

A Passion of Mine

By Bob Clarke

“Dad, I want to be an Air Cadet!” These words from my 12-year-old son were the beginning of a very exciting adventure for me.

Although I had once been an Air Cadet and even a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force for a while, I had not been involved for nearly thirty years. The organization had changed a great deal since my involvement and now had both boys and girls as cadets. When I was a cadet, all our needs had been provided by the Military. Now parent-sponsoring committees provides most of the fundraising.

The first night that my son and I went to sign up, a lot of things happened in a hurry! The officers were explaining to my son what cadets were all about. At the same time I was being enticed by two chocolate éclairs and a cup of so-so coffee. I was hooked and that same night I became a member of the parents sponsoring committee. Little did I know that I was embarking on a volunteer career that to the present time has kept me involved for nearly nineteen years.

A few months from my initial start I became the Chairman of the sponsoring committee. A year later I became the Director of the Southern Zone. Being Director of the Southern Zone, I had 14 sponsoring committees reporting to me. From there, other positions followed and before long I was the Provincial Vice Chairman of the Alberta Provincial Committee of the Air Cadet League of Canada. After a three-year term as Vice Chairman I moved up to the Chairman's job. I now had thirty-nine squadrons to look after, with about 2200 cadets in total.

It was a great pleasure for me to see so many shining faces at so many different events that I often forgot how difficult it was at times to administer these groups. When you have to deal with locations as far apart as Peace River and Crows Nest Pass it puts a new meaning on volunteering.

The ever-growing problems of fundraising have been increasing since the military supply of both funding and equipment has been steadily dropping off. Numerous problems have occurred in trying to get sponsoring committees (composed mostly of parents who have had no military experience or involvement) to work with Officers who are part of the Military (Air Force Reserve list).

When my two-year term was over, I took on a new responsibility. As Past Chairman I was to organize and co-ordinate a Cadet Effective Speaking Contest. Contestants who had competed at their squadron level were to meet in a provincial speak-off. The winner of this contest would represent Alberta at the national finals held in conjunction with the annual general meeting of the Air Cadet League of Canada. The caliber of these young speakers inspired me to look at my own abilities in this field. This was a major contributing factor in me eventually joining Toastmasters.

After my two years of Past Chairman I looked to the national scene to find some place to carry on my involvement as a volunteer in the Air Cadet League. I was elected as one of the 15 National Governors of the Air Cadet League of Canada. At the national level we are involved in setting policy to govern all aspects of the civilian part of the partnership. We must ensure that all local groups are in fact following the policy and procedures set down. We are also involved in trying to obtain funding from various sponsors to help support the operation of the national office.

On the lighter side of things, some of the perks in being a Governor involve getting the opportunity to travel all across Canada. Our annual meetings have been held in major centers from the east to the west coast. We have wine and dined with dignitaries such as the Lt. Governors of most Provinces, Mayors of many large cities and quite a few Members of Parliament. As a Governor, I get the privilege of paying for all my expenses incurred in traveling to these functions. Besides having a good time we are always trying to encourage more people to get involved with the Air Cadet Movement.

Currently I am the National Governor for the Effective Speaking Completion. As such, at each Annual General Meeting I chair a committee with representatives from all across Canada. We collectively decide the topics for each year's completion as well as review the rules. Effective Speaking, as in Toastmasters, is a very valuable skill which will aid the cadets long after their days in the movement are over.

I am not sure how many more years I will be involved with Air cadets, but I look forward to the day when one of my grandsons says, "Grandpa, I want to be an Air Cadet!"

Bob Clarke

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Air Cadet League of Canada/

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