

The Least Laid Plans



For the five days we were home after our tour of northern Ontario, we knew Charles would get a good cleaning, as would our laundry. We would see some friends and a play. And then we were going to leave.

We had a basic plan: To travel through Maine and explore their national and state parks along the coast. But not too long before we left, two things happened to totally obliterate our plans. We found out about two events we had to attend. No problem.

We loaded Charles up again and drove up the Don Valley Parkway. With a few thousand others.



This newly planned trip was going to be a very different trip from most. For one thing, we had to bring dressup clothes! (And some of us had to *buy* dressup clothes!)

Several hours after leaving Toronto, we arrived in our Nation's Capitol.



And the next day, we donned those dressup clothes and found a very nice parking spot for Charles...



It's hard to see what Jim is pointing to, so we'll get a little closer.

There. Now perhaps you can tell that Jim's pointing to Rideau Hall.



For those who don't recognize it, that's the residence of Canada's Governor General, currently Mary Simon (our first Indigenous Governor General).

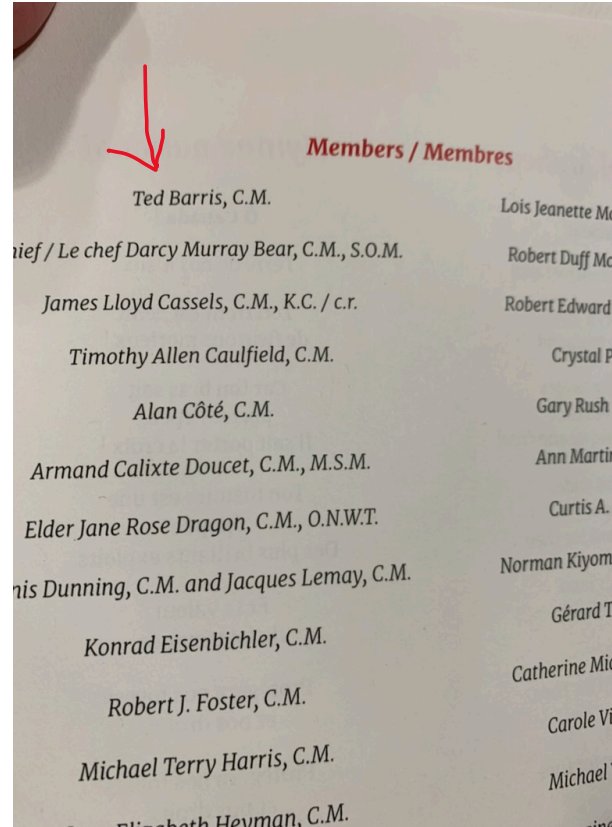
And here we are inside Rideau Hall, waiting for the important event to begin.



The important event being this:



And more specifically this:



Yup. My brother, Ted Barris' investiture to the Order of Canada!

Here's the very short write-up explaining why he deserved this honour (if you don't already know.)

Ted Barris, C.M. Uxbridge, Ontario

Ted Barris' storytelling has served as a mainstay in Canadian military heritage. An author, freelance journalist and broadcaster, he has raised awareness of the role Canadians have played in military history, showcasing a detailed perspective of veterans' personal experiences. He has authored 20 non-fiction books, including 10 bestsellers on Canadians in the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War and the War in Afghanistan. A sought-after speaker, he has inspired remembrance and recognition of service among military and regimental associations, museums and veterans' organizations, as well as within a variety of writers' circles.

Unfortunately, we were near the back, so we didn't get a great view of the actual moment, and we were asked not to take photos, which didn't stop anybody.

This is Ted facing the audience as his accomplishments were being acknowledged.



This is him receiving his medal.

This is him having his photo taken with the GG, by the Official Photographer.



And this is the official photo the Official Photographer took.



This is him with half the recipients of the day. There were 56 in total.



(Ted is second in from the right in the back row)

It was so wonderful to be a witness to this incredible, very much deserved and long-awaited honour. One of the things that made it so thrilling was to find out about all the other honourees Ted was amongst. They represented every aspect of Canadian life. There were celebrities like Sandra Oh, Andy Kim, CBC reporter Brian Stewart and choreographer Chrystal Pite. And there were people we never would have heard of otherwise – elders who saved their language or affected public policy, scientists and business people and advocates who fought for change and philanthropists who shared their good fortune. It was humbling and inspiring.

After the ceremony, there was a lunch served and we got to meet a few more of the honourees. And everyone was welcome to wander around the rooms and the grounds which exude a lovely mixture of elegance and warmth.



Later in the day, we met again for dinner. At the door of the restaurant, the maitre d' noticed Ted's Order of Canada pin and thanked him for his service. I told him that Ted had just received it that day and he lit up, very excited and said, "Oh! You were one of the 56!" Ever the promoter, Ted gave him his card and pointed out the bookstore where he'd just signed copies of his new book.



All in all, it was a perfect day. And I couldn't be prouder of my big brother.



Between engagements, we found some time for an impromptu visit with my old friend Patrick Granleese, who abandoned us in Toronto a few years ago, so I only get to see him on Zoom these days. It was great to see him in real life.



The next morning, still glowing from the excitement of the day before, we revved Charles up and headed south and east, seeing a few fall colours...



... travelling alongside the mighty, and mighty beautiful St. Lawrence, until we got to Cornwall...



...and crossed the St. Lawrence into the United States of America.

Clearly there was no need to use our Nexus card to get a head of the crowds.



Destination: Another important event on America's east coast.

We got a beautiful weather day, and enjoyed splashes of autumn colours.





We were reminded, often, about how much Americans get into Halloween.



Eventually we ended up at our first stop, Cumberland Bay State Park on the west side of Lake Champlain. It was a lovely campground, with a great, long beach.



We enjoyed a walk
before the sun set.



Not wanting to waste a good beach, I went for another walk in the morning, before we went back on the road. It was gorgeous, pristine day.

I was enjoying the sights, both natural and artistic.



I was especially entertained by the antics of the Canada geese who were convening to plan their migration south.



Then, a man who was jogging along the beach, slowed down and took out his earbuds as he approached me. He apologized for “telling me what to do”, but he wanted to warn me that there were a lot of junkies in the area and, as a result, needles are often found on the beach. He finished by saying, “Otherwise, I’d be in my bare feet too.” I thanked him and, when I saw another barefoot couple walking toward me, I paid it forward.

I was glad the jogger “spoke his truth.”

A while later, we left our campsite and boarded the ferry that would cross the lake.



And a few minutes after that, we were in Vermont.

It was a perfect day for travelling and although the sun wasn't always in the best place for photos, the colours were stunning.





A few hours later, we entered Massachusetts, the state where our next exciting event was going to happen.



We had booked a spot through “Boondockers Welcome”. These are people who travel a lot in their RVs, and happily offer up a space on their property for travellers to stay overnight – usually for free. Often, it’s just a space, without hook-ups, in their driveway. Sometimes it’s a lovely site elsewhere on their property. It’s not unusual to never even meet the hosts. Our hosts, Gerry and Katie were not those kind of hosts.



They not only offered up power and water connections, they invited us into their home after dinner, along with the other couple staying there, Mana and Roberto. We sat around their dining room table, talking and nibbling on snacks and raising a glass. We had a lively evening of sharing stories about our travels and our work and how we each met our spouses. It was great fun, and we felt most welcome.



The next morning, Gerry insisted on showing us how he'd fitted out their camper. A retired cabinet-maker, he's ingenious at making use of every square inch of space. I really wish I'd taken photos!

Finally, we said goodbye and set out for our next destination: Provincetown. It was another lovely day for a drive.





The last time we were in Cape Cod, we were travelling with Jim's daughter, Courtenay, who lives in Boston. She had insisted we stop to get the best lobster rolls - at a roadside stop in Wellfleet. So, on our way to Provincetown, in honour of Courtenay, and because we love lobster rolls, we decided to try to find the place she'd guided us to the last time. And guess what!



They were just as yummy (and expensive!) as they were the last time we were there.



With full stomachs (and empty wallets) we drove the rest of the scenic drive to Provincetown.





We assumed this group was escaping Canada for the upcoming holiday weekend.



When you get to Provincetown, you immediately know you're in a special place.





Even when it's grey (which it was the second day we were there) the colours stand out.



There's art everywhere. I just loved this artist's work.



And then of course, there's the politics.



We'd loved Provincetown the last time we were there. But there was a specific reason we needed to be there on October 7th.

As many of you regular readers will know, the way we plan trips is to *not* plan anything too rigidly. So, although we had intended to focus on travelling through Maine, less than a week before we left, we found out that there was a Town Crier's Competition in Provincetown. We've only ever known one Town Crier, our friend Stephen Findlay, who serves as Lunenburg's Town Crier. So, when we found out that Stephen would be competing in Provincetown, we obviously had to change our plans.

In another set of coincidences, our friend Jeffery Huard and his husband Alan were also in Provincetown, having bought a house there a couple of years ago. Not only is Jeffrey also a friend of Stephen's, he was unexpectedly called on to replace a judge for the competition. We had a nice little catch-up, the evening before the big event.



The competition was to be held in the park in the middle of town. We arrived as some of the Town Criers were gathering. The clouds were heavy with rain.



We met one of the more colourful competitors, and were surprised to discover that he was from Burlington, Ontario! It turned out several of the competitors were Canadian.



John Angus Spencer-Barnes, of Lancaster, England, opened the event with a welcome Town Cry, in rhyme, acknowledging not just the significance of the competition, but also the fact that Provincetown is a place to “celebrate individuality.”



Unfortunately, the weather didn't co-operate, and just as Mr. Spencer-Barnes finished his welcome cry, the rain started coming down. But the organizers were prepared, and the competition moved inside the Town Hall.



We didn't really know what to expect, but we were informed that, in the first round, all of the Town Criers were tasked to do a cry about their hometown. In the second round, they were to present a cry about some aspect of Provincetown's history. This all made for an informative and often quite funny diversity of "cries".

Each cry began with the traditional ringing of the bell and crying "Oyez!" or "Hear Ye" three times. And from that point, they would unroll their scroll and read the cry. They were judged on entry and exit, projection and clarity, content and structure.



Our friend from Burlington, David Vollick, began, "Greetings from Burlington. The one in Ontario — *not* the one in Vermont!" which got a good chuckle.



Bruce Kruger, town crier for Bracebridge and South Bruce Peninsula, began by announcing, "I've been dispatched from Upper Canada to voice strong consternation, nay absolute indignation, at the deplorable Provincetown declaration concerning our Canada geese!" This was based on an actual town meeting in 1810, in which Canada geese were banned from roaming Provincetown at large.

When the town crier from Nantucket, Massachusetts opened his scroll and began, "There once was a man from Nantucket..." and then quickly exchanged that scroll for the right one, he brought the house down.



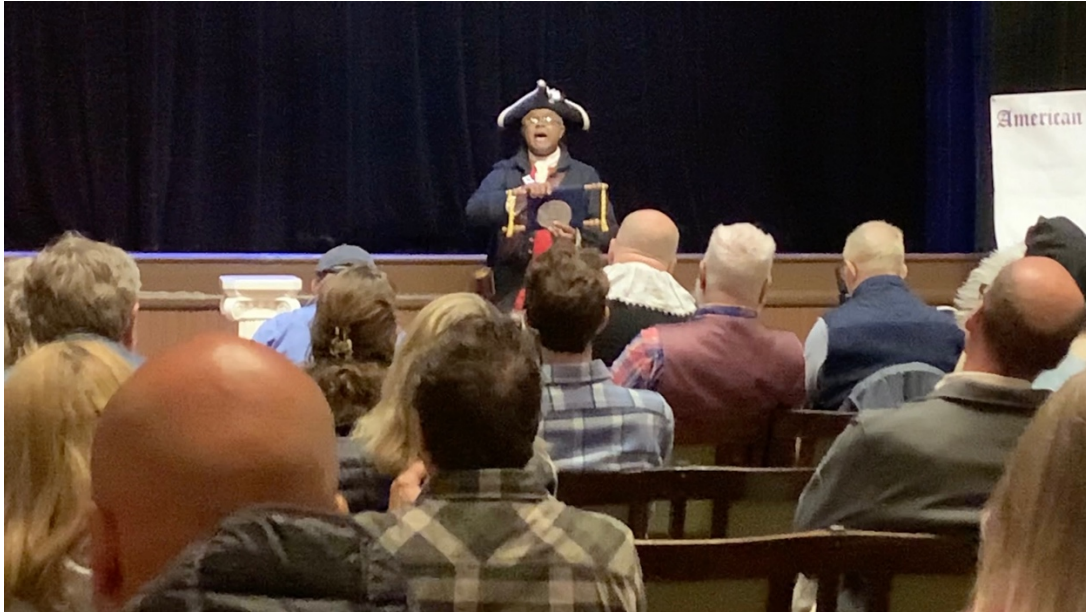
There were two women criers. This one began with a little mimed drama, in which she indicated to her husband that *she* was going to do the cry, not him. And so she did.



The second female crier took a more traditional route.



There was one African American crier, from Alexandria, Virginia, where he's spread the word for 13 years.



Our friend, Stephen Scott Findlay looked confident as he readied himself to stride down the aisle and offer his cry. And his confidence was justified, as you'll see when you view Jim's video below, capturing Stephen's two cries.



At the end, all the criers were called up for photos, and when they all rang their bells together, it was a memorable sound.



Later, we discovered the final results: David Vollick of Burlington, Ontario placed first. Our friend Stephen Scott Findlay placed second. James Stewart of New Glasgow, Nova Scotia placed third. Tim Yuskaitis of Fair Lawn, N.J. was the "Best American Crier."

After the event, we had a chat with Mr. Spencer-Barnes who was, not surprisingly quite a character. He was also a semi-retired BBC announcer. Which should not have come as a surprise either.



We'd been on the road for 5 days, travelled over 1300kms, and had experienced two amazing, award-winning ceremonies. Not bad for a couple of travellers who spurn planning. (Don't forget to check out Jim's videos!)