank you for all that you have done for our government. It is much appreciated.”

“Thank you,” I began. “But why did Gaddafi not come?”

As it turned out, the Canadian Government would not allow Gaddafi to have his own armed security. They wouldn't allow his security to carry their own guns. In the USA, they had. In Newfoundland, they wouldn't. The security had to be the RCMP, and that was that. There was other rumored bullshit about why he didn't come. Fabricated stories like how he tried to put his tent on government grounds and other stories that were hogwash.

We did get a lot of calls from the media and we kept saying, “He didn't stay here.”

It wasn't a lie.

We started to refer to Gaddafi as the perfect guest. Most expected Prince Charles to be the perfect guest. They might expect Princess Anne to be the perfect guest. Or Dr. Ballard, or even Meg Ryan. But Gaddafi? Most people thought him a murderer and that he'd robbed his people. But to call him the perfect guest? It was almost an oxymoron. But Gaddafi was the best guest we never had. Though he never actually came, he paid his bill which actually included a tip. We had still had all the beds and furniture.

We kept the iceberg water.

After the Libyans left, our first thought was “Thank God he didn't come.” I can't imagine how someone can be that deranged and that disrespectful of his people and their suffering. He was a wild cowboy, very sure of himself, and ended up in the gutter. It was sad.

That was our brush with Gaddafi just months before he came to his end. You're watching the news and seeing things and you can't help

but think. Here was someone who had been scheduled to arrive in Canada with two personal 747s. A contingency of support staff was in place long before he even was to arrive, 60 or 70 people who had already shown up here in town. The place was full of Libyans. A person who obviously had extreme wealth and ready access to it and, at the end he plummets from total extravagance to the gutter just months later. I wondered if there was something wrong with him. I tried to understand him but in a way I'm glad it didn't happen because anyone with that type of mindset...who knows what could have happened here?

If you were to go through the records of the Ritz Carlton, you will find they had many people stay in that hotel over the years that the world didn't like. Their business was hospitality and service and that's what they do...serve hospitably. Should they have turned Stalin away? No, because their role is not to judge, but to provide a service. I would be more upset with myself if we turned someone away for reasons based on politics, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

There was a lot of fear and suspense while we were going through it. All of that eats at your stomach. It certainly wasn't all violins playing and being happy. Even writing the cheque was not a simple thing but at the end of the day it was beneficial to us. It was a lot to endure, but we had to say, "Thank you! Next!"

Prince Charles was coming. We moved on immediately to caring for the next guest. Out went all the furniture back to Athenry and on to High Point North Carolina, shopping for furniture fit for a future king.

CHAPTER THREE

Jesus Don't Be Talking

His Royal Highness Prince Charles and The
Duchess of Cornwall

My father was from the small fishing village called Mount Carmel, about an hour from St. John's, a fisherman like his father before him. With his father's blessing, he joined his older brother in the Royal Navy at the age of seventeen to fight for his king and country. He was fiercely loyal to the Union Jack which he would raise at our summer home near the same tiny fishing village where he grew up. He would often be asked, "Mike why are you flying the Union Jack and not the Maple Leaf?" His answer meant little to me at the time.

"I fought under that flag. I lost my brother and many a mate under that flag. Why should I surrender it now?"

My mother was from Coatbridge outside of Glasgow, Scotland where she was raised in an orphanage run by Catholic nuns. During the war, she worked in an ammunition factory. Two years after the war ended, my mother and father moved to Newfoundland.

So, from as early as I can remember, the Pope and the Queen stared at me through the bars of my crib, pictures on the wall. I received a daily reminder of His Holiness with the daily litany of “the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost,” a phrase I had learned nearly as quickly as “How come?” The sixth of eight children, I can clearly remember going with my mother to downtown St. John’s at the age of five where lines of people waited to catch a glimpse of the Queen and the Prince.

The royal car passed slowly, and my mother tried to lift me up over the many heads in front. A man next to us took hold of me and hoisted me onto his shoulders. I could see everything. When the car had gone and the man put me down, my mother took me tightly by the hand and off to a shop for a promised ice cream. There she repeated the story she had already told me many times of the castles where the royals lived. She had showed me many pictures of Balmoral Castle in Scotland and Buckingham Palace in London. That day my questions came as fast as my ice cream melted.

“How come they had two castles?”

“How come they came to Newfoundland?”

“How come? How come?”

I am sure my mother was thrilled when that ice cream finally went in my mouth. However curious I may have been, my mother still spoke proudly of her homeland and of the royals that lived there.

I was fascinated with her stories, from the castles to the guards with the furry hats to the double-decker buses. Never did I expect that one day I would be hosting a prince and princess in a mansion only steps away from where I stood that day with my mother.

My father had a full Newfoundland accent. My mother had her Scottish accent and a better command of the English language and of we children at the dinner table. “*Gimme*” was not acceptable. While she would tolerate it from Dad, we were not allowed to repeat. She would demonstrate the proper English way of speaking it and we had to replicate or not get whatever we might be requesting.

“Can I have that please?”

“Yes, you *may*”

That’s the way it was. In my father’s case she’d simply say, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks but you? You, Kevin, are not an old dog. You will learn.”

Now, I very much appreciate the lessons I received from my mother while growing up, like proper table manners and courtesies, though it wasn’t always the case. Many a time, I would complain to my mother about my peers and their proper English, or lack thereof.

“How come their mudders don’t make them do it?”

“Kevin, it is not ‘mudders’. It’s mothers.”

It may have been agony then, but I’m so glad now because I can socialize anywhere and not be embarrassed by lack of proper speech and etiquette. It’s funny how disgruntled we can be in our youth over things like that yet grow to appreciate them later in life. Things like grace before dinner. Everything had its proper protocol. I guess that, in part, it helped me become who I am. Although, truth be told, my father’s native tongue still presents itself from time to time.

It all started one afternoon with a call from a representative of the provincial government telling us to expect a call from Heritage Canada requesting a tour of Ryan Mansion. The expected call came the next day and a viewing was arranged for five days later. When the day arrived, two cars pulled up and six persons arrived. Robert took them through the south wing while I was over in the north wing where the eight suites were under full renovation. Plumbers ran pipes getting ready for tubs, showers, toilets and the like. Electricians ran miles of wires for light fixtures, electric outlets, fire alarm panels, and cable and internet services. Pipefitters installed sprinkler systems. Millworkers installed fire door separations between wings. Plasterers and painters restored damaged moldings where ceilings and walls had needed opening to accommodate all the above.

The South Wing was 100% completed a year earlier. Six suites complete with in-floor heated Carrera marble bathrooms, large walk in marble showers, soaker tubs, bedrooms with four poster beds, fireplaces, dining room and parlours along with large foyer housing a fireplace and the grand staircase. Fire doors separating the North Wing on all four levels had been installed so debris and noise from the eight suites under construction were kept to a minimum.

By the time Robert had completed the tour of the South Wing and entered the North I had arranged for the workers to take their lunch early so the noise level would not be an issue. Up to this point we were not told anything except the group was doing a site tour. It had been in the news for a few days that Their Royal Highnesses Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall were beginning their official royal visit to Canada in Newfoundland, however. As soon as I heard the English accents, I knew exactly what the tour was about.

The local representative was rather negative with her comments about the location. Ryan Mansion was built on the intersection

of two busy downtown streets, separated from the front and back sidewalks by a mere twenty feet. The silence was often punctuated by the scattered ambulance, firetruck, or police car siren. Some viewed the locale as a disadvantage while others perceived it as a strategic location in North America's oldest city where you could feel the pulse of its energy. Across the street is what is known as Bannerman Park, North America's oldest Victorian park. The greenspace was a gift to the citizens of the city from Governor Bannerman in the 1800s.

I listened while the local representative repeatedly underscored the hectic noise level. She mentioned she had two other properties to visit, one in mind specifically that might be a better fit. I could not help but interject.

"If the intended guests you are looking for are who I think they are, the noise level here would be no more than what one would experience in a large village in the English countryside."

With that, the group exited the mansion. The last to exit from the British group was a woman named Joy. She turned around and stepped back.

"Are you confident you will have all completed within two months?"

"As sure as sure can be," I replied with assurance.

She passed me her card and said, "Get ready confidentially. They will be staying here."

And confidential it was to be.

I turned to Robert. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!"

Two weeks later we were given an added push with Gaddafi booking the North Wing. That was a blessing in two ways. It made us push harder to get the North Wing fully operational quicker and gave us a big cheque so we could properly fit out the eight suites with the quality of furniture that was in the southern six suites.

Three weeks later, off we went on a furniture hunt to High Point, North Carolina in the United States. As all the leading manufactures are located there, you can buy right off the floor with no waiting. Had we ordered locally, we could have expected at least a sixteen-week delivery delay or more. We had but four weeks to get there, select, purchase, accept delivery, navigate border customs, assemble, coordinate, clean, and achieve full operational status.

Robert is the one for design and coordination. I'm the one that can eye the room for measurement. He was accustomed to the song-and-dance of the local vendors.

“That one is not available.”

“It will take sixteen weeks to get a matching one as we have only one in stock.”

“You will have to select another colour.”

“No, might be able to get one similar.”

Additionally, he had grown used to shopping from pictures in a catalog versus seeing the actual product and experiencing the colours, textures, and fabrics firsthand. In High Point, he was in a designer's dream with miles upon miles of inventory at his feet.

My shopping personality trends toward, “That’s nice. Do you have eight of them?” Robert, on the other hand, spent five days “just looking”. Then, on the last day, when it was all coordinated in his head, he made one fell assault. “That, that, and that.”

So, after day one, my responsibility became to check rates, verify delivery times from North Carolina to Newfoundland, and drink a lot of coffee in preparation for the final assault since time was of the essence.

After talking with at least ten different shippers, it was determined a 55-foot trailer would be our best option. It was arranged to have all the items picked up from each warehouse, deliver to a central location, package, then load the trailer, and ship onwards. All in all, the inventory was coming from at least four different warehouses. Sales were finalized, selections passed over to the shipper, and were ready to return home.

The countdown had begun. It was twenty-one days until the arrival of the royals to Ryan Mansion. The furniture was aboard the trailer, as guaranteed, and *en route* to the border. We engaged a customs company to deal with any paperwork. Fourteen. days later, the furniture arrived. That left only seven days to pull it all together. It was hectic, but they say a picture tells a thousand words, so I will allow the following to take you on a tour.



***Above:** Sitting room with grand piano
Below: Center table in main dining room;*





Above: First floor landing looking out toward harbour

Below: Ryan Mansion lobby;



1 DEGREE OF SEPARATION



Above and Below: Typical bedrooms





Above: Main lobby staircase looking up toward 10-foot Waterford beveled glass window



Above: *Sitting area lobby*

The day before arrival, The Royal Canadian Mounted Police arrived in a huge tractor trailer, fully-marked, and parked on the street in front of the mansion. Here we were, exercising discretion, and now on the road for all to see is a full display of security! They brought in dogs and several personnel to sweep the grounds. After the better part of an hour they left but advised from then on, there would be full surveillance and security, all staff required identification, etcetera.

Up until this point, we felt perhaps we were just a decoy as several rooms had also been booked at The Delta and Fairmont hotels which were both about three blocks away. Still, Robert made sure all the specific details were being attended to, right up to the Duchess' flower preference which he had painstakingly researched. I had to make sure all systems were fully operational as all fourteen suites were to be occupied by the royals and their immediate staff.

The security was the first to arrive and arrive they did. The lower level of the mansion was turned into a command center. An emergency vehicle was parked in the adjoining carriage house. Security personnel surrounded the mansion.

I looked at Robert. "I think they are definitely coming here."

So much for my decoy theory.

Next, in came two Canadian Armed Forces vans blocked to the gills with luggage and every possible thing one can imagine to be boxed. There were fourteen guests in total, two of whom would be on the world stage for the next three days, all of whom needed appropriate attire for any occasion at a moment's notice, formal wear, elegant casual, and military honours. It was an amazing orchestrated ballet to see how quickly the staff showed in synchrony with the luggage vans and had everything unloaded and properly positioned in the designated suites within ten minutes. In extremely short order, we became familiarized with who-was-who as well as the proper protocol when addressing the royal couple.

We were informed that the Royal couple were whisked to the Mile One Stadium for a public address in their honour with the Governor General, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of the province and thousands of others.

They were expected at the mansion in three hours. Dinner was to be served forty-five minutes after arrival.

I was dressed in suit, shirt, and tie waiting in anticipation for their arrival. I was to officially greet them outside on the front steps upon their arrival. The irony of the choice was I was terrible with names, a fact which Robert can attest to readily. Most times he has

to remind me who's who at a large family function. As the royal car arrived and I stepped outside, Robert leaned in for a final reminder.

“Kevin, it is *not* Prince Philip. His name is Prince Charles. Keep repeating. Don't forget.”

And sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.

Here I was face to face with the Prince with the Duchess just a few feet behind. I was instructed that protocol is you do not reach out your hand in welcome as is customary for the rest of the world. So, I kept them dutifully by my side.

“Your Royal Highness, welcome to Newfoundland and the Ryan Mansion.”

With that he took off his glove and reached out his hand to shake mine. Robert graciously opened the door. Inside, the Prince's staff awaited and moved swiftly into action, showing the royal couple to their suite.

I had been speaking with the chef at Clarence House in London days before their arrival, reviewing menus for the three-day visit. I was given a list of likes, dislikes, and possibilities. The surprising part was nothing was unreasonable. Salmon, halibut, and wild game pies were on the list, all staples of a Newfoundland diet. On that count, I breathed a bit easier. The chef went on to reiterate that the prince preferred local ingredients whenever possible. I worked with our chef and devised a menu, sending it off to Clarence House. They approved it as suggested. One of Clarence House's suggested desserts was bread pudding.

“Can’t be,” I thought. “My god! *I* was reared on it!”

I thought perhaps I had heard him wrong and asked the chef to repeat.

“BREAD PUDDING,” he reiterated.

It was as if my parents were back from the dead for dinner. Poached salmon, pan-seared halibut, and bread pudding. They had been staples at the Nolan dinner table for as long I could remember. Ah, the bread pudding with warm vanilla sauce, topped with fresh cream. The chef at Clarence House faxed me his recipe and, aside from a few different additions and substitutions, the end result was the same. Bread pudding. The poached salmon was the same as we served with the *Titanic* dinners topped with a buttered cream sauce from a 100-year-old recipe.

The main dining room was separated from the kitchen by swinging doors to the butler’s pantry and again from the butler’s pantry by additional swinging doors to the kitchen. The eve of the prince’s dinner, I was in the kitchen simultaneously calming and stressing the chef.

The poached salmon was steaming away. I had insisted he find only fresh. It didn’t get much fresher than being caught three hours earlier by a local fisherman. Expertly carved into six-ounce center-cut filets, it steamed above the water with just a hint of sea salt and a few teaspoons of cooking vinegar. I left the kitchen to attend to a detail. When I came back, it was still steaming.

“You are over cooking the fish! How long are you cooking it?”

“Twelve minutes.”

Seven minutes! It was supposed to be seven minutes!

I distinctly recalled the dinner for Dr. Ballard. My friend Barbara insisted on seven minutes to properly cook fish. The worst one could do was overcook a fish. It was always a joy having dinner at her home as she had mastered the proper technique.

I instructed the chef to quickly redo the entire batch, steaming for exactly seven minutes, which he promptly did. The meals went to the dining room. Shortly thereafter, the butler made an unusual announcement.

“This has never happened before, but the prince was wondering if there was more salmon.”

Thank you, Barbara!

The water was still on the gas burners.

“Give us eight minutes. One to heat up the water. Seven to steam.”

Eight minutes later and out it went. The chef was proud as a peacock as the potential crisis had been averted. For the moment, all were relaxed.

After the royals were settled, the dining room felt a bit like the set of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, a popular British television program. The royal staff were truly great. Both Robert and I enjoyed conversing with them, particularly as to the quality of service thus far.

“Is everything okay?” Robert asked.

“If the boss is happy, we are happy.”

“Is the boss happy?” I quickly interjected.

“The boss is *very* happy.”

Then the prince’s valet came to me with a question of his own. “The prince was wondering the significance of the two Royal Navy sailors in the picture by the fireplace.”

I informed him it was a picture of my father and his brother, their only picture together. His brother’s ship was destroyed just weeks later, and he was lost at sea. I had thought they would never have the honour to be in the presence of a prince and future king, so I had snuck it in there.

The staff stayed in the dining room chatting informally about everything under the sun. They were all happy in their employ with the Prince and thought highly of him. That fact shone through over the next few days. One commented how relaxed we appeared handling things.

“Don’t let the suit fool yah,” I replied.

When they finally all retired for the evening, the mansion went from a hustle and bustle to a whispering quiet. The lights dimmed. Security personnel all manned their positions for the evening. Robert and I decided to take a break with a leisurely drive and a coffee from a local drive-thru take away. Upon leaving the mansion through the back gates, we could not help but notice the watchful eyes of security everywhere. We locked the gate and on we went

Although both exhausted, we celebrated in our own little way. We had successfully completed the restoration of the mansion, including the north suites, the furniture fit out, to the last, minor details and,

more importantly, the “boss” was happy. The staff’s informal moniker for the prince went a long way to putting us at ease.

The next morning came early. At the crack of dawn, all the fires were being lit in the fireplaces. You could hear the crackling from the hot water running from the furnaces below through the five to six hundred feet of cast iron piping, to the waiting bathtubs and showers above. Outside, a dense fog descended around the mansion rolling in from the harbour along with a cold mist of rain. The umbrellas would be needed that morning for sure. But for now, it was time to boil the kettles for the tea and start the coffee brewing.

The chef was busy crisping up the bacon, cracking the eggs, and grilling the tomatoes. Meanwhile, the locally-sourced blueberries, bakeapples and partridgeberries simmered on the stove preparing to compliment the fresh bread baking in the ovens. The butler stuck his head in the kitchen and complimented the aromas that had greeted him as he descended from the third floor. When I had asked the chef at Clarence House for bread preferences, he had forwarded me recipes for Irish soda bread, English tea buns, and Scottish butter biscuits. My mouth watered as the baker took out the soda bread.

“Wait till it cools,” she warned.

“Don’t be so foolish,” I replied. “Put some partridge berries on it with a dab of cream so I can see if its fit for a future king and his missus.”

I admit, I was partially tempted to say it wasn’t good enough just so I could have it all to myself, but my face could not hide the Cheshire cat grin.

Breakfast went off without a hitch. *Upstairs Downstairs* were all ready to face the November morning in a seaport town. The prince and duchess descended the staircase, prepared to exit the mansion and carry out their official engagements. The cars were brought to the front complete with security detail.

I held the front door and as they stepped out with opened umbrellas, I commented, “Not the best of mornings out there, but it is supposed to clear.”

“Much like the English weather,” the prince replied.

Brazened by his response, I extended the conversation. “We refer to England here as ‘just across the pond’. Watch your step. The stair runners are a little on the damp side. Good day.”

With a slight nod of the head they headed down the front steps to the waiting cars.



Above: His Royal Highness Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall with staff on Ryan Mansion entrance steps

I turned around and ventured back inside. All was a buzz. The mansion staff tidied up from breakfast. Dishes clanged as they were returned to the dishwashing machines off the butler's pantry. Housekeeping tended to their duties. Fire logs were replenished in all fireplaces throughout the mansion. Candles were replaced in all the candle holders. Flowers were freshly watered. The chef



Above: *A Royal Convoy*

busied himself over the evening menu. I went down to the lower level where a surveillance team was stationed and enquired if they wanted coffee or needed anything else. The valet enquired about a tailor to replace an item on the prince's formal jacket. Robert arranged for one immediately with a quick phone call and off they went to the tailor's shop.

Before the valet left, he said to me, "You should look in on the prince's study."

It was on the second floor which he used as his office during his stay. As soon as I entered, I could not help but notice that the framed photo of my father and his brother Fred in proud Royal Navy dress had been moved from the fireplace to the desk the prince had been working on.

My father lost his brother in the war and was himself partially paralyzed from gunner's shrapnel. The simple action and acknowledgement by the prince by relocating the photo to his desk was a greater reward for the two Newfoundland fisherman than any of the medals that had been bestowed upon them. I lifted the photo, gave it a kiss, placed it back where he put it and proudly left the room.



Left: *Michael Nolan and his brother, Fred*

Downstairs, the chef came to me in a little bit of a panic. The fish shop only had fresh frozen halibut. He tried to assure me this will be as good.

“There are at least five hundred boats out there fishing today with cell phones and the like. One of them must have a fresh halibut on board. Tell the fish shop we only want fresh. Keep at them, and if not, try elsewhere.” I insisted. The chef walked off, shaking his head.

Security came to me. There was a delivery driver at the back gate. They wanted me to go out to confirm and accept. Out I went to meet a poor guy nervous as hell. He had no idea what was happening at the mansion. Normally, drivers pulled up, rang the bell, and someone opened the gate and signed for delivery. This time he was greeted by a sniffing security dog. I acknowledged, signed for, and accepted the parcel. Off he went, all ok.

We were informed that the prince and duchess would be returning to the mansion for a quick lunch before departing to their next function. They would be arriving in thirty minutes. I instructed the chef, and a light lunch was put into the works.

The royal couple returned right on time. Their lunch was served quickly, and they were whisked away just as swiftly for afternoon duties to return four hours later. Back they went into their suite to get ready for their next engagement.

“The duchess would like to know if it is customary for the ladies to wear their poppies at evening functions,” the valet asked.

I advised not all would be wearing but those that do will be respected for it. For those unaware, the poppy holds a special significance for Britain and many in Canada and Australia as well. It is a symbol of Remembrance Day as the deaths of all fallen armed forces personnel are recognized. The poppy is the flower of choice as, despite the ravages of war, it still bloomed upon scarred and bloodied battlefields of World War I.

A short time later, she descended the stairs behind the prince in a striking blue dress adorned with a red poppy. She had the stance, style, and poise of a duchess. Confident and attractive for her age, I could not help but ponder why the media was so fixated on

portraying her so differently then she actually was. In the three days I spent in her company, the British people can take comfort that she represented them well on the world stage. I could not help but notice that her staff respected her well, and rightfully so.

The cars pulled up in front of the mansion. Again, I held the door for them and could not help commenting.

“My Lady, you look stunning. Enjoy your evening.”

It became customary for me to attend to the door whenever they entered or exited the mansion. I would always get my cue from watching security’s movements inside and outside the mansion.

Shortly after their return, the chef had their meals prepared. Once the royals were finished, the chef quickly moved on to preparing food for the staff to be served in the main dining room. The night’s menu? Fresh halibut followed by bread pudding for dessert.

I was out in the lobby at the bottom of the staircase next to the fireplace delighting in the fact yet another successful day was coming to a close. I turned to discover the prince standing next to me.

“I hear we have something in common,” he mentions quite casually.

What in the name of Jesus could we possibly have in common?

I ticked the litany of differences off in my head.

Your mother is English, mine Scottish. Your family is Protestant, mine Catholic. My father a common fisherman, yours a prince.

Mind you, though, we were both brought up on bread pudding.

“I was shown some of your restoration work today,” he continued.

Apparently, when Robert ventured to the tailors with the valet, he had pointed out the Benevolent Irish Society buildings which were just up the road from the mansion. The valet had asked if we had a portfolio of our work and Robert gave him a CD which he must have then shown the prince. It showcased roughly a dozen or so historic properties in the downtown area that we had restored over the years.

That is when he posed the question. “Have you had any issues with your municipality?”



Above: Fully-restored BIS Building, St. Patrick's Hall, St. John's, Newfoundland



Above: *Before and after photos of St. Patrick's Hall (1877) fully restored by Kevin Nolan and Robert Hall (2002)*

He had only had the words out of his mouth for a moment when I blurted out, “Jesus, don’t be talking!”

From there it got worse as I quickly realized what I had just said and to whom I said it. I offered a remorseful apology of which he was having no part. Instead he thanked me for being so candid and tried to put me at ease.

“Can you elaborate?”

Restoring Ryan Mansion and preserving all the heritage features within was a challenge when dealing with the city building inspectors. While inspecting, they would use current codes with little regard to what the damage maybe to the past. Delays were constant due to demand appeals. I pointed to the fireplace burning brightly as an example.

“They wanted me to line the chimney with a light aluminum casing from the top of the exterior roof chimney to the firebox inside the mantle. It would have reduced the airflow by 200% which would have caused the draft to expel smoke into the rooms.

He surprised me with his reply. “We have had the same issues and problems.”

“Really? I would have expected your name would open doors.”

“Doors might open, but that does not mean we can walk through freely.”

He then mentioned a process that they had used on other projects where chimneys were required to be lined because of code issues. It involved a liquid coating that was cast down from the rooftop

to the firebox keeping the loss of draft flow to a minimum. I was amazed. I had never heard of it.

“I wonder if the inspectors here will approve?” I pondered. He suggested it had been approved with Lloyd’s of London.

He turned to his secretary, Giles. “Do we have Mr.Nolan’s coordinates?”

“Yes,” Giles replied. “I will see he receives the information.”

Next to the lobby where we stood was a small library with a desktop computer. The prince asked Giles if he could bring up certain properties.

I was fascinated by the work with which he was involved. Not only that, but now I knew what it was we had in common and it was nice being recognized by him for it.

Next morning after breakfast, they went off to other engagements. As usual, I manned the front door on both their departure and return. I must say there were quite a few of both over the three days. I could see why they required the sizeable staff. They would never be able to keep up with their commitments without them!

That morning, the rain was heavy. It rained cats and dogs. Umbrellas were a necessity. Fortunately, they had sturdy ones as the wind was howling. Once they departed, the mansion buzzed again, not only from cleaning staff, but with the flurry of activity from the royals’ staff. They readied for their exit and to meet the royals at the plane. The chef prepared a lunch for them for the trip to Toronto. The Canadian Armed Forces were parked outside waiting for their cue to transfer the luggage into the awaiting vans. Before the royal

couple exited for the final time, they gave both Robert and me a nice remembrance gift. They honoured us with pictures in the lobby by the staircase as well.



Above and Below: The Royals depart





Above: A Royal farewell **Below:** (From left to right) Kevin Nolan, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, HRH Prince Charles, and Robert Hall



What started as a nervous encounter became an unforgettable experience. Once they departed, my friend Elinor suggested a long drive around the countryside to wind down and relax. In the three days of the royals' visit, I would say if I had six hours of sleep, that was the extent of it. Elinor and I often took weekly drives, calling them "the orange and the green". My family was from the Catholic side while Elinor's hailed from the Protestant. Both Irish loops were separated by the main highway. The Catholic side hosted Knights of Columbus halls while the Protestant side sported Orangeman's Halls, like in the old country of my father's childhood and his fathers before him.

Today a Catholic is welcomed freely into an event in the Orangeman's Hall just as the Protestant is welcomed into one at the Knights of Columbus. It was a story from the past with a happy ending. Each drive would take around five hours to complete which included a leisurely lunch. That week we decided on the green route.

About one third of the way, I said to Elinor, "I am truly exhausted and not sure how far I can drive."

"Turn around," she said. "I will take over the wheel while you take a nap."

Within five minutes, I was out cold in the passenger's seat. I was oblivious until Elinor tried to wake me.

"Kevin, your phone keeps ringing. It might be Robert."

Robert stayed at the mansion as we were told that until the plane goes beyond halfway toward its destination, we had to be prepared in case it had to return. Robert had said there was no need for both of us to stay and encouraged me to relax and take the drive with Elinor.

The call was from Giles the Prince's private secretary. He indicated the prince enjoyed the conversation with me the previous evening and would like for me to elaborate on a few points I had made.

I did so readily.

When the conversation ended Elinor turned to me.

"You do realize that the Prince of Wales just called asking for your comments on a certain topic."

"Elinor, I'm half asleep. I can hardly remember what I said."

"Don't worry. You made perfect sense."

With that I passed out again until we were back in the city and I took back over the wheel.

That evening the NTV news hour aired a special on the three-day royal visit. We began to get phone calls from friends.

"Did you see the 6 o'clock news?" We had not.

The duchess was asked how her stay was in St. John's. "I would have to give Ryan Mansion a ten out of ten."

Obviously, we were delighted. Then, around three weeks later a letter came to Ryan Mansion from Highgrove, House.

Below: Thank you correspondence from Prince Charles



HIGHGROVE HOUSE

23rd November, 2009

Dear Mr. Nolan,

You really could not have taken better care of my wife and myself when we stayed at Ryan Mansion during our visit to Newfoundland earlier this month. I just wanted to send a personal note to say how very grateful we were for your kindness and for all the trouble you went to on our behalf.

If I may say so, it is always such a pleasure to find people who share my enthusiasm for buildings of character and who have a passion for doing things properly, and with sympathy and sensitivity. As a result, it was a great joy to stay in your splendid hotel and I shall never forget the fire logs made out of waste coffee grains – a brilliant idea!

This brings you warmest good wishes from my wife and myself and our renewed thanks for your hospitality.

Yours most sincerely
Charles

CHAPTER FOUR
***Throw Another Log
on the Fire***

The Princess Royal, Princess Anne

All guests that come to Ryan Mansion are treated as VIPs. When they come with assistants and security detail and needed a little extra attention, usually I was the one expected to greet them. Such was the case with Princess Anne.

I waited in the front foyer for my cue. The cars pulled up, first the security detail and then the Princess and her entourage. I opened the door and, as was royal custom, my arms were by my side.

“You come highly recommended by my brother,” the Princess commented.

I very nearly blurted, “Who’s your brother?”

After my “Jesus, don’t be talking” faux pas, I decided I had taken enough vocal liberties with the royal family and bit my tongue. The Princess was coming to Newfoundland in her capacity as Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.

To give a better understanding of the Regiment's history dating back to 1795, its contributions during the war of and the Great War of 1914, and the devastating effects to its population from the Battle of the Somme on July 1, 1916, I drew inspiration from The Rooms, a repository of archival information relevant to Newfoundland and Labrador established to help preserve cultural memory and the memory of many brave Newfoundlanders that have gone before. Newfoundlanders like Frederick "Fred" White, age 22, Regimental number 1481.

Like many of Newfoundland's sons, Fred White fought and died bravely on the fields of Beaumont-Hamel in the Battle of the Somme, one of the biggest offensives of World War I mounted by Allied troops. On behalf of the Newfoundland government, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Nangle, a military cleric, negotiated purchase of those same fields from French farmers with a determination to construct a War Memorial on the site. All Newfoundlanders were encouraged to support the campaign for same by any means possible.

Many Newfoundlanders heeded the call, including six-year-old Harvey White of Durrell Arm, Twillingate. In broken English but heart felt words, young Harvey wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Nangle and enclosed his small part for the cause. The letter is archived at The Rooms.

Dear Sir:

*I ham only a lettel Boy not quit seven yars old
I do go to school Every Day and I*

*ham in no. one Book
an I keep hed of the class Every Day
and I had one Dollar gave me four*

*keeping hed of the Class so I ham sending it to you four
Bhaumont*

*hamel memorial
that is the spot ware my Fathere*

*was killed July the First 1916.
I ham in closing one Dollar*

*Yours very truly
Harvey White,
Twillingate, Durrell Arm*

Though he never had the opportunity to meet his father, young Harvey, like many Newfoundlanders, gave their all to remember those who had fallen on the fields of France. The Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial opened on June 7, 1925, only three years after Harry White's heartfelt donation.

The sacrifices of the Newfoundland Regiment, a dominion of the British Empire at the time of World War I, were not only recognized by Newfoundlanders, but by King George V who added the extraordinary prefix Royal to the regiment's title in

1917. In 2010, Princess Anne, in her role as Colonel-in-Chief, arrived in St. John's to present new colours to the Regiment and we prepared to host another royal at Ryan Mansion.



Above: Princess Royal, Princess Anne at Ryan Mansion

From grand memorials to small tokens, there are many ways the past is honored and remembered, by commoners and royalty alike. It is interesting to note that during her visit to Newfoundland, the Princess was seen wearing a Forget-Me-Not.

Legend has it that when God was naming flowers that a plant called out to God.

“Forget-me-not, O Lord!”

God replied, “That shall be your name.”

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the Forget-Me-Not was used to commemorate “our nation’s dead,” those who had died in WWI or WWII. The small flowers were pinned in the same way that the poppy is used on Remembrance Day. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the tradition of wearing a Forget-Me-Not is still in limited use today. Following confederation with Canada, the tradition of wearing the Forget-Me-Not was displaced by the poppy. Forget-Me-Nots are used internationally to remind people to reflect over something worthwhile that has been given. Princess Anne also displayed the caribou, another important historical symbol in Newfoundland history.

The woodland caribou has long been an important symbol to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. In October 1915 there was a movement in the dominion, now province, of Newfoundland to have every person “wear the emblem of the 1st Newfoundland Regiment.”

On October 1, 1915, the St. John’s newspaper the *Daily Star* reported that members of the St. John Ambulance Nursing Division would be on the street corners in St. John’s selling the caribou emblem

for five cents. Their goal was to have every person “wearing the emblem of the 1st Newfoundland Regiment in honour of our boys who have had their first baptism of fire in the Dardanelles.”

It could be said that the caribou as an official symbol stumbled into our history. In 1638, King Charles I granted Sir David Kirke (Ferryland) the Coat of Arms of Newfoundland. The crest is unique in that the shield is topped by an image of an elk, remarkable in the fact that elk never inhabited Newfoundland or Labrador. Caribou, however, were and are commonplace. The elk is most probably used due to the fact that none of the English heralds of the 1600s had ever seen a caribou and, therefore, could not draw one. They did, however, know what an elk looked like and this animal was used instead.

On October 2, 1915, it is doubtless that the St. John Ambulance nurses sold many caribou emblems to the patriotic citizens of St. John's, all wanting to show their support to the Newfoundland Regiment. It would also mark the first time that the emblem was sold solidifying its place as the iconic symbol of Newfoundland and the Newfoundland Regiment.

Today in what were the fields of battle where Newfoundlanders fought, on what is now known as the “Caribou Trail” the caribou, the symbol of the regiment and the province stands facing the enemy line with its head thrown back in defiance, a symbol of Newfoundlanders’ bravery and fortitude.

Once the Princess was all settled and squared away, two of her accompanying staff members came down for tea

“Well, was she as you expected compared to her brothers?”

We had, of course, hosted Prince Charles at Ryan Mansion a year earlier. We had also hosted Prince Edward several years prior during a fundraiser for The Duke of Edinburgh Awards in a separate redevelopment project at the Benevolent Irish Society building St Patrick's Hall.

"To be honest," I began, "I found her a bit more staunch and formal. When she mentioned I came highly recommended by her brother, I had to bite my tongue. I nearly asked, 'Who's your brother?'"

I explained the slip of the tongue with Prince Charles. "I nearly died and could not apologize enough."

"What did he say?" the staffers asked in curiosity.

"He just grinned and thanked me for my candor."

They laughed "You really *should* have asked her 'Who's your brother?'. I can assure she might have found you cheeky but would have liked you for it."

"Is everything okay with her suite?" I queried.

"Yes. Perfect. She is relaxing in front of the fire with her tea and is working on her second piece of the dark fruit cake."

As usual, we had requested information on specific likes prior to her arrival. Ginger and dark fruit cake were on the list. We went to a local baker renowned for her abilities and requested an order for both. We made no mention as to whom the cakes were for, of course. The next day she called with an issue.

“I will prepare the ginger cake but will not be able to do the dark fruit cake you have requested.”

Well, at least we could procure one. They did say either, so we confirmed the ginger cake order. But I was not to be discouraged. I contacted my sister-in-law Judy. Every Christmas she would put half a dark fruit cake in my Christmas box. It would remind me of my mother’s and always brought back fond memories of another time. I told her who it would be for, full confidence in Judy’s discretion.

“Kevin! My cake would not be good enough!” she exclaimed.

“Let me be the judge of that,” I countered. So, without further ado, she agreed and started right away.

“Would it be ok to put the rum in it?” she asked nervously.

“Just make it the way you always do.”

On her second piece, indeed! Judy would be proud, I thought as I sat having tea with the Princess’ staff.

As it turns out, the cake wasn’t the only thing the Princess loved.

“She loves the fire logs. The Prince told her all about how they are made from recycled coffee grinds. You should give her one when she leaves.”

How am I supposed to pass a five-pound log to a Princess?

That’s like Cinderella and the coal.

Well, it didn't take coal, but the Princess did eventually warm up to me and me to her. It turned out to be a simple matter of her bark being bigger than her bite. Her staunch look grew into a warm smile. Before she left, we enjoyed several engaging conversations. Once, she let her guard down, you realized she had a warm subtle charming personality.

Upon leaving, she presented us with a gift. A framed, signed portrait.

"I heard you are collecting these," she teased. Her lady-in-waiting stood behind her, signaling with exaggerated facial expressions. She pointed to the fire in front of us.

She wanted me to give Cinderella a piece of coal!



Left: *The Princess signs the Ryan Mansion guest register*

The hell with it, I thought. I will. As the Princess signed the guest register, I backed up and reached into the oak closet to the right of the fire mantel. I grabbed one of those five-pound, recycled firelogs along with a paper package to hold it. When the Princess turned around, I casually handed it to her.

“I hear you would like one of these coffee logs,” I offer.

“Just one?” she responds.

Flustered, I replied, “If you give me a few minutes, I can parcel up a dozen to your car.”

“I’m just joking,” she replied, smiling. “One is just fine. Once when I am back at Gatcombe this evening, you can be assured I will be sitting in front of the fireplace having my tea and feeling the comfort from its burning.”

With that, I opened the door. We all bid our farewells and both Robert and I watched as they descended the stairs to the waiting cars.

Robert then swept the suite along with housekeeping to make sure nothing was forgotten. I was sitting in the kitchen with a four-shot Americano taking pride that another visit had successfully concluded. Robert entered with the nearly whole ginger cake. I’m not a lover of ginger cake myself, so I could relate. But dark fruit cake? Dark fruit cake is truly my favourite, especially when packed with fruit. Yes, even though it has flour and I remembered the wheat belly book’s chapter on man boobs, I make an exception for dark fruit cake.

“Bring on the fruit cake,” I chanted to Robert.

“Hate to disappoint you,” he informed. “Not a crumb left.”

Judy will be as proud as a peacock. It seemed her dark fruit cake was as big a hit with the princess as it always was with me.



Above: *Royal farewells with fond remembrances of fruitcake and firelogs*

CHAPTER FIVE
***He Loves Me. He Loves
Me Not.***

Meg Ryan and John Cougar Mellencamp

When the booking was made for John Cougar Mellencamp and Meg Ryan, it was made in their manager's name. It was not until they arrived that we knew exactly who they were. John was a smoker and, although not permitted inside the mansion, we did make allowances for the private courtyard under the hundred-year-old oak tree next to the lion's head fountain. Both he and Meg spent a fair bit of time there, her wrapped up in his arms and him puffing away.

But there were more outside spaces in St. John's than our courtyard.

I received a call from the city manager asking if I would sit on a board whose mandate was to restore and enhance North America's oldest Victorian park, Bannerman Park, which happens to sit directly across from Ryan Mansion. Since development was my forte, it was impossible to say no. Additionally, it afforded me the opportunity to give back.

About a year earlier, I was in Kingston, Ontario visiting my niece who was in the Palliative Care Ward at Queens Hospital. My visit was a bit of a surprise. So was her pale complexion and lack of hair. Her big hugs and tears made my own hard to hold back but, for her sake, I remained stoic.

“Uncle Kevin,” she requested. “Can you do me a favour?”

“Whatever you ask,” I replied without hesitation.

“There is a place, not too far from here, where I really want to go but they won’t let me. I will tell them I am going with you to the cafeteria. I can put *that* thing on my head.”

She directed my gaze to a long hair wig that resembled her own former locks.

“How convenient!” I tried to make light. “You can wash your face and head in one clean swoop.”

“Let me put on a little lipstick,” she said.

I wanted to tell her to take it off. It made her face look ever so pale.

“How do I look?” she asked.

I decided it was time for a little white lie and if there’s really a guy up there keeping score, the hell with him.

“Roxanne, you look every bit as beautiful as that day I walked you up the aisle.”

This was not the first tragedy Roxanne had endured. My older

brother Fred, her father, had died young. She asked me to give her away on her wedding day, an honor I proudly accepted. She looked at me directly, her eyes flooding with tears.

“Enough of that!” I ordered. “Let’s get the Jesus out of here.”

What I didn’t say was, “While I still have the strength to push that thing.”

I helped her into a wheelchair and grabbed the throw near her bed. It looked like one of her kids’ blankets. Properly tucked and stowed, off we went. I wheeled her past the nurses’ station where she introduced me as “her favourite uncle that came all the way from Newfoundland just to visit me”.

“Imagine that!” She continued, launching into the planned lie. “I’m just going to the cafeteria with him to have a cup of tea.”

We continued to the elevator where she gave me a clear set of instructions.

“Push M. Wheel me near the door. Bring the car around, then come back in and get me.” A regular Bonnie and Clyde, we were. I popped off to collect the getaway car.

Upon my return, two nurses were busy chatting away with her. Roxanne cut them off.

“Well, here’s my uncle. I’ve got to go have tea with him, now. He’s is very busy and has to leave soon.”

The nurses said their farewells walked toward the elevator.

“Wait a minute,” Roxanne warned me under her breath. A brief thirty seconds passed. “Let’s go!”

I got her in the car just feet from the hospital door when she gestured to the wheel chair. “We’ve got to take this.”

I shoved the chair in the back of the car. I got into the driver’s seat and she stared at me with the sweetest of grins behind that stark lipstick. I leaned over and gave her a kiss on her pale cheek then put the car in gear.

Her directions came with a focused intent. “Go straight. Turn right. Turn left. Go straight. Now left again. Stop here.”

We were about a mile from the hospital in the middle of the city near the entrance to a park.

“Will you please get the wheel chair?” she asked. I quickly obliged.

I helped her into it. Again, she gave me direction, pointing to a particular section of the park. We wheeled down a cobblestone path into a private garden. She had me stop and read the sign.

It was memory garden, beautifully landscaped with a water fall burbling in the middle. Engraved granite stones dotted the pathway. She asked me to position her chair towards the sun while I sat on the park bench adjacent. The sounds of the birds chirping, the sound of the water dancing on the iron grate below, and the smell of the summer flowers lulled her into a gentle sleep. I moved the blanket up around her and returned to my perch to read a pamphlet she had given me and to reflect on the conversation we’d had when she’d handed it to me.

“Uncle Kevin,” she had said. “I don’t want my kids to visit me at a graveyard like where my father lay. I would like them to remember me here with a memory stone what do you think?”

It was hard to keep my eyes from watering.

My thoughts drifted back to Bannerman Park. The first meeting, when I would go back as fund development chair, was scheduled for just a few days later. My role was to raise \$3,000,000 which the city promised to match, dollar for dollar, to the tune of \$6,000,000. The section of the park which was directly across from Ryan Mansion was dark. Damp, but with beautiful trees. A perfect place for a garden just like this.

When Roxanne awoke two hours later, she asked me what I thought.

“I think it’s perfect, I replied.

“Will you help me fill out the form?”

“Most definitely.”

On the way back in the car as she thanked me, I said, “I have to thank *you* for bringing me to the park and letting me see such a beautiful space within the city. One that can be recreated in St. John’s.”

I explained Bannerman Park project and my function on the board. “I am going to work to make this happen. There will be a stone for you and your father so when your children return to Newfoundland, they don’t have to visit either of you in the graveyard. There will be all kinds of attractions alongside the

memory gardens. Skating trails, water features, playgrounds, a swimming pool, and the like.”

It was going to be beautiful.

Just like Roxanne.

We received several raised eyebrows as we returned past the nurses’ station.

“That was a long cup of tea, Roxanne.”

“We had a lot of catching up to do,” Roxanne quickly replied. “It’s been a long time since our last visit.”

With that, I helped her into her bed.

“Uncle Kevin, I can’t keep my eyes open.” She removed her wig. Before I could turn back from returning it to the mannequin head, she was sound asleep. I gave her a kiss on the cheek and headed back to the elevator. Although I choked back tears, I was also happy for the gift of sharing a lovely afternoon with her, one of the last ones in her life. I returned to St. John’s, the Bannerman Park plans, and, a year or so later, our new guests at the Ryan Mansion.

John was fully respectful of observing our smoking policy, keeping his habit to the yard. He and Meg arrived just a few days before John’s concert at Mile One Stadium to relax. His crew stayed at a nearby hotel.

After his first performance, he returned to the mansion requesting coffees and ice water. He suggested I join them in their suite. They had one of the larger suites with a large separate parlour complete

with fireplace, wet bar, and plenty of seating, to which he gestured.

“Take a seat and rest a spell.”

His personal massage therapist massaged the calves of his legs.

“They are extremely tight tonight, John” she worked away.

As the masseuse worked her magic, I sat, joining John for some conversation. It was a bit surreal. Here was this rock legend sitting next to me, chatting as freely as if I knew him for years. In a way, I suppose I did, through his songs and lyrics.

“Do you smoke?” he asked.

“I used to. Three packs of Camels Plain a day. I practically made love to them.”

“Why did you give them up?”

I thought about it. “When I was thirty-six, I gave up the booze. When I was thirty-seven, I gave up red meat. The next year I tackled the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do in my life. Give up smoking.”

I sighed. “Six months of hell.”

“Do you ever crave one?”

“Yes, and if I smell a Camel or a Marlboro, I’ve gotta get out of the way. That’s when I’m at the weakest.”

“When did you start smoking?”

“When I was fourteen. My parents did everything to keep me in school. I had failed grade seven. When I told them I wasn’t repeating it, they transferred me to a school 100 kilometers from St. John’s in a small town called Freshwater. I was accepted into a Catholic school, Holy Rosary, and was sent to live with my father’s sister. My father’s brother, who worked at the American Naval base, lived just next door. He smoked Camels Plain and bought them by the cartons. My cousin, only a year older than me would, shall we say ‘borrow’ them. Puff, puff, puff and I was hooked at the tender young age of fourteen.”

John chuckled. “You were a late bloomer. I started at ten and have no plans to quit. Good thing is I don’t drink. That’s a bad combination. Booze and smokes together. If I take up the booze, I’ll give up the smokes, but I don’t have any plans to take drinking anytime soon.”

We all had our vices, I supposed.

“Well,” I replied, “smoking was the hardest habit for me to break. Won’t take so much as a puff, ‘cause I know I’ll never have that much will power again. So, no booze, no red meat, no smokes.”

“What’s left to give up? Sex?” John laughs.

I join him. “Wheat.”

“Wheat?” he asks curiously. “Why wheat?”

“When men get older, wheat goes directly to their chest. It creates man boobs.”

Shock registered on his face. “Fuck, Meg did you hear that?”

She had been sitting quietly, listening to our exchange. John shook his head. “Well, I haven’t had a drink for forty years, but the smokes that’s another thing. Was told to quit long ago, even before the first heart attack, but it’s one of my better pleasures. I’m too good at it and have no plans to stop.”

This whole time, the massage therapist was working out the kinks in his legs. He needed to be in top condition for his second show the following evening.

“Would you like to come?” he asked. “I’ll get you front row seats.”

I nodded. “Great!. Much appreciated.”

The plans were set in stone. But it wasn’t the only stone that would involve Mr. Mellencamp and Ms. Ryan.

“Mary showed me a brochure for a restaurant in Dildo,” John said. “Is there really a place called Dildo?”

His skepticism at the name didn’t surprise me one bit. One thing was for sure. Newfoundland has its own distinct character.

“Yes,” I laughed. “It’s a village right on the ocean. Been there since the 1700s.”

“No, shit.” He stared.

I laughed. “No, shit.”

“You listening to this, Meg?”

Meg and the mansion housekeeper were already on the way to

becoming the best of friends. It was not unusual to hear Meg calling throughout the mansion, “Mary! Mary! Where are you?”

Whatever the latest request was, dutiful Mary made certain it was fulfilled. Extra towels, more coffee or, as it turns out a Dildo.

“Yes,” Meg replied to John’s question. “Mary already-told me. She said they have the best fish and chips.”

John had a copy of the one-page menu.

“Is the chowder as good as it sounds?And I want to try this Dildo ‘sticky pudding.’”

“I can arrange to have it brought in from Dildo for after the show,” I offered with a semi-straight face. “What would you like.”

“A big bowl of that chowder with those biscuits. Meg?”

“I want the same and I think I would like to try the sticky pudding.”

“Can we have a couple of those Dildo sticky pudding things?” he laughs.

“No problem.”

And that, I thought, was that. But there were more laughs on the menu with Mr. Mellencamp.

“Well,” he continued. “I like learning something new everyday, and this really qualifies. How do you get a name like Dildo?”

“I can tell you it was named long before batteries came around.”

DINE ON THE DOCK

Dildo Dory

GRILL

PUB STYLE RESTAURANT

Get Started

Cod Tongues A Newfoundland favourite that will leave both you and 'The cod' speechless. Lightly fluffed in seasoned flour, pan fried, and served golden brown with enjoy scrunchions and lemon. **13.50**

Mussels On the deck or in the dining room, our mussels are always a favourite! Perfectly steamed in either a WHITE WINE & GARLIC or a TANGY TOMATO sauce. **13**

Calamari Golden, crispy fried squid served piping hot with choice of homemade tartar, seafood sauce or garlic aioli. **12.50**

Nachos Hand cut and prepared corn chips, loaded with Sweet Peppers, Onions, Tomatoes, Hot Banana Peppers, and melted Tex Mex Cheese. Served with Sour Cream and Salsa. **14**

Grilled Chicken - Add Soy Sauce & Add Guacamole. **12.95**

Gourmet Onion Rings Large beefsteak style onion rings deep fried to a crisp perfection. Served with ranch dip. **7.50**

Wings Lightly dusted and seasoned. Your choice of Dry Spice, Hot sauce or Ultimate BBQ. Served with hot cheese or ranch dip, celery and carrot sticks. **13.50**

Poutine Our signature fries smothered in homemade gravy and a blend of mozzarella cheese. **Small \$ Large 11**

Fill Your Boots Can't decide? Try this innovative pouter with calamari, onion rings, cod fish, wings and hand cut homemade fries. Served with choice of dip. **19.50**

GET HOOKED

IN COD WE TRUST
In Newfoundland, if you're having fish... then, you're having Cod. Salmon is Salmon. Halibut is Halibut. But Cod is Fish. So when we say "the fish is fresh" we mean that the Cod was probably caught today... near Jones. Did we mention "our fish is always fresh"?

Pan Fried Cod Freshly placed from the icy cold North Atlantic, and pan fried to perfection with pork scotch onions. Served with hand cut homemade fries, daily vegetable scotchions, homemade tartar sauce, and traditional mustard pickles. **\$17.50** (substitute side salad or sweet potato fries **\$2.50**)

Fish Cakes Creamy potatoes with fresh cod and sauteury served up as three golden brown fish cakes. Served with hand cut homemade fries, daily vegetable scotchions, homemade tartar sauce, and traditional mustard pickles. **13.50** (substitute side salad or sweet potato fries **\$2.50**)

Sampler Plé Perfect as an appetizer or light meal, enjoy two fishcakes served with homemade tartar. **9.50**

Cod Bites Perfect for the desk? Bite size pieces of local cod hand dipped in our signature F&C batter, deep fried to perfection. Served with hand cut homemade fries, tartar sauce and coleslaw. **12**

Fish Burger Fresh caught, lightly battered and deep fried cod served up on a toasted bun and topped with lettuce, tomato, onion and homemade tartar sauce. Served with our hand cut signature fries. Oh my Cod! **14.50**

SHRIMP LA FAVE

Homemade Chicken Fingers A local favourite! Five fresh cut chicken fingers lightly dusted and deep fried to perfection! Served with hand cut homemade fries, homemade coleslaw and choice of dipping sauce. **14**

BURGERS

Dory Burger Not a seafood fan? Never fear! We've got the best! 100% Seasoned Beef burger loaded up with Bacon, Cheddar, BBQ Sauce, Aioli, Lettuce, Tomato. Topped off with a gourmet onion ring. Served on a Toasted Bun with hand cut fries and coleslaw. **14.50**

Grilled Chicken Burger Fresh off the grill, this honey lime Marinated Chicken Breast is topped with fresh mayo, onions, fresh lettuce & tomato. Tamed Served on toasted bun with hand cut fries and coleslaw. **14.50**

Veggie Burger Give pasta a chance... plus a few other grains and vegetables. Topped with lettuce, tomato and aioli. Served on a toasted bun with hand cut fries and coleslaw. **14.50**

DESSERTS

Dildo Sticky Pudding Created in our very own kitchen, our Dildo signature pudding will put a smile on your face and a warm feeling in your soul. Baked Fresh and filled with dates. Topped with homemade caramel or Newfoundland rubh sauce and vanilla ice cream. **6.95**

Steamed Partridge Pudding A traditional Newfoundland cake, loaded with local berries and topped with vanilla ice cream and your choice of homemade caramel or Newfoundland rubh sauce. **Available 6.95**

Today's Sweet-Treat Ask your server for today's selection of sweet treats. Available with one or more spoons.

SOUP

A local favourite, our hearty **Vegetarian Pea Soup** will warm ya right up. Served with oven baked toast. **Cup 6.50 Bowl 8.50**

CHOWDER
OUR SPECIALTY

Seafood Chowder Thick and creamy, our famous seafood chowder is loaded with chunks of fresh cod, salmon, and local root vegetables, served with oven baked sea biscuit. **Cup 7.50 Bowl 11**

GET TOSSED

House Salad A house specialty! Crisp leafy greens, red onion, dried cranberries, crunchy walnuts, creamy goat cheese. Served with our famous house-made blueberry vinaigrette. **Side 6.75 Main 11.50**

Hot Caesar Salad It never ceases to amaze how a single salad remains so popular year after year! Crispy Romano, real bacon, creamy parmesan and just the right garlic bite will show you why ours is a favourite! **Side 6.75 Main 11.50**

BEST! FISH & CHIPS

ALSO AVAILABLE GLUTEN-FREE!

BEST FISH & CHIPS Fresh, wild, North Atlantic cod hand caught by local fishermen, dipped in our signature batter and lightly fried to golden perfection. Served with our hand cut signature fries, homemade tartar sauce and coleslaw. From now on, when you think "best fish & chips," you'll think "Dildo Dory!"

One Piece 13 Two Piece 16.50

Coffee / Tea
Regular | Decaffeinated | Herbal Tea

Juice
Apple | Orange | Cranberry | Clamato

Soda
Pepsi | 7-Up | Ginger Ale | Orange
Diet Pepsi | Diet 7-Up | Root Beer

2.75

KIDS

(12 and under)
\$7.00

Grilled cheese sandwich
Chicken Fingers (2)
Mini Beef Burger
Cod Bites (4)
Hot Dog

Served with
Kids size juice or soft drink
Signature hand cut fries
Vanilla Ice Cream for dessert

9 Front Street 709.582.5799 www.dildodorygrill.ca

Gluten free available. Ask your server.

Above: Menu at Dildo Dory's

The chuckles continued. “It’s located in Trinity Bay, just up from Come By Chance and Spread Eagle.”

Did I mention Newfoundland had a distinct character?

I continued. “After the town of Dildo, you have the villages of Heart’s Delight, Heart’s Desire, Heart’s Content, and Cupids.”

John blinked, dumbfounded. “You aren’t shitting me.”

“Nope,” I said as we all laughed.

“But, seriously, the name has a legitimate source.”

As a young boy, sitting in the boat with my fisherman father, he would row while I sat at the back, cod fish squirming in the bottom of the boat halfway up my boots.

“Pass me a dildo,” he’d order. “A white one.”

There would always be two small buckets in the boat. One filled with white dildos and one with dark brown, each about the size of a cigar, and all of which my father would carve himself.

“What’s the difference?” I’d ask.

He told me one was carved out of wood and the other whale bone. “The whale bone is harder and there’s less chance it will snap when the oar is forced against it.”

I explained to John, “A dildo is what a fisherman places in the holes and then the oar is placed between them.”



Left: Personalized Mellencamp-Ryan stone installed in Bannerman Park Memory Garden

With that, he sat up. “I’ve got to have a smoke.”

The massage therapist tidied-up her stuff and left the suite while I silently considered Bannerman Park and the plans for the Memory Garden with its stones.

We really needed to start off with a great promotion. Here I had North America’s Sweetheart, star of a host of successful romantic comedies like *Sleepless in Seattle* and *When Harry Met Sally* and John Cougar Mellencamp, a rock legend and they’re staying in a suite directly across from the planned location of the Memory Gardens.

It has to be a sign, I thought.

I brought the subject up to the couple.

“Nope,” said John.

Meg had a different opinion. “It does not sound all that bad.”

“Good,” I began. “Think about it then. Enjoy your smoke and looking forward to tomorrow’s concert.”

Well, the tickets arrived. I had arranged for the thick and creamy chowder and the Dildo Sticky Pudding to be delivered to the mansion after the concert. I took a gamble and had a granite stone carved with their name on it to be ready for the next afternoon. When they came in the dining room there was a thirty-pound stone with a heart in the middle.

“I love it,” Meg says.

John shook his head. “No way.”

“Do you love me, or love me not?” Meg challenged the legendary rocker.

“What happens if we split?” he countered.

“The other side is blank. Just send an email and I will turn it over,” I interjected, eager to sell them both on the concept. John finally caved.

“Okay. Lay it.”

I decided to push my luck. “Well, I was hoping you would come across in the morning before you leave and have a picture taken with it. It is the first stone and it will help launch the beginning of the campaign.”



Above: (From left to right) John Cougar Mellencamp, Meg Ryan, and Kevin Nolan

They agreed...with a caveat. I had to be in the picture with them.

Now it was my turn to balk. “No

They called my bluff. “Well, if you are not going to be in the picture, then we won’t either.”

I sighed. What I wouldn’t do for a good cause...it really did “hurt so good”.

The concert was a big hit as was the chowder and the Dildo Sticky Pudding. The laying of the stone was a seminal moment, both because it was their first public proclamation of their love and because it marked the start of a very successful launch. I was able to recruit Newfoundland Canadian superstar Mary Walsh as our Campaign Chair and together with a great team we raised in excess of the funds needed and way ahead of schedule.

CHAPTER SIX
***A Scotsman in Leopard
Skin Tights***

Sir Billy Connolly

He had me laughing. Not exactly for what he said, but for the flair with which he said it.

“My liberties are off to take a bang!” With that, he straddled the bannister and slid down the flight on his arse. His eyes suddenly widened, and he popped off just before he landed, center-spread, on the large, solid oak, hand-carved pineapple newel post on the main floor landing.

“Well, that’s not exactly the type of bang I was thinking about,” he mused as he dusted himself off.

Who in the name of Jesus was this?

He sort of sounded like my mother, a Scottish war bride, but the similarity ended there. My mother would never have been seen in form-fitting, leopardskin tights!



Left: *Sir Billy survives the newel post*

I had no idea who Billy Connolly was. Not a clue. But here was this very slim guy, hair down to his arse, standing right in front of me, dressed in leopard skin tights.

“What do you think? Am I dressed right for George Street?” he asks. “That’s where the crew is taking me. They’re *en route*.”

The crew, as it so happened, were staying at another hotel we owned with an operating partner. It was a larger spot with more rooms, nice accommodations, at a third of the price. It was customary when tours came through, to book Ryan Mansion for the talent,

and secure less expensive accommodations for crew elsewhere. Celebrities also generally preferred their privacy.

George Street was in downtown St. John's, just four blocks away from Ryan Mansion. Close, yet just far enough away so noise wasn't a bother. From Ryan Mansion, the walk was easy. All downhill. Just picture a miniature San Francisco. Steep hills clustered with bright colourful houses to appreciate on the leisurely stroll down. Coming back, on the other hand, I advise guests to take a cab. It curbs the complaining at breakfast when your head aches and competes with your back and legs for relief. One is never sure which one to listen to.

George Street is a cobblestone lane lined with pubs and restaurants tightly knit together. There's every kind of music you can imagine. A few of the pubs can be on the vicious side. Others, the rowdy.

I gave the leopard-skinned Scotsman the names of a few lively Newfoundland Irish bars with great music I thought he would enjoy and vice versa. Before he departed for the evening's festivities, I asked if I could grab a snap on the staircase.

"And that you can!" he replied heartily.

"Right up front! I gotta get a picture of those tights," I begged.

And I did.

They say there are more pubs per square foot on George Street than anywhere else in North America. Several play great Newfoundland Irish tunes. I gave him the name of several of those. Then, his mates came and down over the hill and off they went with the man in the leopard skin tights.

When I was twenty-five years old, I had a hairstyling shop outside Vancouver in British Columbia. Business was so-so. The stylists making the big bucks were all the Europeans that immigrated to Canada. I finally decided, enough was enough. I did a little research to see who was the best to learn from in all the world. All fingers pointed to Vidal Sassoon. So, with a little help from my friendly banker, I went to London's theatre district, just off Piccadilly, to Sassoon's shop in the East End. There, I took lessons from the best.

It was an experience. I learned a combination of style techniques, but it was the lessons in marketing savvy I prized the most.

"What do you charge in your salon?" he asked.

The answer did not please.

"When you get back in Canada, place an ad in your local magazines that you are back from the Sassoon Academy in London and are now taking appointments. Put your rate up to three times the present rate for any appointments made with you exclusively." I thought he was nuts but decided to give it a try.

His advice was priceless.

I could not have been busier, and the money? Well, let's just say it was good. In no time at all, I bought my first new car. A shiny, red Camaro. There is a story involving the Camaro and a long-haired goat. But that's a story for another time. Two years later, I laid down the diamond-blade scissors gifted to me, sold the Camaro, and moved on to a completely different business venture and have never looked back.

I have fond memories of my time with Vidal Sassoon. I learned much. When I looked at Billy Connolly, with his hair to his arse, I



Above: Sir Billy's "round table"

could not help but wonder.

What would Sassoon do?

Never a man to back down from a challenge, by Jesus, Silly Billy would have given him one. Forget the diamond scissors.

He'd need a machete.

The next morning, Sir Billy joined his mates for breakfast at the round table of Ryan Mansion. The good knight was keeping court. But, from the sounds of things, none had kept my advice.

“Oh, my legs.”

“Oh, my back.”

“Oh, can I get another large glass of that orange juice, but could ya put a bit of ice in it?”

During breakfast, I started to gain a better appreciation for silly Billy. He continuously spouted amusing anecdotes that kept all within earshot laughing.

By this time, Robert, the madGoogler, had called me over.

“Kevin, look at this!”

There were tons of articles on Sir Billy. Even though I had never heard of him before, after reading a few of those articles and watching a few videos, I would have to consider him a Steve Martin with a Glasgow accent. Over the next few days I got to appreciate him more, breakfasts at the round table becoming strategy sessions. He was starting his latest tour, *Journey to the Edge of the World*. They were filming segments while in town. One day, as he prepared to take a drive up the Irish Loop, he sipped on a bottle of our iceberg water.

“Where does this iceberg water come from?” he asked.

“An iceberg,” I state, matter-of-factly.

“Oh, shit! You’ve got to get me on an iceberg!” he cried.

I didn’t know about actually getting *on* it. It’s dangerous. It would be easy enough to go out on a barge and pull up alongside, though. I went to the internet and punched in: www.icebergfinder.com.

Within one second, it gave the location of three bergs off the coast of St. Anthony. It was far north and, as it was late in the season, his best bet. Back in the breakfast room with the knight and his mates, I gave them important information for safety directly from the iceberg site, as well as coordinates as to the three I located, and information on boat hire.

Then I told him about the iceberg cowboys.

It takes a certain kind of crazy to brave twenty-foot waves and sidle up next to a towering mountain of solid ice and then jump on of your own free will. You have to be even crazier to drill holes in the ice and intentionally drop live dynamite into them to blow it apart. If that wasn't enough excitement, you could always lasso the frozen behemoths with pike-tipped ropes and haul them from the shipping paths. These were the nutters that were called ice cowboys, I told him.

“What? You are shitting me!”

“No,” I replied quite honestly. “You should be able to find some of these guys while you are up there. How do you think they get pieces of those icebergs all the way to land and into the bottle?”

Then I told him that icebergs weren't the only thing that got towed in to land.

As real estate developers, we had purchased an historic building on Water Street close to the harbour. It was sort of derelict, but quite attractive from the exterior with its dark brick facade. It had an architectural pedigree, designed by Williams Adams Delano and Chester H. Aldrich, chosen designers for America's richest like the Rockefellers and the Vanderbilts. They gifted their design to Sir Wilfred Grenfell and assisted in the construction.

The building had seen historic events like the 1914 Newfoundland Sealing Disaster, a tragedy where seventy-eight men froze to death on the ice fields. They were towed into the wharf alongside the building and brought down to the lower level swimming pool where they could thaw. Afterward, they were brought back up to the main floor ball room and laid out to wake. The room wasn't small. Neither was the grief.

The interior of the building was in no way like the exterior. Years of sitting vacant with a wide-open roof to the elements like sleet, snow, and rain had fostered rampant mold growth. I was approached by the filming scout for the movie *Red Door*, who had seen the building from the outside and thought it would be perfect for their film shoot. I had my doubts, but the deal was struck.

One day during filming, I visited the set. There was a great deal of shouting going on. The ceilings in the ball room had two huge, broken beveled-glass sky lights set in the fifteen-foot ceilings. The film crew had suspended 3 x 30-foot square heavy plastic which gathered the water and directed it to diverting hoses. A few thousand litres dangled precariously over our heads as the plastic filled. I stood there in amazement. The room was cold and damp as there had been no electricity in the building for years. I spent most of my time transfixed on that saggy plastic, expecting it to break at any moment. I looked at all their T.V. monitors powered by the huge generator parked outside on the street, humming like a great beast. The crew had white washed the walls. I watched the filming itself. Action. Cut. Action. Cut. The flurry of activity had me dizzy.

I wondered how all the ghosts in the room felt.

In the end, looking at the final product, you would think the movie had been shot in a 19th century mansion.

What they couldn't do in the movies these days.

After the wrap, it was business as usual. I was back at Ryan Mansion and Sir Billy was back at breakfast keeping the stories spinning.

He was an interesting chap to meet, a pleasure to get to know, and a fashionable beast. If my Scottish mother, with her own particular brand of humour, had been alive she would have enjoyed his anecdotes immensely. I can still see her now, beaming with a bit of pride whenever she talked of Scotland. Silly Billy would have been all right in her book.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Bar of Gold

k.d. lang

Between her Patsy Cline covers and her version of *Hallelujah*, the distinctive k.d. lang was a sound easily remembered. And, after her stay at the Ryan Mansion, a face not easily forgotten as well.

I had tried to get tickets for k.d., who was playing at the Opera House in Sydney, Australia, but they were sold out almost the moment they went on sale. I had intended the tickets to be a Christmas gift for Robert to coincide with an upcoming February trip to Sydney. The plan was to stay in Sydney for three weeks, then embark on the QEII for a twenty-six-day cruise from Sydney to Hong Kong. We traveled through five ports in Australia before we were to cruise onward to Bali, Manila, Japan, Taiwan, and eventually Hong Kong where we intended to disembark.

Our scheduled stop in Bali was cancelled due to terrorist threats. Then, the Manila stop was cancelled because a tourist bus had been bombed the day before. Both good reasons to forego a visit.

The Taiwan stop was cancelled due to waves. Obviously, they had never crossed from Nova Scotia on the Newfoundland ferries.

The ship's last cruise was drawing to a close and rightfully so. Between having to step over buckets collecting leaking water from the upper decks, the aging carpets, and the rusty pipes, one might think she was the *Titanic* on her worst day, gussied up with a splash of paint. The ship was being sold to a group in Dubai with plans to turn her into a floating hotel. We were leaving the ship to spend ten days in Hong Kong before heading home back to St. John's.

Still hoping to catch k.d., I explored the possibility she might be playing Hong Kong, but, alas, the timing still did not work out. Another big name that *was* available was Nora Jones, fortunately one of Robert's favourites. Only front row seats were available, and the price was near that of the entire cruise. But my shopping days were waning. Christmas was only a few days away. So, I clicked "purchase" on my computer screen and that was that. Done and dusted.

The evening of the concert arrived, and we traveled to the far side of Hong Kong harbour on the *Star Ferry*. It was certainly a step down from the QEII, but an adventure in and of itself and a far more pleasant experience. The Sony Center was dark when we arrived, just five minutes before the concert started. We were shown to our seats by attendants with flash lights. Although front row, we were three tiers up. A good view, but not quite as represented. However, we settle into our seats, prepared to enjoy the show.

We only seated for a few minutes when the two attendants returned asking to see our tickets. It seemed we were occupying some else's seats. The attendants motioned for us to follow, which

we did. How far back are they taking us, I wondered.

Meanwhile, Nora walked on stage and sat at the piano. As she began “Come Away with Me”, they sat us in seats just below. Beyond Nora’s playing, you could not hear a pin drop. The acoustics from our position were so spectacular it was like a private concert. But all play and no work does not a paycheck make. So, with the Miss Jones’ soulful stylings still echoing in our ears, we returned to Newfoundland to get back to business.

Back in St. John’s, we were developing the Benevolent Irish Society (BIS) buildings, into condos and townhome estates. The middle unit was called The Tower. It boasted 8,000 total square feet with thirty-five-foot ceilings. There were ninety-nine steps from the ground floor to the top of the fourth-floor mezzanine, so a private elevator was a necessity and not a luxury.

The Juno Awards, Canada’s top music awards, were being held in St. John’s and a lot of famous entertainers and award-winners were arriving in town like jazz-pianist Diana Krall. Several weeks prior, I had given a tour to representatives of *SaturdayNight Magazine* for an article they were publishing on our development project. As it happens, a copy of the same article was in Ms. Krall’s private plane as she traveled to St. John’s to attend the award ceremony. My phone rang off the wall with a pressing request. Ms. Krall wanted a tour.

Now.

Her available time was brief, it seemed. She only had a small window before she was scheduled to arrive at the awards and begin her warmup and practice for her appearance. Now was the only time she had to take a tour of the facilities.

Well, considering this monstrosity and financial gamble of an 1870s reconstruction had been already on the market for eighteen months, the answer was “yes, please and make an offer”. I’m glad Robert had had the foresight to have things all prepared, just in case. All I had to do was light the fireplaces and turn on the music which was piped into every room. The thirty-five-foot domed ceilings of the former Nickel Theatre on the top floor allowed for a music quality just slightly below that of the Sony Center a month earlier in Hong Kong. The first song of the *Come Away with Me* album had just begun, the lights perfectly dimmed, and the fires lit just as the doorbell chimed. As I opened the door and I reached to shake her hand, As I looked into her eyes, a sobering thought hit me like a ton of bricks.

Jesus! I’ve got on the wrong bloody music.

There was no way to change it at that point. As I mentioned earlier, name recall is not my strong suit. When I was told Diana Krall, I pictured Nora Jones. Fortunately, she was preoccupied with the viewing, she showed no signs of bother as we scaled the full ninety-nine steps. I left the elevator feature for last. It was a sincere pleasure taking both her and her entourage on the tour. She seemed to enjoy both the walk about the property and the music.

“I’m in love with the property, but I think it would be more ideal to be closer to Vancouver. I had just heard so much about the property I had to see it. It’s truly stunning,” she later commented.

Speaking of stunning, we may not have been able to go to k.d. lang, but, as luck would have it, k.d. lang was coming to see us. A year after the Junos, which she also attended, k.d. lang checked in to the Ryan Mansion as a welcome guest. The next morning, our breakfast cook called me in a tizzy. Tanya was barely five foot and

hardly ninety pounds soaking wet, but don't let that fool you. She was a feisty one.

Each morning, she would invent a creative breakfast for all guests. Tanya made it a point to visit each table describing her culinary delicacies in great detail. She always followed her editorial with a grudging concession.

“Now if ya don't like that, I can always pop something else on for ya.”

If I have to.

That morning, she had to.

“She turned her nose up at my eggs benny. Ya knows what she wants? Poached eggs, soft medium, and sautéed spinach. Who ever heard of fried spinach? I uses that for salads!”

“Do we have any?” I asked.

Tanya opened the fridge. “Yes. Look. Two bags full.”

I put in a quick call to my culinary muse, my old friend Barb. I called her secretary and impressed the urgency of the matter. She put me right through. Frantically, I asked for the preparation instructions for sautéed spinach.

“Easy to do, Kevin,” Barbara assured. I put her on speaker. “Do you have a wok?”

Next to me instantly was a face puckered like a Cabbage Patch Doll. Tanya wasn't happy but, presto, a wok appeared on the stove. Barbara's instructions came quickly.

“Dice up a small garlic. Heat up a teaspoon of fine olive oil. Brown, but don’t burn the garlic. Now, put in the spinach.”

“Do I add water?”

“No! The spinach is over 90% water. You will make it too soft. How’s it going?”

“Shit! The whole bag has shrunk like the bejesus!” I exclaimed.

I’m certain Barbara chuckled. “It is supposed to. Now, add a little sea salt and *voilà!*”

“Thanks!” I offered. “You saved the day.”

“Don’t forget dinner at my place Saturday night. The group is coming and don’t forget to tell Robert be on time.”

In what seemed as quick as a flick, the spinach, the eggs, and toast were ready and plated. The cabbage face was gone, and the sweet, angelic smile Tanya normally sported had returned. She departed to deliver the order. In moments, she returned with a message.

“She wants you to join her.”

“Okay, then. Put the rest of that spinach on a plate with a bit of toast. I’ll go right out.”

Out in the dining area, k.d. gestured for me to sit. “Thank you for joining me. I’ve got so much to ask you. Are you going to eat?”

I nodded. “Yes, mine will be out in a second. But, please. Go ahead. There’s no need to wait.”

And there truly wasn't. My food arrived, *tout de suite*, complete with eggs. k.d. complimented the spinach.

"This is really good." That was all Tanya needed to hear. She returned to the kitchen, smiling from ear to ear. I had to agree. It was delicious and, since then, has become a new staple in my diet. The "green thing", as Tanya would call it.

"Do you want that green thing, same as her?" On the third day, Tanya tried it herself.

"It's not awful like it looks," she admitted.

Over the next four days, breakfast with k.d. each morning became a regular thing along with the poached eggs and "the green thing". Her concert sold out as did the encore performance they managed to pull together in just a few hours.

In St. John's, there is a huge hill called Signal Hill. It sits at the base of downtown. When you get to the top, the walk back down along the cliffs and the views at the mouth of the harbour are truly spectacular. Each morning, k.d. asked me to bring her there, a request I was happy to oblige. The first morning, I traversed it along with her, but that was enough of that. Over the next few days, I would bring her to the top and meet her at the bottom two hours later. Afterward, she wanted coffee.

"Back at the mansion?" I asked.

"No. A local shop."

I took her to a café located not too far away in the downtown area. It was lunch time and as luck would have, there was a parking

space right in front of the door.

“What would you like?” I asked, fully expecting to run in, grab the order, and get back in the SUV.

“I want to go in and sit with you,” she replied.

Surprised, I took her inside the shop. I ordered the coffees and deserts, for which she insisted on paying. We were entertained by the double-takes from the customers as they walked in and out. Many wore puzzled “she seems familiar” looks. Again, over the next few days, it became ritual. We chatted about everything and nothing. She asked countless questions about my personal life and my business. But it was a balanced exchange. In return, she offered access to her own. We talked about her partner, her home, her Toyota Prius, and on and on. Conversations between strangers turned to lively exchanges between friends. We had very, very much in common. As the visit wound to a close, k.d. extended a congenial invitation.

“Kevin, if you ever get to L.A., you have to get in touch. I would love to show you around. Here is my cell number. If I don’t answer right away, leave a message. I won’t be long getting back, as this phone is always with me.”

And the memory of her visit and all our conversations was something that will always be with me.

The next morning at breakfast she says, “Kevin, I’m hoping you can help me.”

“Sure, no problem.”

Or so I thought.



Above: *The incomparable k.d. lang on the Ryan Mansion staircase*

“I would like to bring back something special for Jamie. I was thinking a bar of gold.”

Hm. Most people are lucky to get a t-shirt.

“Ok, let me give it a go.”

When she went upstairs to change for her morning hike, I'm called one bank after another. Every answer was the same. You had to order it and seven days was the soonest possible delivery.

Discouraged, I look up and there's k.d. She had heard the end of the conversation.

"Don't worry, Kevin. I can get it later. I won't be seeing her for a few weeks."

A gracious guest.

We continued with the daily routine, up to the top of the hill then on for coffee.

She made another request. I was determined to make this one happen. Whatever it was.

"Would you mind bringing me to the concert? They will send a car but, if it's no problem, I'd rather if you could."

Done and done.

"No problem," I agreed.

"Are you going to stay for the concert? Let me know how many tickets. I will make sure my manager arranges things."

I couldn't believe it. After trying halfway around the globe, we were finally going to see k.d. lang in concert, right here at home!

I ticked through the list in my head.

Robert, of course. I also included his sister, Pauline. Pauline had been a genuine asset when Prince Charles visited. She had assisted Robert in maintain the royal quarters to ensure adequate privacy. We trusted our staff, but the last thing we wanted was someone posting a picture on Facebook! Then there was Barb who had come to our rescue and kept us afloat with the *Titanic* dinner. Both ladies were big k.d. fans.

k.d. made sure there were tickets for all.

The concert was amazing. Towards the end, her manager came over with a message.

“k.d. will be waiting back stage for you. She said if you would like to bring your friends, you’re welcome.”

Both Barb and Pauline were thrilled. The four of us posed with k.d. with all our arms linked. The four days I had spent with her was a joy,capped off by an absolutely amazing evening. I would have to say...*it was pure gold.*

CHAPTER EIGHT
***Gluten-Free,
Not Guilt-Free***

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

It started out with a flight from St. John's, Newfoundland to Fort Lauderdale, Florida to begin a 113- day cruise around the world on Holland America's *Mazdam*. The cruise began as a gift from a close friend meant to celebrate a milestone birthday. It ended up being a trip of a lifetime.

There were three of us on this journey, all three the closest of friends. The ship departed on January 2 and was to return April 28. Just three days later, on May 1, one of my trip companions and closest friends would undergo open heart surgery at the Munk Cardiac Centre in Toronto. The cruise would be a time to reflect, celebrate and inspire.

The nicest part of traveling by sea is that there is virtually no jet lag as you ease through the different time zones. During the 113 days, we passed through many. Some we encountered twice as we circumnavigated the globe in a second pass. I had to leave the ship when it arrived in Sydney, Australia due to business concerns, but had plans to meet up with the ship and my friends in Papua New Guinea.

Five weeks into our cruise, I disembarked in Sydney for a flight halfway around the world to St John's, Newfoundland. It was a stark contrast between the sunny skies of Sydney to the chilling snow and icy shores of St. John's a mere 24-hours later.

The first three days of my five-day solo excursion went well. My business dealings wrapped up satisfactorily. On the fourth day, I awoke to a shining sun. It had rained during the night and, through the windows, the trees glistened with icy diamonds as the sun refracted through the icicles that had formed on their branches.

I skipped down the stairs of Ryan Mansion, a song in my head and hum on my lips. Mary, who normally saw to our guests and prepared breakfast, already had my traditional four, long shot Americanos poured in wait. The fireplace glowed. I glanced out the window at the ice-laden trees with their fractals of sun-inspired prisms.

God, this is spectacular!

Too bad the beauty came with bone-chilling cold, but the tiny rainbows of light would dissolve with the warmth. Speaking of warmth, my return flight back to the more temperate side of the world was scheduled in just forty-five hours.

I had one final business task, to sign a few papers from my lawyers, then a few social engagements. I intended to drop in to say "hallo" to family and, that evening, I had accepted a dinner invite from two old friends. I bid the diamond trees farewell, grabbed my winter coat, said goodbye to Mary, and launched out of the mansion down the steps below to the waiting car.

Well, that had been the plan, anyway. Reality had different ideas. Down the steps I went, falling flat on my back as I slipped on the

ice that had accumulated on the steps from the cold and rain.

Thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump.

Down seven steps I descended, all the way to the landing, square on the flat of my back. I managed to prop myself up in a half-straight position when Newton's First Law took painful effect. My slide continued.

Thump, thump, thump, thump.

I banged my head on the unforgiving cement landing. As I lay ass-deep in the icy, melted slush for several minutes, I finally managed to form a clear thought in my head. And it was a painful one.

Jesus, I think I'm damaged!

My arm was a rag doll's just dangling limply. The other arm still seemed to work, though. I was able to reach my phone and called Mary, who was busy inside the mansion clearing from breakfast.

"Come out and give me a hand. I need to go to the hospital, but I can't get up and doubt I can drive."

Mary rushed outside to my aid. She was a capable woman, a bit of a gentle brute. The personality of Florence Nightingale with the strength of an ox. She grabbed the arm that was not folded awkwardly beneath me.

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" I groaned. "Take your time. You're killing me!"

Uncertain whether she just hadn't heard me or just plain ignored

me, she grabbed my back from the good side and yanked me up on solid footing.

“I think it’s just out of joint. They can twist it back in place again,” Mary diagnosed. I assumed she fit medical school in between pulling my four shots of espresso. “Want me to give it a go?”

I didn’t know which hurt more at that moment, my head or my shoulder. “Get me to the Jesus hospital!”

“Old Faithful” dropped me off at the emergency department. I did not have to wait long before a doctor came in and gave me the exact diagnosis as Doctor Mary the Butch, the Baker and Candlestick Maker. He called in an intern and together they pulled, yanked, and rotated my arm and shoulder until I felt I was being dismembered. They finally abandoned their attempts and secured an appointment for me later that day with an orthopedic surgeon. At least they gave me a little help for the pain which had increased exponentially from their futile efforts. They had tried to help as best they could.

“Old Faithful” had been waiting for my call and within minutes she showed, coffee in hand, accent thicker than the outside snow.

“What did I told ya they’d say?” she smirked.

“They confirmed your analysis,” I replied, trying to keep a sober face. I could see she was beaming from the corner of my eye with that “told ya” look.

After a drive to a nearby restaurant for lunch, we ended up back at the hospital entrance for my appointment with the orthopedic surgeon.

“Have you had a survey?” he asked.

“Nope not yet.”

“So, they tried to relocate your arm without an x-ray, hm? Well, we will get one now.”

Off I went for an x-ray then back to his office. Ten minutes later, he returned with the results.

“The bad news is, it’s broken. The good news is that it’s a perfect break meaning the chances are very good it will heal back with no ill after effects. I will set it and you will need to return so I can monitor the healing.”

Talk about a crimp in my travel plans.

“Doctor, I am on a flight at midnight to London then onwards to meet friends and a ship in Papua New Guinea,” I protested.

He delivered a stern gaze. “I strongly advise against traveling right now.”

Undaunted, I offered an alternative. “There is a hospital on board the ship. Can’t you give me directions to give to the ship’s doctor?”

The doctor finally conceded. “Okay. I will also give you exercises you must start in four weeks when your sling can come off.”

I worried about dealing with the excruciating hurt in the middle of the ocean. “Can you give me something better for the pain? What they gave me earlier really did not help.”

He nodded. "I can understand that. Yes. I will give pain requires."

Prescription in my free hand and bright blue sling on the other, I felt like a signal flag heading back to the car. Thanks to my brother-in-law, Joe, I was able to purchase six non-descript black ones which blended in with the black wardrobe I quickly resorted to wearing.

My sister, Joe's wife, upgraded my ticket from Business to First Class with Aeroplan points leaving out of London and flying to Bangkok. The upgrade provided a separate private compartment with a sliding privacy door. I had to call my friends, Barb and Karen, from the *Titanic* dinner game and advise I would have to cancel their dinner invite due to my lack of mobility.

"Not to worry," they said. "We will come to you and cook it there."

There we were the three of us at the dining room table. They had cooked me my favourite, poached salmon drizzled with a lemon-buttersauce. However, my appetite was subpar, so I merely nibbled. They were feeling badly for me when Karen looked at the prescription bottle on the table.

"Kevin! Flush these down the toilet! These are OxyContin. Highly addictive."

"Addictive or not, they are easing the pain a little," I remarked. And that was that.

My five-hour flight left at midnight for London. I had one hour and forty-five minutes to catch my connecting eleven-hour flight to Bangkok, then another two-hour wait for journey to Manila where I was to catch a small connector flight to Yap, New Guinea. The flight from St. John's to London was hell in a bucket. The pain

was too great to sleep even after a few of the OxyContin. I got to London and though my connection gate to Bangkok seemed the same distance as my St. John's had been, I still had to walk. Thank god for the carry on I was towing. It served as a convenient crutch. But I was still exhausted and in pain.

On Thai Airways, they escorted me to my little hideaway in the front of the plane. There were eight small private cabins, each with their own sliding privacy door. I popped another pill, hoping to sleep. Three attendants came in, one passing me a pair of monogrammed silk pyjamas. With my good arm, I pointed helplessly at my sling. Without any words, they had me stripped to my underwear and the pyjamas on in less than ten seconds. Sensitive to my pain they could not have taken better care.

Thank god for upgrades.

Well, between the pills and lack of sleep on the St. John's to London flight, I died, figuratively speaking, on the London to Bangkok run. Whether it was the excellent service, the silk pyjamas, the medication, or perhaps a blissful combination of all three, the trip up in the clouds was peaceful. Before I knew it, the three attendants appeared again. They did their Houdini trick once more, and within seconds they had me out of those silk pyjamas and back into my street clothes.

Breakfast was served and we prepped for landing. Once on the ground I realized my journey from Manila to Yap on a small prop plane would be impossible. My friends onboard the ship had already contacted me to see how I was making out. I let them know I was alive and limping along but told them I wasn't certain I could make the journey to Yap from Manila on a small prop plane.

“If someone so much as touches my shoulder, it’s pure agony.”

They suggested I stay in Bangkok and meet the ship in Manila six days later. I made the flight change and an electric airline buggy transported me across the two-mile airport trek to customs. From there, I went to check into the Intercontinental in the center of Bangkok.

I was settled in my room at 8a.m. and I needed a shower but decided to soak in the tub instead. It was a nice white marble bathroom with a stand-up shower and a separate deep tub. I filled the tub and added the bath oil that was next to the tub. Usually, showers are the norm for me, but after a flight halfway around the world and a clipped wing, I decided to soak, sling and all (I had my five replacements).

Getting in was easy. Getting out was another story. The oil made it impossible to gain purchase with one arm. After an hour of bathroom calisthenics, I succeeded. I replaced the wet sling, took two more pills as needed, and collapsed into the bed. When I awoke several hours later, I moseyed over to the window to enjoy the view of downtown Bangkok.

Holy shit! Guns!

Covering the roof of the adjoining shopping center were military troops in full battle fatigues, armed with rifles! A few turned around and gave me looks I didn’t care to interpret. I quickly closed the curtains. I grasped my pill bottle and flushed every, last pill down the toilet.

Pain or no, I wasn’t about to let my mind play freaky games like this. I sat in the room wondering what to do next. Outside, I was

surrounded by imaginary guns. Inside, I was being tortured by a dismembered shoulder. Suddenly, the phone rang. I scrambled to pick it up.

My friend's frantic voice was on the line. "You have to get out of Bangkok. Now! They are planning to close the airport. There's a military standoff!"

"You've got to be kidding. Hold the line. I went to take another peek out the window. They were still there. It wasn't a hallucination.

Jesus Mary and Joseph!

I flew with one wing down to the front desk to get the full story. It seemed the streets down from the Intercontinental had been blocked and controlled.

"But everything is fine," the concierge assured. They arranged to get me some over-the-counter pain killers which at least helped me sleep in between watching the drama unfold outside.

Eventually, the car arrived to transport me to the airport so I could meet my friends and the ship in Manila.

I hoped.

If you ever want help getting into a car, or out of a car, or shuttling luggage through security, or hefting it in and out of the overhead - wear a shoulder sling. Service could not have been better. I managed to arrive at the airport and board my flight before the situation in Bangkok closed the airport. During the flight to Manila, I napped the full three hours. I was delighted to meet both my friends at the arrivals gate. After the "oh-my-god-it-is-great-to-see-you" hugs, it

shifted to “you-look-terrible-how-are-you-feeling” frowns. I replied with a quick “don’t touch my shoulder” and then we were back on the ship.

After many stops, my sling removal, and loads of arm and shoulder exercises, we reach Durban, South Africa. Aboard ship, I was staying in the Neptune Suite which afforded guests of that floor a separate lounge. The president of Carnival Cruise lines, the company that controlled Holland America plus many other cruise lines, was staying on the same floor. He was on-board from Durban to Cape Town. A delightful conversationalist, I had many the conversations with him each evening in the Neptune Lounge. It was interesting to learn the workings of the industry first-hand from the chief himself - from his humble beginnings to leading a \$17 billion-a-year and growing industry.

The highlight of the cruise, however, was the guest in the cabin just down the hall, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his wife Nomalizo Leah Tutu. Nomalizo and I shared a common bond. We were both wearing arm slings.

The conversations with both were a pleasure. Then there was the breakfast.

The couple invited myself and my two companions along with four other shipboard guests to join them along with their daughter and daughter’s husband to a private breakfast. The archbishop was already seated at the table and, as soon as we got settled, he gave a great welcome. He suggested we all introduce ourselves and share what we could be thankful for.

Thank god I was not the first.



Above: (From left to right) Nomalizo Leah Tutu, Kevin Nolan, Robert Hall, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Robert sat on one side of me and Elinor the other. To be honest, I cheated a little. I paraphrased what Robert said and added a few words.

Good artists borrow. Great artists steal.

The archbishop passed around the wine for all to have a swig. Now, drinking was not my thing, or at least not at that time in my life. What was I supposed to do?

I took a page from the Thai stewards' Houdini handbook.

A goblet the size of a fish bowl came my way. together with a white linen napkin to wipe the rim. I unfolded the napkin, held to shield

my face and, to all, it appeared as if I had taken a swallow. I dutifully passed it along, smoke and mirrors successful.

Growing up as a kid in Catholic school, we would be filed down from the classroom to the church below every Tuesday. There we would have to go to confession. You entered a dark closet the size of a phone booth and knelt, waiting for the little sliding shutter window to open.

An old man dressed in black with a coloured scarf around his neck would say, “Yes, my son, tell me your sins.”

Every Tuesday morning I’d repeat the same thing. “Father, I was disobedient at home and in school. I told lies. And I took the Lord’s name in vain.”

I guess he was never quite convinced. “Anything else my son?”

“No, Father, that’s it,” I insisted.

“Are you *sure* my son,” he insisted right back.

“Yes, Father.”

“Say three Hail Mary’s, two Our Fathers, an Act of Contrition and two Glory Bes.”

I would scoot out and up to the altar where I would kneel and say those prayers as quick as a star shooting across the sky. I could say a Hail Mary in six seconds, an Our Father in seven, an Act of Contrition in eight, and a Glory Be in three. So, in less than a minute, I was walking down the aisle back to my seat. If you stayed at the altar too long, people thought you had committed mortal

sins. Venial sins were the quickies.

Lying to an archbishop? Well, that was my first venial sin on the cruise. The next one, if I was back in my school days, would be a mortal and I'd be going to hell. Curiously, though, the archbishop made a statement that suggested hell was not so bad, as he was willing to go there.

Back to my mortal sin, though. After the wine had been passed, he took a loaf of bread I swear was big enough to serve all one thousand people on board. He broke it into pieces that were nearly the size of a hamburger bun and passed it around. Now, a few years back I read a book called *Wheat Belly*. It talked about the damage wheat can do to the body from the chemicals used in the growing cycle, etcetera. That thought alone was terrible. But what got me was the chapter on man boobs. Yes, man boobs. According to the book, if you ate a lot of wheat, the bigger they would get as you got older.

No more wheat for this guy!

Now, here I was, being passed a huge piece of gluten. Thank god for Houdini and the linen napkin again as I concealed the offending wheat product on my legs and then into my pants pocket. The now empty platter sat in front of the archbishop who used his fingers and put every last crumb into his mouth as he said another prayer.

I remember making my holy communion. It was a big day. The nuns' instructions were set on repeat.

“When the priest puts the host on your tongue, you move it inside your mouth. You do not chew. You cannot let your teeth touch the Holy Ghost of God.”

My hand was always up. “Sister, what will happen if my teeth touch the Holy Ghost?”

I thought perhaps my teeth would fall out.

Instead, she would look at me with fire in her eyes and a leather strap in her hand.

“You’ll go to hell.”

The host back then was the size of a quarter. Now here I am with a chunk of bread the size of a Big Mac bun bulging in my pant pocket.



Left: *The author on his First Communion*

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! I'm finished!

Well, the breakfast ended. I left the room. Once outside, I offered my handful of gluten to my friends, one a Protestant, the other an atheist. They looked at me and laughed.

“Throw it out.”

I looked dubiously at them both. “If this ship sinks it’s your fault.”

The ship didn’t sink, and the archbishop and his were none the wiser. We still enjoyed a chat or two, and I showed Nomalizo a few of my arm exercises.

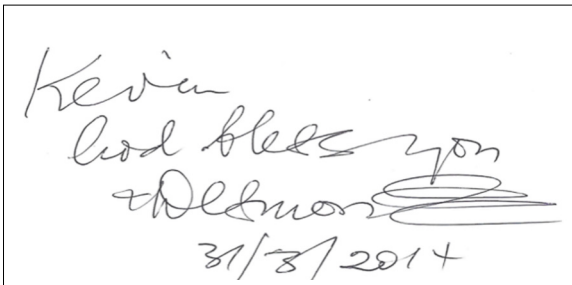
The rest of the cruise was great and my best friend, the atheist, proceeded to have the open-heart surgery post-cruise and made a full recovery.

The Protestant still does a world cruise every year.

As for me, the recovering Catholic? Well, if you’re reading this, I didn’t go to hell.



Above: (From left to right) Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Kevin Nolan, and Robert Hall



Left: A handwritten blessing from the Archbishop

CREDITS

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The discovery of the Titanic

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1 DEGREE OF SEPARATION

*A Collision of Tragedy, Nobility,
Harmony, Comedy and Madness*

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