

A Tale of Two Classes

Class of 1954 and 2011 share insight on pharmacy then and now

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A half of this story begins in September 1950 on the steps of a church (long since demolished), next to the Ontario College of Pharmacy building on Gerrard Street East in Toronto. That day, the first group picture was taken of the pharmacy class of 5T4—but it wasn't the last. Since then a group picture has been taken at each of 55 annual reunions of this class. A worn but proud banner "Classmates for a Lifetime" has been displayed wherever we have met over the years.

The other half of this story begins with the inaugural class of 92 students who began their studies at the University of Waterloo School of Pharmacy in January 2008. This new School is the anchor for the Health Sciences Campus being established by the University in downtown Kitchener. The students are participating in a cooperative program that allows them to take classroom knowledge to the workplace and bring work experience back to class.

This year, our class of 5T4 held its annual reunion in Waterloo. Through the kind invitation of Dr. Jake Thiessen Dean of the School, we toured the new facilities and met with the 2011 class for a two hour session of engagement, insights, stories and advice. Brief biographical



sketches sent to the students prior to our get together gave them a picture of the various opportunities we were able to take advantage of as young graduates. These opportunities included community and hospital pharmacy, industry, management, graduate studies, research, teaching, government, association and College activities as well as further studies in other fields including medicine.

Seated together in a lecture hall, we discussed pharmacy practice over the decades beginning with the 1950's. Our dialogue also included why members of our respective classes chose pharmacy as a career. The students were interested in hearing stories of our undergraduate years and how we became such a tightly knit class. A few tales brought gasps from them. For example, some of us smoked in the dispensary, sometimes prescription labels were written by hand, we were taught never to discuss the purpose of the medication with the patient and to dispense only the brand prescribed. Some changes!



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They were incredulous that we have met so often over the years and wondered how (and perhaps why) we have done it. We told them that it started with our attitude as undergraduates. It was Dr Garnet Patterson who referred to us as “the class that never let studies interfere with education and social activities”. While social activities had a lot to do with it, other factors were also important: the development of our own class constitution; the relatively small number of students; the Gerrard Street location (considered somewhat remote from the main campus); keeping our contact list current; leadership and the willingness to participate in planning that has continued over the years. Of course, in order to be sustainable, reunions have to be meaningful in ways other than social.

Our reunion in Waterloo in September 2009 is a case in point. We had two outstanding speakers, Dr. Neil Turok, Executive Director of the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics and Alex Mustakas, Artistic Director of the professional theatre company Drayton Entertainment. In addition, Dr. David Johnston, President of the University of Waterloo dropped by our luncheon and spoke. To top it all off, Dr. Thiessen and his colleague Laura Manning took us on tours of the building and participated in the session with the students.

What did we gain by this reunion and visit to Waterloo? Certainly the continuation of friendships and the opportunity to stretch our minds. But most importantly, we came away with the conviction that as the scope of practice for pharmacists expands and their role in providing an enhanced level of patient care unfolds, these young people along with graduates from our Toronto faculty, will serve the public with distinction.

What did the students gain from this interaction? I can't speak for them but I hope they now have a better understanding of the history of pharmacy in Ontario and the struggles the profession has had, to get where we are today. I hope their insights into future opportunities were broadened. I hope that they gain interest in maintaining friendships as well as a desire, after graduation, to support their alma mater and lend a hand to future students.

As Dean Thiessen put it, “our goal is to graduate great Canadians, people who care for others and great pharmacists”. Everything we saw and heard that day has convinced me that that goal will be achieved. 