

The Bomb at Parliament Hill

Today, as I crossed the school yard at Satinwood School, I felt different—a loss of innocence. I thought our family was far away from criminal activity. I was twelve years old when my view of the world changed. Our family now carried the burden of my Uncle Bob's brother, breaking the law.

On May 19th, 1966, Mom and Dad listened to the news report at breakfast as usual.

“A terrifying bomb explosion rocked Parliament Hill yesterday. A grudge bomb meant for MPs in the House of Commons blew up Paul Joseph Chartier as he walked out of a third-floor washroom. A man tried to throw a bomb into the House of Commons.”

“Paul Chartier, that's Bob's brother,” Dad said.

Aunt Gloria, Mom's sister, married Bob Chartier. We spent Christmas and summer holidays with Aunt Gloria and Uncle Bob on Grandma's farm, and in Picture Butte in southern Alberta.

At school, I was sure my friends would shun me for being a relative of a lone bomber. Little did I know, they didn't listen to the news or connect me to him at all. I kept quiet.

Why did Paul do something so drastic?

This question followed me throughout my life. Now looking back as an adult, I can see more clearly how the events played out, both in my mind and what actually happened.

My Uncle Bob had a strong French accent, but I was not sure how fluent he was in French. My French grandmother encouraged Aunt Gloria to marry him. Because of the connection with Quebec, I believed Paul was a member of the separatist party in Quebec.

I started paying attention to politics during Trudeau-mania in 1968 when Pierre Trudeau won the liberal leadership race. Before that, we had Lester B. Pearson and John Diefenbaker running the country.

Lester B. Pearson had been Prime Minister for most of my childhood, which was during the Cold War. President Kennedy tried to convince him that Canada should have nuclear weapons to protect Canada and the US from Russia. Pearson was reluctant, but understood the need.

Diefenbaker, the prime minister before him, wanted nothing to do with nuclear weapons. In fact, when Canada had developed the fighter jet CF-100 called the Avro Arrow, the fastest jet in the world with the potential of shooting down long-range missiles from Russia, Diefenbaker cancelled the project. Diefenbaker thought we no longer required a jet with this capability. February 20, 1959, became known as Black Friday when he had the CF-100 destroyed along with the blueprints, in case they got into the hands of the enemy.

Diefenbaker had also ignored Quebec, and Pearson wasn't much better.

Christmas Away from Home

It had been nine months since Paul had tried to blow up the parliament buildings. A sunny Christmas morning, 1966, Dad plowed a trail through our hay flat to the main road. The blizzard the night before had blown in our driveway.

“Your aunt Gloria is expecting us for Christmas, we have to get there some way,” Mom said as she paced, looking out the kitchen window at the packed snow drifts.

Mom hadn't bought a turkey for us to cook. Christmas dinner was three hours away in Picture Butte, Alberta, where Uncle Bob and Aunt Gloria ran the Picture Butte Hotel.

“We have to go out the trail I plowed through the hay flat,” Dad said. “I remember that was the only way out to the main road.”

We didn't take long to get ready and the five of us were on our way through uncertain highways; the snowplows were out in full force.

When we arrived, I didn't smell turkey, or anything else, for that matter. Aunt Gloria must not have expected us so soon. There was no apology or rationale as to why there was no Christmas Dinner. Mom made us sandwiches, and I played Mousetrap with my younger cousin, Robby, who was still in his new pyjamas past noon. This new game intrigued me. I wanted to play the whole game, but someone had set it up before hand, so Robby and I turned the crank and watched the ball move from one plastic piece to another to set up a chain reaction, and eventually the trap fell on the mouse.

We exchanged gifts at some point during the afternoon with Aunt Gloria their five adopted children. Denise was my age, Robby was three years younger, the identical twins, Monique and Marlene, were seven, and John was two and a half and still in diapers.

Our family was used to a Christmas routine established by my grandparents from both sides of the family. Now, after all four grandparents passed away, we established new traditions. At Aunt Gloria's, we waited for the festivities to begin, but they didn't. Uncle Bob must have been working at the hotel. Sometime, long after dark, the turkey was ready. We all helped get the meal on the table.

I didn't think about how Uncle Bob's brother Paul's terrorist attack, the hotel business, or having adopted children may have affected their family. I was just ready to go home, back to our routine.

Canada's Centennial - 1967

My older sister and brother, Julie and Harry, both went to Expo in the summer of 1967. I remember writing a speech in the 4-H club about not being able to go to Expo. I was left at home

doing my brother and sister's chores while they were gone. I didn't win the speech, likely because it had a tone of feeling sorry for myself and complaining about the younger sister's plight in life, which was not in line with the 4-H motto of being there with head, heart, health, and hands to help the community and country. We planted Centennial trees in our yard and celebrated by flying the maple leaf flag that was adopted only two years earlier.

It was ironic that Charles De Gaulle, President of France, came to Canada during Expo 67, during our centennial and delivered a speech "Vive le Quebec Libre (Long live free Quebec). This was seen as an endorsement of Quebec's separatism. After much criticism from the Canadian Government, De Gaulle cancelled his trip to Ottawa and returned to France.

Trudeau-mania

The next year brought many changes as we moved to another farm ten miles to the north in April 1968. The Hutterites had bought our land and traded for our new farm for \$1.00.

I remember being in our new living room watching the leadership race on TV, after Pearson retired in the spring of 1968. Liberal politicians "crossing the floor" to put their votes behind Trudeau at the end of the convention. Even though Trudeau seemed young, he was born in 1918, only two years younger than my father.

Trudeau enjoyed a good argument and thought journalists were lazy, and uninformed. Trudeau had been an editor for Cite Liberal, which gave him insight into how the press gallery had been bought off by the corrupt government of Duplessis.

Once Trudeau was in power he called an early election in June of 1968. Trudeau-mania had taken over, and he won with a majority government against Conservative Premier of Nova Scotia, Robert Stanfield, a textiles manufacturer; and Tommy Douglas former premier of Saskatchewan who was the author of Canada's first health care legislation. Trudeau had the

command of the French language and spoke against radical nationalist in Quebec and with his charisma.

Trudeau was Prime Minister in a time when the threat from Soviet Union was becoming a thing of the past. In 1969, Trudeau and his staff wrote the white paper called “Defense in the Seventies” that remained policy well into the 1980’s. The military was downgraded, just in time for the October Crisis in Quebec.

Terrorists in Quebec

In October 1970, Quebec terrorists of the Front de’ liberation du Quebec (FLQ) kidnapped James Cross, the British Trade Representative in Montreal at gunpoint and Quebec Labor Minister Pierre Laporte. The demand of the separatist agenda was to release of "political prisoners," to broadcast of their manifesto, and have safe passage to Cuba. Parliament could not give into demands of illegal terrorists. After two weeks it became clear that the Quebec police could not handle the situation, and Premier Robert Bourassa urged the federal government to send in the Canadian Armed Forces and invoke the War Measures Act.

On October 17th, Pierre Laporte was murdered with his body found in the trunk of a car. On Dec 3rd, James Cross was released, and the FLQ had passage to Cuba.

Old Montreal

In the summer of 1971, I visited Julie and her new husband, Brian, in Ottawa. On a trip on Julie’s bike to the Parliament Buildings, I was so excited when I saw Trudeau get out of the limousine parked below the Peace Tower.

That weekend, they decided to take me to Montreal to see Brian’s sister Pam and her husband, Grant. We took the subway to a crowded and noisy pub in “Old Montreal”, across

from the Jacques Cartier Statue. A band at the pub played “Vive le Quebec Libre” slogans and patrons sang along. It came to me is a gestalt, or an “ah, ah moment”. I could see things clearly.

“Oh, I understand this Quebec thing now,” I said as I slammed my fist on the table.

The bar went silent.

Julie, Brian, Pam and Grant, ushered me out the door to spend the rest of the night walking home in the subway, because it was closed.

Had Paul Chartier been a pioneer of this separatist movement?