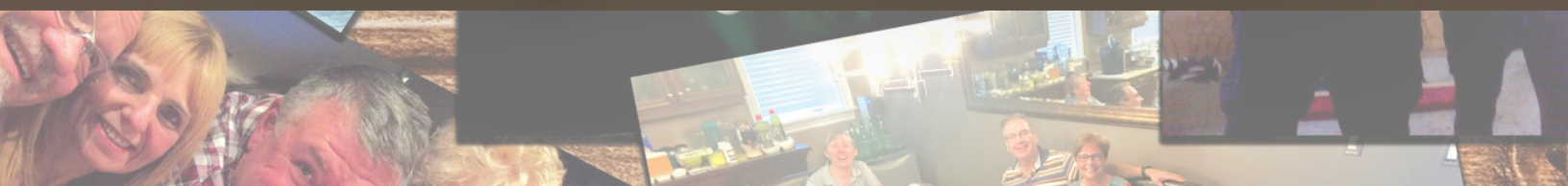




Gary O'Brien





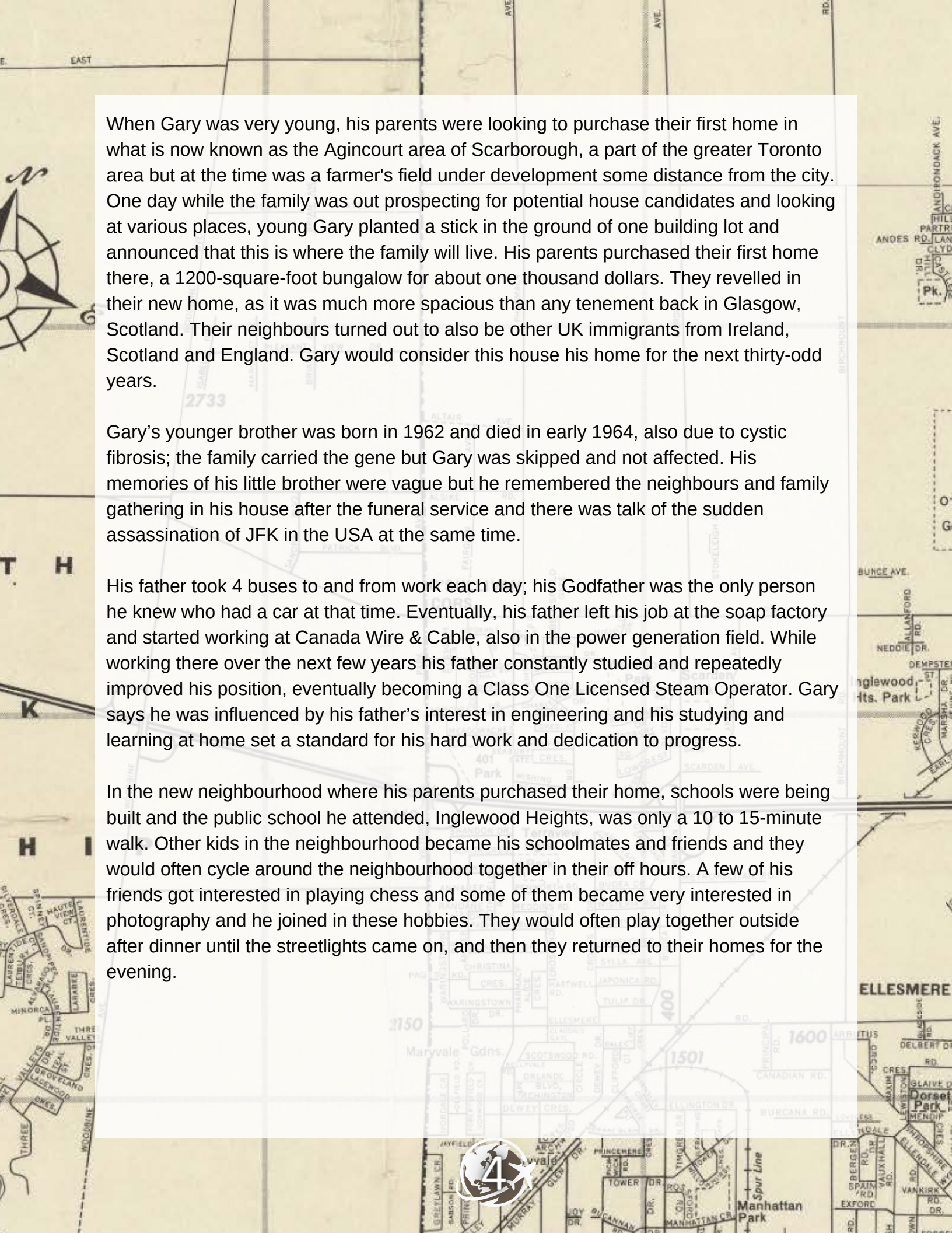
Gary was born to Scottish immigrant parents from Glasgow, Scotland. They were born in the 1920s and met in their early teens but began to know each other better at the start of World War II when they were both about 19 years old. At that time his father had volunteered for the Royal Army and his mother became an air-raid warden while working in a machining factory.

During a total blackout one blitz night when German bombers were possible, his mother ran into a cast iron postal box and lost many of her teeth in the collision. She continued to work and got dentures to replace them. His father became a stretcher bearer in the Army Medical Corps and arrived on the beaches the day after the D-Day invasion. He was quickly promoted to corpsman and kept that position during the remainder of the war. After the war, his parents married in 1947.

Work was difficult to find in the UK after that, so the decision was made for his father to travel to Canada and seek employment there. He arrived in Quebec City and from there travelled to Toronto where he obtained employment with the Lever Bros. Soaps Company. He worked hard and eventually improved his position and moved into the power generation area; saving enough money to bring his wife to Canada to join him about a year later. His mother was thrilled that there was no food rationing in Toronto as there was back in the UK; she could actually purchase two sticks of butter at a time when shopping!

They moved within the city of Toronto a few times and ended up in the Danforth area, which was the edge of the city at the time. They had their first child about 1953, a daughter who ended up passing away due to cystic fibrosis in her third year. Two years after that, Gary was born in Toronto at Women's College Hospital in 1958 and the family rented a place in the Warden Avenue area. Gary's father was now a war veteran and became a godfather to the two children of a friend, and those friends also became Gary's godparents. Gary's Uncle on his mother's side also came to Canada around this time but the rest of her family remained elsewhere around the globe. His uncle eventually got a job in the same factory as his father worked in.



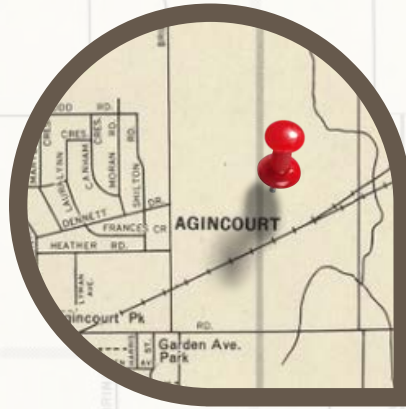


When Gary was very young, his parents were looking to purchase their first home in what is now known as the Agincourt area of Scarborough, a part of the greater Toronto area but at the time was a farmer's field under development some distance from the city. One day while the family was out prospecting for potential house candidates and looking at various places, young Gary planted a stick in the ground of one building lot and announced that this is where the family will live. His parents purchased their first home there, a 1200-square-foot bungalow for about one thousand dollars. They revelled in their new home, as it was much more spacious than any tenement back in Glasgow, Scotland. Their neighbours turned out to also be other UK immigrants from Ireland, Scotland and England. Gary would consider this house his home for the next thirty-odd years.

Gary's younger brother was born in 1962 and died in early 1964, also due to cystic fibrosis; the family carried the gene but Gary was skipped and not affected. His memories of his little brother were vague but he remembered the neighbours and family gathering in his house after the funeral service and there was talk of the sudden assassination of JFK in the USA at the same time.

His father took 4 buses to and from work each day; his Godfather was the only person he knew who had a car at that time. Eventually, his father left his job at the soap factory and started working at Canada Wire & Cable, also in the power generation field. While working there over the next few years his father constantly studied and repeatedly improved his position, eventually becoming a Class One Licensed Steam Operator. Gary says he was influenced by his father's interest in engineering and his studying and learning at home set a standard for his hard work and dedication to progress.

In the new neighbourhood where his parents purchased their home, schools were being built and the public school he attended, Inglewood Heights, was only a 10 to 15-minute walk. Other kids in the neighbourhood became his schoolmates and friends and they would often cycle around the neighbourhood together in their off hours. A few of his friends got interested in playing chess and some of them became very interested in photography and he joined in these hobbies. They would often play together outside after dinner until the streetlights came on, and then they returned to their homes for the evening.



Agincourt's neighbourhood detectives, 1968. Inspired by the Hardy Boys books.



Don
Beaulieu

Gary
O'Brien

Terry
Tout

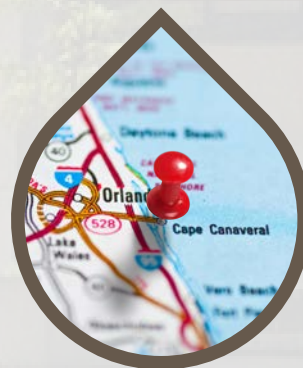
Mark
Terry



In school it was found that Gary had a talent for mathematics; although he stated his writing was not as skilled. He said you either had a pencil or a pen on your desk for your writing class and for a long time he had a pencil for erasing mistakes. During this time he also enjoyed school sports and found he was a good runner and trained in track and field for some time with the girl who lived directly beside him.

In grade three, he and two others from his class were pulled aside and taken to the principal's office. At first, they thought they were in some sort of trouble, but they were advised that they had an opportunity to advance to grade four early as it was felt grade three wasn't challenging them. They were given the choice to advance, and after some thought, two of them agreed. Gary reflected that jumping grades had an effect on him as the other students in both grades looked at him a bit differently, and this perhaps had an effect on how he interacted with others later on.

In 1968 when he was ten years old, his family travelled to Scotland to visit his parents' family. He was introduced to his relatives there for the first time. There were many of them, as his mother had eight siblings and his father had several also. He found it very exciting and a bit overwhelming at times with the number of people at a gathering. He mentioned some other memorable trips when he was young such as one to Florida where they watched an Apollo rocket launch from Daytona Beach, then later visited the Kennedy Space Center seeing the launch pad and the control center. His parents also visited friends at their cottage in Victoria Harbour, Ontario a few times but overall, didn't find the cottage life very appealing.



In junior school, he continued to train in track and field and even competed. Gary helped his school win many competitions and regional events. Eventually, he and his friends Don, Terry and Mark discovered the Hardy Boys mystery books and became enraptured with the stories, often imagining, creating and playing out their own detective adventures. This would end up playing a role in Gary's future with real-life police work down the road.

Gary attended grades seven and eight at John Buchan Senior Public School, again within easy walking distance from his home. He decided at this time to devote less time to track and field and instead spent more sports time with soccer and trying American football and focused more on other interests such as mathematics, radio and television, and other electronics. He became a member of the school's math and chess clubs.

Once in high school, at Stephen Leacock Collegiate Institute, he and his friends continued to pursue their interests in math, photography and electronics, and he found the school had its own radio station. Gary eagerly got involved when the chance arose, teaming up with a fellow student named Bill and together they produced some morning shows for the station. At that time they would take turns reading and voicing the morning shows but Gary leaned more towards the technical elements and was better with the mixing boards and other equipment, while Bill enjoyed being on the microphone more. Bill became a lifelong friend and continued to pursue a career in broadcasting and is still in radio today.



He says his friends in high school seemed to group off in two different directions with one group interested more in technical ventures and the other following other interests which included mathematics. Through two fellows in this second group of friends he was introduced to the Royal Canadian Air Cadets, he believes it was the 631 squadron in Scarborough. He joined this squadron and thought that this could lead him towards a military career in the future. He enjoyed the Air Cadets for about two years and had taken a couple of flying lessons to see if there was interest in being a pilot and the cadets took a few road trips to the Royal Military College in Kingston. The squad's meeting hall ended up burning down due to a faulty roof heater and this eventually ended his association with them.

He now had a couple of different paths he could follow and he accepted an offer through his school to spend one evening in the broadcast trailer for Hockey Night In Canada at Maple Leaf Gardens to see if he was interested in the technical aspects of that industry. If it turned out he was, he had an offer of mentorship for a career introduction into that field. Around this time he started spending a lot of time helping with the production of television shows with the community cable station for channel 10.

He was soon to turn 18 years old and needed to make decisions about his future. After much reflection, he decided to attend a recruitment meeting with the Royal Military College in Kingston as they offered accredited university and college degrees in numerous fields where he felt pursuing a broadcasting career at that time did not. At the recruitment session he felt the military recruiters attempted to discourage him from applying at that meeting for a number of reasons two of which were that he didn't play hockey and he had an Irish surname and there was continuing strife in Ireland. His application was submitted but he was not accepted.



It was 1976 and Gary decided he wanted to fly fighter planes for the military so after a discouraging attempt to enter the Canadian forces he sent away for some brochures about the possibility of joining the RAF in England. He read the materials he was sent and announced to his parents that he was going to apply to the British Royal Air Force.

Two of the requirements to enlist were that he be a British citizen and carry a valid British passport. Gary found that he was indeed considered a British citizen as both his parents were born in and had married in the UK. In order to obtain his passport, he had to travel to Scotland and get copies of both his parent's birth certificates and their marriage license as they didn't bring copies of these when they emigrated. His mother returned to Scotland with him as his father was helping to run the factory with other managers during strike action. They arrived in Scotland and over the course of the next four weeks and after much running back and forth between government offices and making requests, he had the needed documentation and applied for his passport which was mailed to his Aunt's house where they were staying.



Within 2 weeks he received another letter with travel information, train tickets, taxi vouchers and instructions on when and how to apply at the RAF base at Biggin Hill in Westerham, England. He was now in his second month in Scotland and his mother needed to return to Canada so his father flew out to join him as the strike was now settled at the factory. Together they travelled to the base via multiple trains, a bus and eventually a taxi ride.

At the recruitment office at the base, he was among other Englishmen as well as some Australians and Irishmen. Some were helicopter pilots looking to move from the Navy to the Air Force and asked him about his licensing but he wasn't licensed at the time.



He stayed at the base for a few days of basic testing then was summoned and advised he couldn't be a fighter pilot as he was too tall for the cockpit ejection system. He was offered various other positions in the service but he had his heart set on flying fighters so he respectfully declined and returned to Glasgow.

It was August and he needed to make a decision on how to proceed next so after much thought he reasoned that if he couldn't fly planes for the military then at least he could learn to build them so he applied to Toronto's Ryerson University aerospace engineering program and returned to Canada. The reply to his application advised there were no vacancies in that program at the time but he could enter the mechanical or industrial engineering programs. Gary chose the mechanical program and in doing so found out that mechanical, industrial and aerospace all had the same first-year courses.

He wrote and passed the physics and chemistry entrance exams with ease so he didn't need to attend those classes and found his schedule now provided two-hour gaps three days a week so he also signed up for a fairly new computer programming course which would pay off later on. The computers at that time were smaller IBM units using programming cards which involved a lot of hand typing of cards and their computers were learning how to network with the York University computers, a field still in its infancy.

He was still living at home in Agincourt and took the bus and subways to school each day. At the start of the second year the number of participants in the aerospace program dropped drastically and he was able to change programs and enter the one he originally wanted. He says during his three years in that school he met some great people and while there was some 'fun and games' the workload was intensive with fifty hours or more of studying each week plus lab work and drafting most evenings.

Near the end of his three-year diploma program choices were available on where he and his classmates wanted to proceed next.

There were options available and talk about staying on at Ryerson for the full degree program, applying at University of Toronto for their aerospace degree program or entering the workforce with their current diplomas which a number of them did. There was a job fair at the time and he spoke to representatives for the de Havilland Aircraft Canada Company who offered him a position and he accepted it. He bought his first car at that time, a Pontiac Grand Prix.



It was 1977 and he started working at de Havilland on the military use Buffalo DHC5 program but he also worked on the DHC6 twin Otter, the DASH 7 and eventually the DASH 8 project for about a year and a half. He says his time there was lots of fun, there were new people and many new design concepts and methodologies involved. Then in 1983 the government introduced the new WHMIS safety standards into all workplaces and the sudden safety requirements for the handling of chemicals used in treating metals in the aircraft industry were significant. The de Havilland company decided to stop all work and production as they didn't have a plan to become compliant with the new standards.

The McDonnell Douglas Corporation, a fellow aircraft manufacturer in the city at the time, was much quicker in getting their safety standards implemented and about 3,000 people ended up moving from one company over to the other after about a week of de Havilland shutting down, Gary included.

He worked almost eleven years for them, starting out in manufacturing engineering, drawing out plans for tooling, parts and construction. He was then recruited to be a sub-foreman on the production floor and he did that only for a month or so then was asked to return to engineering in a liaison department for a role with the material review board. This role had him re-designing parts and creating processes for fixing problems encountered in manufacturing and reviewing and troubleshooting problematic designs. At the time the company was working on soon-to-be-retired DC10, the KC10's, the emerging MD11 and for a short period the F-18 fighter jet program.



Gary says because he was single at the time he was a prime choice to travel for business so his position now involved visiting different manufacturing locations and parts suppliers to troubleshoot issues and implement fixes. One of the first locations outside Ontario he ended up in was outside of Germantown, Ohio in the factory of a small company named Aeronca owned by Fleet Aerospace of Canada. This company ended up working on the parts for the tail cone for the empennage of the MD80 series which was interchangeable with other similar aircraft. Initially, this was to be a two to three-week assignment where he would oversee the transferring of the manufacturing process from Toronto to Ohio. This included the shipping of the parts and tooling needed for the plant but he ended up returning to help oversee the engineering process and ended up staying there about two years off and on helping out.

As an airline passenger of course he had a critical eye for the aircraft that he was flying on, often on one of the DASH 8 models. One time when traveling via Com Air with other co-workers to the facility in Ohio an arm rail fell off a seat as they were boarding. He and a colleague produced their mini toolkits and quickly re-attached the armrest while reassuring the stewardess that all was well before the takeoff.

He says his next move came quickly after the Ohio plant to a production facility just outside of Macon, Georgia near Robins Air Force Base. This factory was freshly constructed or renovated by McDonnell Douglas for an improved assembly process for the entire tail cone section for the MD80. Here he was a consultant and engineering liaison working with Jimmy Brennan, a company manager from Canada who oversaw the transfer of the entire project and then component assembly. Gary worked directly with a couple of engineers who transferred in from other states and together they smoothed out the transition of that assembly process from Canada to there.

Gary says the work there was good, the people were great and he stayed in touch with many for years afterwards. He would work there for a few weeks at a time then return home to Canada for a short stay before returning again. His parents who were retired by then would stop in to visit him for a couple of days when travelling south in the winter and when Gary had a week off he could drive a few hours and spend it in the condo that they rented in Florida. Eventually, the team from Canada was able to hand over most of the responsibilities to their American counterparts and after about a year in Georgia, his work was done and he returned to Toronto where he noticed work at the Canadian facilities was starting to slow down significantly.

It was near the end of 1991, Gary's friend Paul who was later to become the best man at his wedding, advised him there were currently openings in the Toronto Police Force for auxiliary officers and that he had joined and was really enjoying it. There was no pay involved and no gun was carried but it was a potential opening into the force if he was interested. He was given contact information for the officer in charge of the auxiliary force, Nick Doran whom he called and agreed to meet to get more information. As it turned out Nick was an avid aviation enthusiast who worked on the Avro Arrow scale reconstruction project. Gary agreed to apply for the training course and was accepted.

He said the first class had a wide variety of individuals attending, some hoping to eventually become full-time police officers. After the second class, he was invited by classmates to join them at a nearby pub for a beer and he agreed. He says he spoke to Hazel there for the first time and after listening to her talk for a few minutes he said that he believed he knew what area of England she was from based on her accent, and he was correct. They chatted and he hoped he would see her again the following week. She was indeed in the next class and they ended up talking more and their friendship started to grow.

Gary asked her how she ended up in the auxiliary training and she told him that while in the UK she had been interested in joining the Royal Navy but when she inquired they only offered her non-combat type support roles when she really wanted to see action and 'shoot missiles'. Gary jokingly said at this point 'I knew then I'd found the perfect woman!' She then looked at joining the London Metropolitan Police force and with her university scores it was suggested she enrol in a lengthy course that would eventually lead to an inspector's position but she declined. He says over the next three months they became very good friends. He also noted that coincidentally, when he was trying out for the RAF in England at Biggin Hill base years earlier, Hazel was living only a few kilometres away at the time.

Hazel initially came to Canada in the early 80's for a change and got a job at Pioneer Camp, a Christian summer camp for children and youth in the Muskoka area where she worked as a camp counsellor. After her first season of working at the camp, she took a long road trip to explore more of Canada then returned to England to advise her family that she was moving here permanently. She returned to work at the Pioneer Camp full-time as the Girls' Camp Director. She also spent time as the Dean of Residence at Havergal College, a respected private school for girls in Toronto. Gary says he ended up helping in the camp kitchen as a cook for a week one summer.

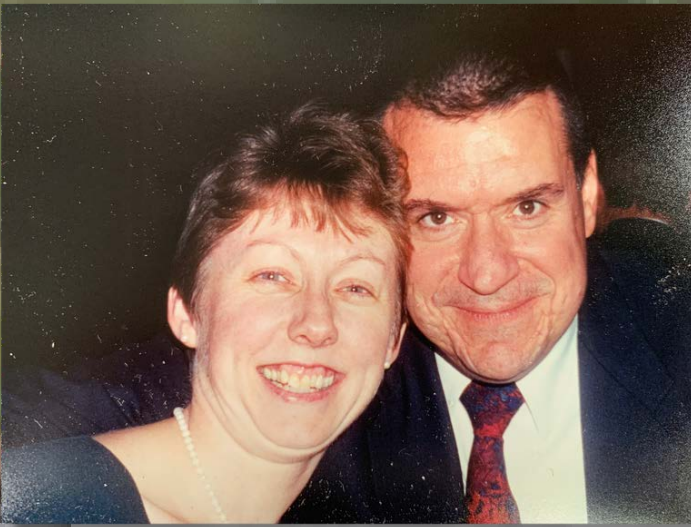
Their training for the auxiliary force lasted about six months and while they lived some distance from each other they soon started spending their free time together when they could and grew closer to each other. They were doing a lot of physical fitness training at the time and often went running together. Gary said they were once running a familiar route near Hazel's home when he twisted his ankle bringing them to a halt. While they were stopped and he tended to his ankle he suggested they travel to New York together to see some shows and enjoy some of the city. Hazel's reply was that she wouldn't travel with a man she was not married to. He says his reply was 'Well we will have to get married then.'

Years later Gary would tease Hazel often saying he didn't propose marriage that day but instead proposed a different running date. They did get married in September at a small ceremony in Toronto at The Old Mill with Gary's parents, Hazel's mother and a few close friends present. The minister who officiated was a friend of Hazel's from Pioneer Camp. The next day they celebrated by taking a trip to New York City where they attended some plays and theatre shows. Upon their return, they held a reception event at the Enoch Turner Schoolhouse venue that was attended by a large number of friends and acquaintances. This in turn was followed by a trip to England in December to attend another reception event held by Hazel's mother for their family in the UK. Gary had moved into Hazel's rented house and fondly recalls, 'At the time it was like we had three weddings!'





At McDonnell Douglas existing projects were now finishing up and parts manufacturing was being sourced out to other suppliers and the end of the Toronto facility was in sight. Some of his engineer colleagues were offered facilitator positions in other countries where parts were going to be produced such as Shanghai, China. Gary wasn't offered one of these positions and says he wouldn't have accepted one anyways. Rival companies Bombardier and Canadair in Montreal had already hired some of the people who worked with him but Gary wasn't keen on changing cities or doing the contract work that was offered. Gary was spared in the first round of layoffs but then advised he was part of the second round and was given a three-month notice.



He and Hazel were both enjoying being in the Toronto Auxiliary Force and now after about a year and a half, they both applied to the Ontario Provincial Police Force. They passed the interview process and then the required physical fitness testing. Hazel received her job offer first then Gary received his the following day. He says he was laid off and out of a job for a total of only five days.

It was July of 1993 and they started their introductory training for the OPP in Brampton where they stayed during the week and then returned home on weekends. That lasted about three weeks and after successfully completing that course they were sent to the Ontario Police College in Aylmer for the next three and a half months. Upon graduating the college they were notified of their placements; Gary would be in the Downsview detachment and Hazel would be in Aurora and although separate, they were conveniently close to each other.

Gary worked out of the Downsview detachment on traffic enforcement of the highways in the GTA. During his time there he had a total of nine recruits work with him and he worked a twelve-hour shift. Hazel was sometimes on the same radio frequency and they would update each other with their hours or work times if needed.

Gary once travelled with an OPP work colleague Rick Dupuis to Norfolk, Virginia to visit the garage where the Phantom Works television series was filmed as they were both fans of the show. Rick was a fan of Corvette stingrays and Gary loved the Oldsmobile 442's. While in Norfolk he visited the naval base touring the Iowa class battleship USS Wisconsin and saw the USS Gerald Ford aircraft carrier.

He says he was like a magnet to any museum or facility that dealt with aircraft or navy vessels. At other times he toured the USS Missouri when he visited Pearl Harbour in Honolulu, Hawaii and visited the Royal Air Force Museum in London, England. When working in Ohio he often spent off-hours at the US Air Force Museum near Dayton.

On one of their anniversaries, Hazel asked Gary what he would like to do to celebrate. He suggested that they could attend some theatre shows together or maybe they could tour a museum with aircraft somewhere. They ended up spending a couple of days touring the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and Museum near Dayton and he saw some new additions since he was last there including ICBMs and two other hangars with newer aircraft.



While working traffic in Downsview he was offered a move to the Fugitive Task Force where he would work with a partner Andy for several months. Together they searched for and sought out people who missed court appearances or failed other requirements. He then received an offer asking him to help with a specific fraud case with the crime department in Mississauga as an acting detective. This resulted in him working on a number of other fraud cases over time including identification theft and bank fraud. Doing this he eventually became a full-time detective.

His superiors then asked him to assist in a joint project with the RCMP who were working on fraud-related anti-terrorism investigations. He agreed and was sent to Ottawa for a month of additional, specialized training and then started working with this unique team. After some time his work there was recognized and it was suggested he apply to become part of a covert operation that sought out individuals involved in criminal activities who might be interested in becoming confidential informants. His work with the informant team was highly successful and he was asked to move to a team that handled unsolved homicides by known, organized criminals.

After a few years of being in those covert operations, he was approached by his old OPP boss to cover his position for a few weeks as he was being promoted. Gary ended up 'coming home' to the OPP and worked out of the headquarters in Orillia where he managed their covert operations including the confidential informant and witness protection programs for the force. Over the next several years he reformed and standardized the programs he was in charge of and helped train several thousand officers.

He volunteered with the Orillia branch of the Air Cadets for a while helping to teach some young trainees.



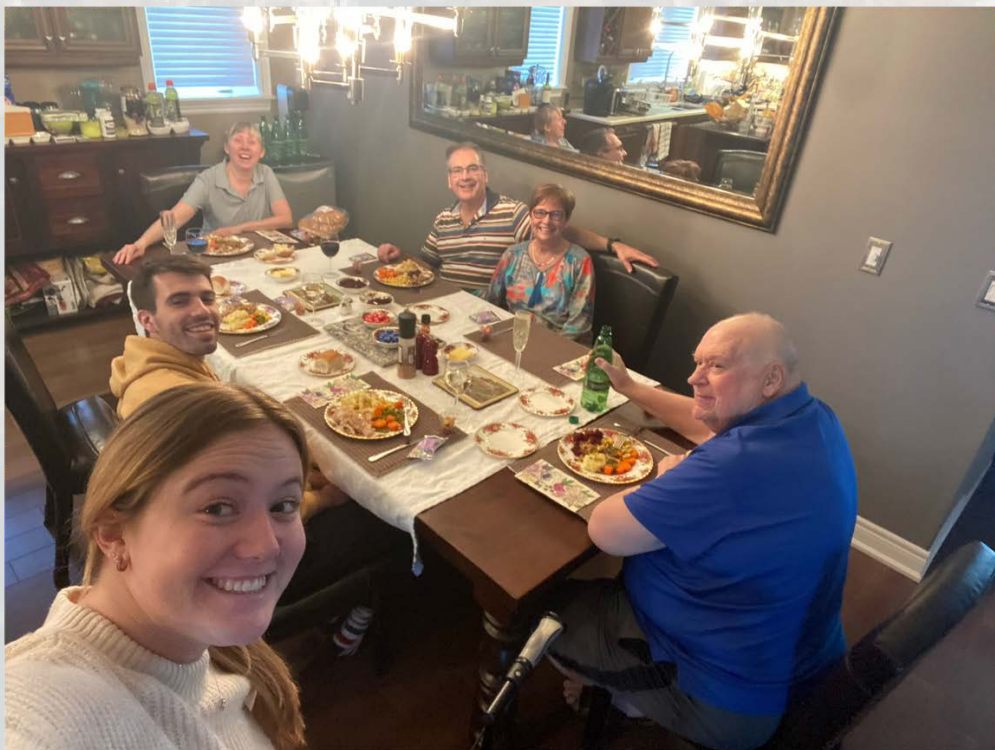


During his years at the headquarters, he assisted many other municipal police forces throughout the province, other forces across the country and some outside of Canada. He also worked outside of his main role with the force and on occasion provided assistance to the Canada Border Services Agency, the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary and many First Nations partners. He has been published within the force including an extensive operations manual and helped another covert law enforcement agent and author by proofreading a number of his books prior to publication. He says the last few years of service in the force involved a lot of training and the setting of standard operating procedures for others to follow.

Gary has received numerous awards and much recognition for his work during his lifetime and has made many lifelong friends along the way. Together Gary and Hazel's contribution to law enforcement and the OPP organization is admirable, his service totalling thirty years and hers twenty-seven. Hazel returned early from a work trip in early 2020 when she learned Gary had been diagnosed with breast cancer and retired at that time to care for him. He retired on July 26, 2023.

Gary says he and Hazel are fortunate to have shared their life together, the companionship of their pet dogs and so many good friends they have met along their journey.





"Gary smiled and laughed often while relaying his story and his passion and excitement for life came through in the telling. I felt privileged to be able to hear it directly from him."

- Steven, Hospice Orillia Volunteer

