

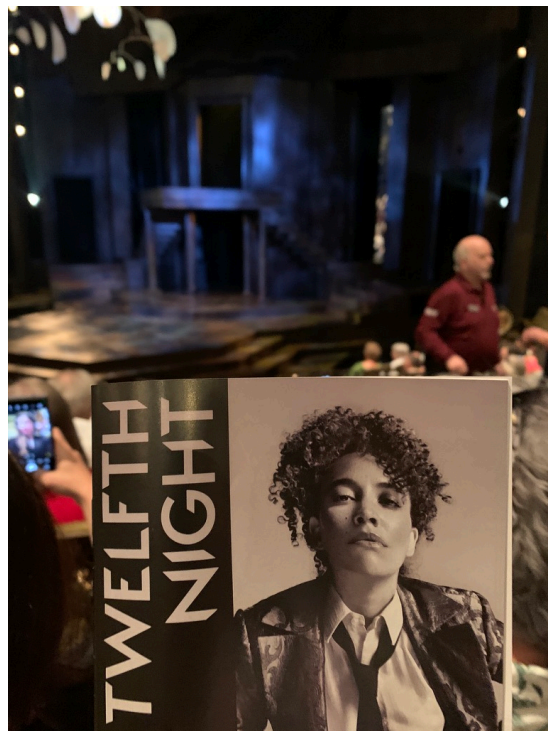
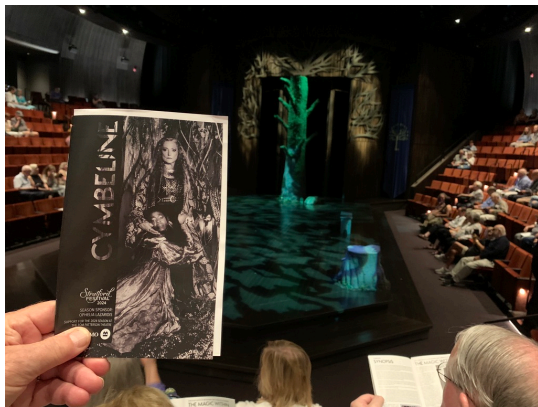
Our Summer With Charles ... Between Engagements



Poor Charles was off the road from the time we got back from our winter escape (I'm still hoping to put together a final report on that adventure) until we finally finished this year's Fringe production. The play I co-wrote, *Dead Right*, was quite successful, and was the Patron's Pick at our venue, thanks to the work of all these wonderful people.



As we looked ahead to summer with a variety of events and commitments, we decided we'd intersperse short trips with Charles whenever we could. So, once the Fringe was over, we took Charles on a trip to Stratford. We saw a few shows, and enjoyed the Stratford experience.



We also managed to catch a show produced by Here For Now, the spunky little company that produces excellent shows in a tent on the grounds of the Stratford Perth Museum, outside of town.

12 Dinners, Steve Ross' play was funny and moving, with Jane Spidell portraying his mother with such pathos, and Geoffrey Pounsett and Ben Skipper rounding out the cast with warmth and humour.



We stayed at the Wildwood Conservation Area, which is a great campground about 20 minutes out of town. So, when we weren't at the theatre, we were parked by the water, writing or reading or walking or just enjoying the view.



We also had a chance to catch up with an old friend from my high school days, Cathy Whelan (formerly Wallace), and her husband Brian. We had a lot to catch up on!



While we were in Stratford, we heard about a production of *Mary's Wedding* in Port Colborne, which came highly recommended. We decided to alter our route home to stop in and catch the show – and were we ever glad we did!

Daniel Reale and Evelyn Wiebe were terrific, and everything about the production was perfect – from the direction to the set, lighting and sound design. One of the highlights of our summer.



Along the way, we spotted a few signs worth sharing.



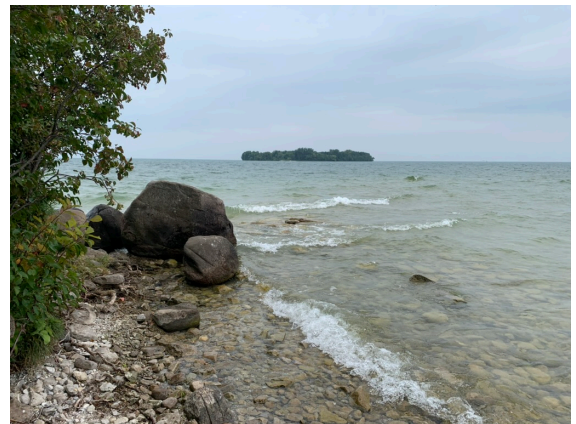
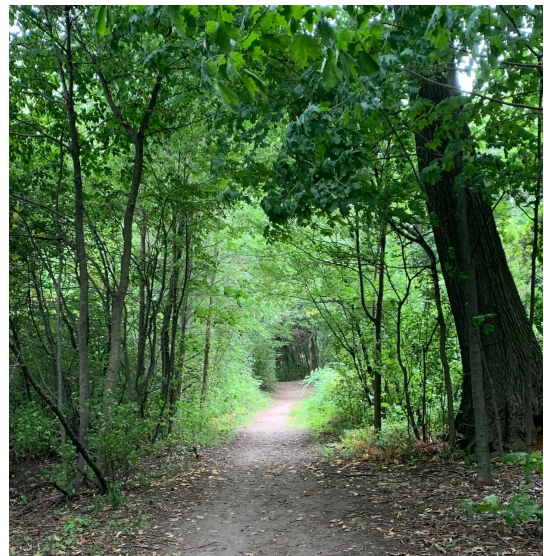
That was a nice little escape, and we got home in time for me to sit in on a wonderful “improv session” with Smile Theatre and people at Baycrest.



And then Jim and the *Dancer* Team did a reading of the latest version of the script, which reminded all of us how amazing this show is.

Then we realized we had a chunk of time when we didn't need to be at home. So we summoned Charles and he was happy to take us to a campground on Lake Simcoe, McRae Point Provincial Park.

It was a lovely spot on the lake,
with lots of greenery and nice
views of Lake Simcoe.



Another short drive...



... and we were in the Muskokas, there to visit Jim's old friends, Doug and Keith, who have a fabulous cottage there.





Were there cocktails? Are there mansions on Lake Muskoka??



We had a lovely, if much too short visit. Doug and Keith are amazing hosts!



From Muskoka, we headed over to the west coast of Georgian Bay and one of our favourite spots, Craigeleith Provincial Park.



The flat shores
of slate are so
dramatic.



And when you
look at the rocks
closely, you see
they're filled
with fossils.

It's against the
law to remove
stones from the
park.



That wasn't the only place we found drama. In the sky that night...



And on our way back home. We stopped at 4th Line Theatre, near Millbrook, which, for over 30 years has been creating outdoor theatre, mostly telling local stories and featuring local talent. It's always exciting to see how they use the environment and find innovative ways to tell their stories.



The show we saw, *Jim Watts, Girl Reporter*, featured about 28 people in the company and told the story of a young reporter who left Toronto to report on the Spanish Civil War.



We got home in time to catch a little jazz at the Rex, with Mike Murley, Terry Clarke, Neil Swainson & Mark Eisenman...



And some more jazz, featuring Whitney Ross Barris, with a guest appearance by Sam Broverman.



We were also able to attend the launch of our friend Peter Fenton's new book called *Not Not Normal*.



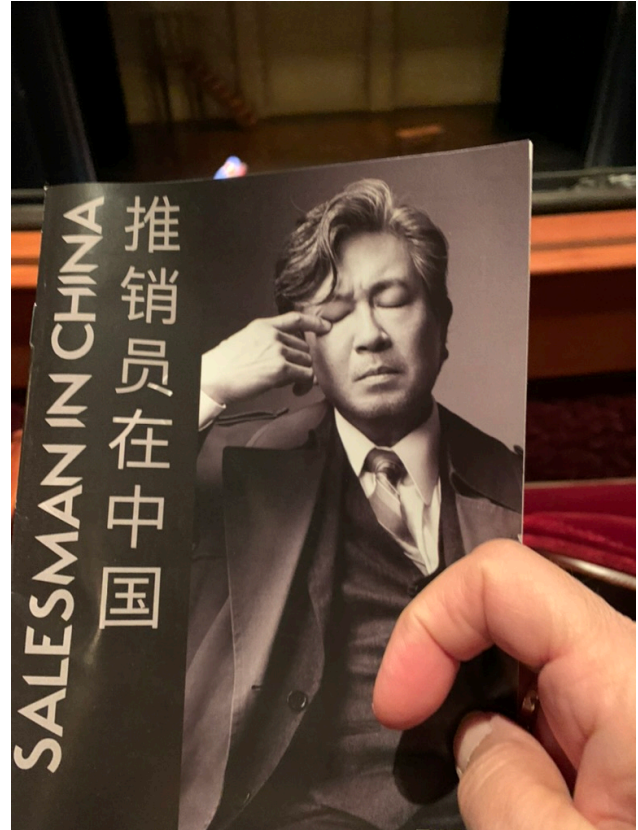
And then we were on the road again, heading back to Stratford!



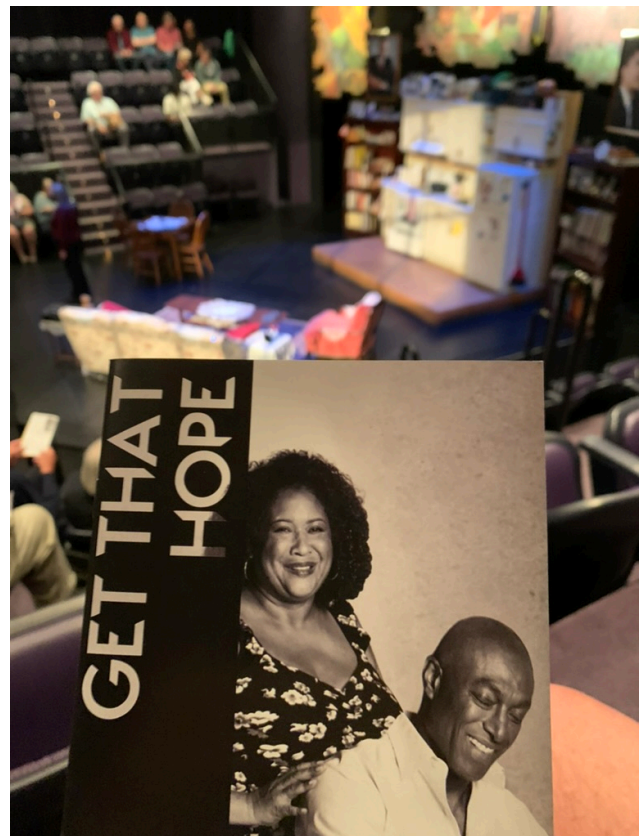
Once again, we stayed at Wildwood Conservation Area.



And then we went into town to see the amazing production of *A Salesman in China*, which is a remarkable achievement – presenting a play in English and Mandarin, with surtitles in both languages – and a captivating play about Arthur Miller's journey to China to direct a production of *Death of a Salesman* in Mandarin.



We also saw and enjoyed *Get That Hope*, about a Jamaican family in Toronto.



Next stop, Mulmur to get together with more friends – who became friends through their involvement with Theatre Orangeville. The setting was beautiful.



And the company was colourful – in every way!



It was an evening filled with great stories, lots of laughs, terrific food and the odd cocktail. Unfortunately, we forgot to take a photo before a few people left.



Next, we went to visit friends Clive and Laura, but spent so much time talking we never thought to take photos before getting back on the road.



This time, we were headed east toward Jim's sister, who rents a cottage on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River.

We stopped at a "Harvest Host", which is a collection of properties all over North America that offer up sites on their land to campers. Often, they're wineries or vineyards or other establishments that offer the space with the understanding that travellers will stop and give them some business in exchange for a free night's stay. Some are fantastic. Some are not. This one was not. This is what greeted us at the gate...



And this was our not exactly elegant parking spot.



To be fair, the people (with whom we communicated, but never met) were very helpful in guiding us to the spot, and told us to let them know if we needed anything. But we were glad to get back on the road and enjoy more enjoyable views.



A few hours later, we arrived for a pleasant and peaceful visit with Margaret at her summer getaway.



We took a few walks around the neighbourhood and to the beach.





This was a lovely idea – they had a whole series of these signs that told the story and showed the pictures from the book.



The rest of the time, we read and ate and napped and talked about travels and family tales. Perfect.

On the way home we overnighted in Presqu'île Provincial Park, which was just fine.

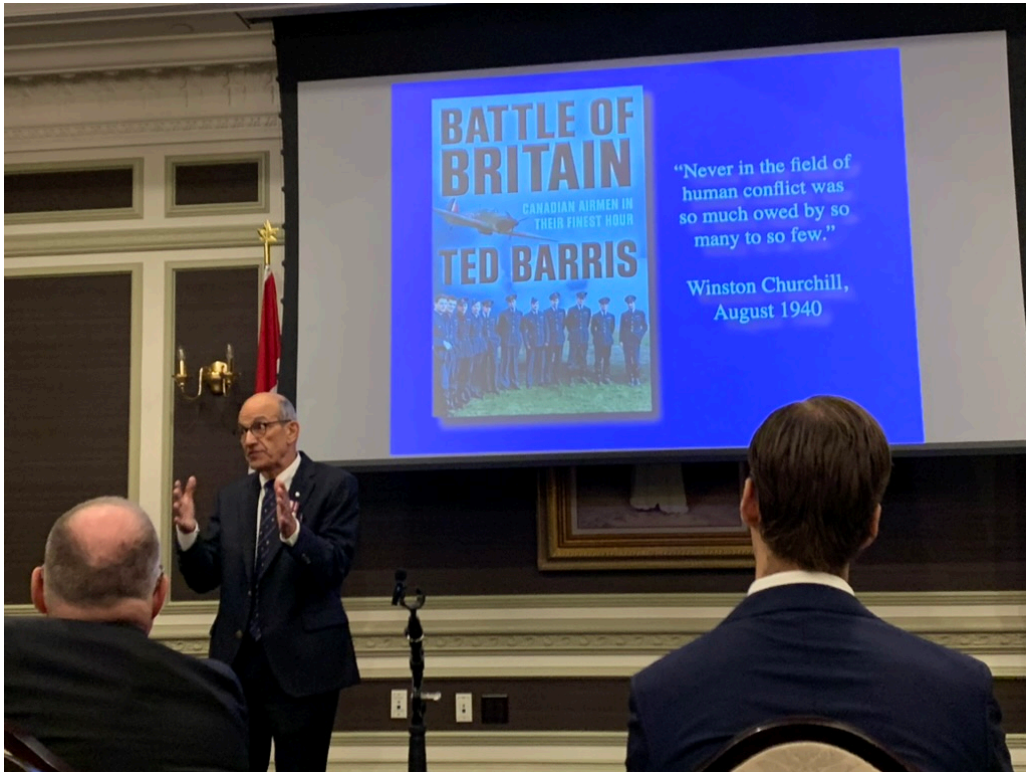




And for our last night on the road, we were presented with a perfectly respectable sunset.



We got home in time for another book launch – brother Ted's new book *The Battle of Britain*, which after one week was on the bestseller list.



And then our annual street party, which is always a lot of fun.





And the next day, I attended an event supporting another great little organization, Recollectiv, which unites people with memory impairments with musicians, to sing and play music together every week. Sharon Hampson hosted the event, which was a joyful singalong with a number of the people who sing and play and share the joy of music every weekend.



The event ended with a short concert by the always joyful Heather Bambrick.



Whew! All that in about two months of summer.

And believe it or not, the very next day, we loaded Charles up again and hit the road.

But that is for another blog.