

LOCAL

'Connaught pulled on people's heartstrings'

Memories contest to mark rebirth of hotel 'remarkably personal' and fascinating

MIRNETH MACLEOD
The Hamilton Spectator

The next chapter in the history of the Royal Connaught is set to launch publicly, while the collection of memories from its previous life has topped two submissions.

John began Saturday for the first 122 letters at the Residences at the Royal Connaught. The aim is to eventually bring a total of 700 emails to the show's own site.

Developers Brett Spadoni and Ted Vukeli said their own memories to the hotel inspired them plenty of Hamiltonian home stories to share about the King Street East landmark. They decided to create a contest.

"Lots of people have memories here and I think some people want a little piece of that back," said Vukeli.

Three judges will pick a winner who will get to host a three-course dinner party for 20 at the Connaught. The developers have partnered with Pop-Up Hamilton, which hosts elaborate meals in unexpected places.

More than 200 submissions have arrived so far, and the project's Facebook page has attracted more than 2,000 likes.

One of the most fascinating glimpses into the social eminence of the grand hotel has come from Harry Frost II, the grandfather of Harry Levin Frost, the original owner of the Connaught, which opened in 1905.

"My mother attended a ball at the Royal Connaught in honor of the then Prince of Wales, shortly after the First World War," he wrote. "He was so taken with her that he liked his dance card with her name. She was still single, of course, and they danced all night. No wonder he adored her — he was a ladies man."

He is referring to King Edward VIII, who gave up the British throne in 1936 to marry Wallis Simpson.

"The Roy at Connaught memories are so remarkably personal," said judge Graham Crawford, who owns HISTORY and HERITAGE galleries. "Think an extraordinary mix of dance, crafts, traditions, nostalgia. It's remarkable the building has been empty for 30 years, yet it's filled with memories."

Picking a winner will be very difficult, Crawford said. "This is Hamilton folklore in the first sense. These are stories handed down from generation to generation."

The other judges are Tom Fenwick and Lauren Erickson, owner of La Boutique boutique and producer of Vintage Marketplace. "How rare were the Royal Connaught really pulled on people's heartstrings," said Erickson. "For a lot of people, it was their glimpse into a world they may not have been a part of otherwise."

The submission will link off with a VIP reception. Media only. With unlimited drinks. Vintage models and plenty of treats to the glassware of the building's past.

macleod@thespec.com
905-536-3429 @mirmacleod



The Royal Connaught hosted many official functions like the Kiwanis Club charter. People are writing about dances, graduations, celebrations and weddings for a contest marking its rebirth.

THE MEMORIES

DIANE PASQUA (PUSSELL) on her first Robinson's department store Christmas party at the Royal Connaught, 1964 (edited for length)

"I was in awe. When I arrived at the Connaught I was escorted from the most beautiful magazine that I've ever seen to the main ballroom. My seat in the balcony up the left staircase made me feel like a princess. We had the best view of everything in this wonderful room. My eyes didn't blink, not even once."

JIM MOYLE, whose mother Agnes (Eaton) Moyle worked at the Connaught through the 1950s till about 1950 (edited for length)

"From about the age of six, the family (Mom, Dad and the four kids) would go to the annual Christmas party at the Crystal Ballroom. The entire stage was loaded with elaborate gifts for everyone. After dinner, a band would play and many Connaught family friendships were made... We would also from time to time (after much home time) parade down to the elegant dining room (where Mom was hostess for some years) in our white and Sunday best. It was always a treat! A huge chocolate plate was our reward if we behaved appropriately."

GLAD FARLE

"About 1956 when I was 6 years old, my uncle, who also worked at the Connaught as maître d' in the dining room I believe, got me a part-time job in the back room in Peacock Alley. My wage was 20 cents an hour! Some nights I had to work past the last steward and would have to call my father to pick me up. In those days, the tip plate on the counter was owned by a private company. One of the gentlemen who frequented the hotel. At the end of each time I would serve him he would take my hand and place 25 cents in it and say, 'This is for you!'"

MARIO WILLIAMS (edited for length)

"In the early '60s, my aunt Nadine operated

a hair salon, La Boutique, in the Royal Connaught on the mezzanine overlooking the lobby. As a boy of 7 or 8, I remember sitting on a high stool most Saturdays collecting the money from the many clients of the salon and doing coffee runs down the corridor to the restaurant at the west entrance. We all perched in back then, my mom and sister washing hair and doing nails. It was always a busy spot and not without excitement. We had Louis Armstrong pop in and sign autographs during his stay at the Connaught. My sister Dina remembers the entire Ottawa Roughies team popping by to say hi while staying at the hotel. At 10, it was the highlight of her day."

DONNA ROYLANC

"I was a child of about 10 years of age, living in Hamilton with my family and various relatives. Once in a blue moon we would have an uncle, Captain Ronald Ruddy and his wife Hilda, come up from Jamaica and stay at the Connaught Hotel. While there, he would host a huge family dinner, which was a major event in all our lives. I know I have pictures that were taken at the time, but they are buried in a lifetime of albums! He lived a much grander life than the relatives here, so we always put on our best bib and tucker for the event. It's a happy memory for me and every one of the remaining relatives who attended."

MATT YARDLEY, who sat on the executive committee of the Hamilton Air Show, about being on his way to a function at the Connaught with a group including military personnel, about 1965 (edited for length)

"The Connaught had a few ballrooms, so we were not the only ones having a function. In the corner, sitting by themselves, gentlemen having their last evening talk, were a bride and her mother. The bride looked beautiful in full dress. She looked like she may have been a little emotional, probably on both ends of the spectrum. The service men, being who they were, also in full dress

THE CONDOS

Website: www.royalconnaught.com
This weekend: The Royal Connaught will be open to the general public on Saturday from 11 to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

TO MAKE A MEMORY SUBMISSION

Email your submission to memories@royalconnaught.com, posted on the Residences of the Royal Connaught Facebook page, or shared on Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest using the hashtag #RoyalConnaught. The contest closes July 4 at 2 p.m.

noticed her. As a group, with us non-service people following because we didn't have any idea what they were doing or planning went up to this table and noticed they fanned out to perfect symmetry, some kneeling, some standing. They then proceeded to all start to sing the song 'The Cruise' using on a slow to Kelly McGillis in Top Gun. You see I lost that over feeling, which was a high-noon Brother! He. The bride and mother, obviously taken by surprise, first were embarrassed, then laughed and then taken by the moment. After the serenade the service men each went up and gave her a congratulatory kiss and then as a group we all went to our function, leaving a stunned mother and daughter."

JUDY PAPALIA

Judy worked at the front desk in the early '70s. She remembers one Sunday morning, Suite 702 called down for tea and paper. She begged the boss to let her take it up. The lady from Suite 702 asked Judy to sit with her while she drank her tea and read her Church of Scientology readings. As Judy says — "How could I say no to Ginger Rogers?" Seems '76 was a popstar's stay. The legendary Liberace himself shared this suite with his Purple Car and had people who flanked the show-ups in an entrance hallway. "He was one of the great great guests ever here!"

DORY MARIANA-THERISE

"It was the winter formal in senior year and he was just a sweet kid whose locker was beside mine. We shared a few dances and had a great time. As most people do after high school, we parted ways. It took a chance meeting while passing each other in a shopping mall nearly 15 years later for us to come to realize that we had more than just locker buddies. And we can both always look back at this picture and say that it all started with a dance at the Royal Connaught. Thanks for a trip down memory lane."

PREDICTION 'IMPOSSIBLE'

The psychiatrist responsible for Steve Meis's care at St. Joseph's Hospital on the last two days of his life was asked Tuesday: How do you explain the fact that 12 minutes after signing out on the (same) morning he reported no suicidal thoughts, he apparently attempted suicide by stepping in front of a taxi?

"I'd prefer to emphasize the word 'apparently.' Dr. Patricia Roubach said, "Sadly, the suicide rate has jumped very much in recent years. It's well-known that predicting when someone is going to move from intention to action is impossible."

"That strong language is used in the literature, impossible."

"I thought long and hard — there is a mystery to it," Roubach said.

Meis had three previous suicide attempts, and had admitted to staff that he was having suicidal thoughts, but told therapists "I'll stay in the hospital" and promised he'd talk if the thoughts re-emerged.

"There is a possibility that he was not honest with me, but he felt honest," Roubach said slowly.

"You just said from attempts had not been like that; they had not involved another person doing something to him like that — a taxi driver, police."

"I thought 'how did this guy get out down?' Funnily said.

Meis spoke around with the shots and walked away.

"I was watching through a haze of gas masks. Once he got up to 40 feet away, he

PMASs High
Parks Canada

**PARKS CANADA COMMEMORATES
70TH ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY**

Friday, June 6 - Sunday, June 8
10 am to 5 pm

Enjoy family-friendly activities such as tattooing, crafts and learning about the role of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the D-Day invasion. Hear first-hand stories from those who served. parksCanada.gc.ca/hhds

Saturday, June 7
7 am to 3 pm
Fill your senses with a touching music, sound and light show.
Special events admission fee apply.

658 Catherine Street N., Hamilton ON
parksCanada.gc.ca/hhds
905-526-8742

'I'M JUST OUT WALKING'

CONTRIBUTOR (A)

Farrill — who first confronted Meis on the shoulder of the taxi 20 meters away and the witness factor, and followed him up the sidewalk — asked Meis what he was doing and told him to drop the object.

When the troubled 42-year-old business engineer didn't answer and instead spoke to the driver, grabbing it so the taxi's headlights could see their faces.

According to Farrill, Meis then pulled the door out from the bottom and rolled underneath, popping up on the other side in "three to five seconds," she said.

The two officers, standing in the knee-high weeds and wet grasses of the parkway's verge, were at the bottom of an overgrown hill and felt they had seen here before. So they held fire.

"I can't move and I have this guy with a shovel coming at me and he's going to try and take my head off," explained Farrill.

Meis was struck multiple times.

"He didn't moan, he didn't groan, he didn't acknowledge it at all. I thought I was shooting blanks," Farrill testified. "I didn't see any blood on impact areas."

"I thought 'how did this guy get out down?' Farrill said.

Meis spoke around with the shots and walked away.

"I was watching through a haze of gas masks. Once he got up to 40 feet away, he

Farrill said during the trial in November, Meis spoke only four words, his last: "I'm just out walking."

tded@thespec.com