

## THE SUMMER OF '64.

It was my first *real* summer job. By real, I mean one where I would receive a paycheque and work regular hours. I couldn't wait to rid myself of grass-cutting for old Mr. Woolfe and the rest of the neighbours on Filion Street, and of weeding Mrs. Landry's gardens. Gone would be the days of pushing a smelly gasoline lawnmower, raking lawns and digging useless weeds out of gardens with flowers I couldn't identify, nor cared to. No sir, I was moving on in the world, a real job, with a uniform, paycheque and transportation. After all, I was fourteen, had a SIN number, and it was time I stepped up to the plate in the corporate world.

Of course, I got the job on the recommendation of my older brother, who previously had the job on the recommendation of our older cousin, whose mother got him the job. They had all moved on to bigger and better things in the Company.

The Canadian Pacific Railway Company, formed in 1881 by Scottish Canadian businessmen, the company that united Canadians from coast to coast, and I was about to join their ranks for the summer. I was instructed to report for work at 7:00 AM on Monday morning at Windsor Station in downtown Montreal where my duties would be explained to me. My uniform would be issued at that time as well, and all I needed to bring was my own form of transportation.

Now the term bicycle courier had not yet been coined; we were simply known as telegram delivery boys. There were six of us along with a couple of older men who drove cars. The city was divided into routes which were assigned to us by a dispatcher for the duration of the summer based on some hierarchy I could not fully figure out. To the best of my knowledge, the full-timers got the best routes, followed by the college students, and we got the left-over routes.

If you know a little about Montreal, you will know that there is a mountain in the middle of the city called Mont Royale. Imagine my surprise when I was assigned a route that did *not* include the mountain. I thought for sure that I would be peddling up and down those steep streets that I remembered driving on with my Dad in his old Austin. Only later did I realize that the older boys would disappear for a whole day delivering a couple of telegrams, claiming that they had to bicycle over the mountain to make the delivery while I, on the other hand, delivered many more telegrams in a day, chalking up many more kilometres in the process. I was weaving in and out

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of busy inner city traffic, sucking up exhaust fumes while some of my counterparts were enjoying the clean fresh air of Beaver Lake on the mountain. I really didn't care because I was free, free to bike any street I wished to, free to smell the aromas of the city, and free from cutting grass and weeding.

My route included Old Montreal with City Hall, the cobblestone streets of the historic business section, the harbour and the St. Henri area, a French-Canadian and Irish working-class neighbourhood, and one of the poorest sections of the city.

Our uniforms were standard Canadian Pacific Railway issue and must have been handed down from the original Scots - thick grey wool pants, stiff grey cotton shirts, heavy wool jackets and peaked caps. This was considered summer wear for bicycling. I couldn't imagine what the winter wear was like. The wool was hot and itchy, and eventually smelled like exhaust after riding all day on the city streets, a minor inconvenience considering that I belonged to this great railway company, and was given the task of hand-delivering these important documents.

I delivered telegrams to stately homes, fancy high-rise offices, luxury hotels, small businesses, government buildings and even one aboard the Queen Mary ship while it was docked at the harbour. I also delivered to run-down rooming houses, semi-boarded up buildings and neglected homes and apartments.

I once had an opportunity to deliver a telegram to a mansion in Westmount, the richest area in Montreal. The regular boy was out on another delivery and this was a Special Delivery. I volunteered to do it, figuring that the tip would be a small fortune. It was a fair distance from the station, probably around 20 kilometres round trip, but it was going to be worth it. I knocked at the fancy doors and a kindly older gentleman greeted me, signed for the telegram and cheerfully handed me a nickel.

Later that day, I was back biking my regular route and made a delivery to one of the poorest dwellings imaginable. I wasn't even sure if anyone actually lived in the building, it was so run down. As I climbed the dingy stairs I could hear a baby crying from the apartment above, and I was met by a toddler in diapers on the upper landing. He just stared blankly at me. His mother, a young woman, emerged from the apartment, welcomed me and

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smiled. I wondered how she could be smiling as she must have know that this telegram would probably be bearing bad news. She signed for it and told me to wait. She re-emerged from the apartment and gave me a 50-cent tip. Astonished, I tried to give the tip back to her, explaining that I was paid to deliver these telegrams, but she would not hear of it and insisted I keep the tip.

I learned a lot about life that summer on my bicycle, things like the biggest tippers weren't always the owners of stately homes in the city or the well-heeled businessmen in their fancy offices. I also learned that respect was something that everyone deserved, and that there could be dignity in poverty. All this from the seat of my bike.