

March 1: Past Chair Mary Delaney's Speech and Introductions

Fifty-three years ago today, the *Globe & Mail* published a leaked exclusive: a huge area northeast of Toronto would be expropriated for a new Toronto Airport, effective immediately. Not long after, *Toronto Star* journalist Scott Young, father of Neil Young and one-time rural Pickering resident, wrote: "I hope that opposition to this affront against common sense eventually will be nationwide, the largest single protest movement in Canadian history. It can be."

It was.

Today we celebrate that protest movement and the advocacy movement it spawned. We celebrate over half a century of citizen action and politicians of vision. With us today are original property owners and original members of People or Planes, their children and grandchildren. But they are far outnumbered by those we have lost over the decades.

Really, it's a wonder we can move or breathe for all the ghosts that fill this hall. Some will be weeping at the personal and collective loss that was endured. Others will be laughing as they recall the stunts, or smiling as they remember lasting friendships forged in shared struggles. Some will be shaking their fists at the injustice of it all. And who can blame them? But most, we hope, will be cheering.

As Past Chair, it falls to me to pay tribute to those who came before. To acknowledge the heart-breaking loss of those early years and the decades of decay that followed.

That loss could not be assuaged even by the powerful words and actions of those who fought this outrageous injustice and colossally foolish plan. The price that was paid is not balanced even by the creation of a national park. What happened was wrong. It was cruel. And it was, in the immortal words of the almost immortal Doc Godfrey, shortly before his death at the age of 104, "*baloney then and it's still baloney now.*"

Please raise your hand if you or your family were expropriated. At the very least, you are owed an apology. Please raise your hand if you or your family were members of People or Planes. You are owed our unending gratitude. We stand on your shoulders and in your shadow. The actions you took then made everything since possible.

We recently discovered a direct line from those first POP meetings to the present. Our incredible research team, the modern equivalent of the 'Technical Team' that worked behind the scenes for POP, has been collating archival material for today's event, and has unearthed the copious minutes of POP's earliest meetings. So, 53 years later, we know that Godfrey said, during a speech on Mar. 7, 1972, "This will be the longest, hardest fight you have ever been in.

We are taking on two governments. ... Is it to be people or planes?" He wasn't talking about the name of the group. Various name options were still being considered. It was only on Mar. 12, at an executive meeting, that "People or Planes" became official.

What really resonates with us is the minutes of the Mar. 15 meeting, in which it was noted that: "There is considerable Toronto opinion that 'P.O.P.' is not effective if the problem is as serious as we say it is." So – they had the same irksome issue we've had to deal with: great name, not-so-great initials. "POP" brought soft drinks or weasels to mind; "LOL" ... ?

But we both won anyway.

Today's LOL operatives have the benefit of Internet search engines, Zoom, and ubiquitous phones in our back pockets. In POP's time, when women mostly were housewives, there was a thing called 'kitchen politics'. In Brenda Davies' house that meant a phone cord long enough that Brenda could use the stove, fridge, and sink as the kids learned to 'duck and run' to get from one end of the rambling Cherrywood farm house to the other as she talked and organized.

Women pulled off government leaflet burnings and bulldozer tea parties, and worked at eight sewing machines to make dozens of black cowls for the funeral march on Queen's Park. And mere days before the three-and-a-half-year action ended, it was three women who occupied the Bentley-Carruthers house and refused to be moved. It was 'The Last Stand'.

What those women and men did in a time before cell phones and the Internet – hell, they had party lines! – is nothing short of miraculous. There were occupations; street theatre; a music festival; devastatingly clever satiric versions of Ontario government newsletters, delivered to the government office and then delivered by the government; songs, books, and poems written; dead fish put under a site trailer; highway signs altered; a float in the Toronto Santa Claus Parade; a hang-glider landing on the lawn of Parliament; and at least one airborne explosion that was launched over a field, scaring the living bejesus out of the surveyors doing their work below; and endless meetings, meetings, meetings....

POP was gob-smackingly audacious, inspiringly creative, a movement of farmers and hippies, Bay Street financiers and small-town business owners, artists, journalists, nurses, politicians, teachers, lawyers, and one orthopedic surgeon with the ability to bring them all together. I have given many speeches and interviews over the years, but I have not yet found a way to adequately express my profound admiration, respect, and love for what these people did. It is the stuff of legend.

Doug Turner, here today, is one of the few remaining unsung originals, having chaired POP's shadowy parallel organization MTARC – the self-named and self-appointed Metropolitan Toronto Airport Review Committee – which focused on presenting the anti-airport case to governments. He tells the wonderful story of MTARC's breakthrough moment when they hired

Toronto lawyer William McMurtry in 1975: McMurtry was able to open doors to the Premier's office (he was Premier Davis's speechwriter) and eventually the Cabinet room where the POP technical committee convinced the Ontario government that there was no need to build Pickering airport.

In modern parlance, McMurtry was an influencer of the first order. Unfortunately, McMurtry had no federal counterpart, and it took an additional 50 years of chipping away to convince the federal government to follow suit. The government, by the way, never twigged to the fact that MTARC was a wing of POP.

It all worked. Every attack, every approach. All the cogs in so many gears. What we would now call a game of Whack-a-Mole, in which the aptly named POP always won.

The entirety of the campaign, begun on March 3, 1972, and continuing today, we think of as Then, Now, Next. POP begat Green Door Alliance, Green Durham, and Land Over Landings. LOL begat Common Ground Garden and Stop Sprawl Durham. The next steps are starting to take shape. The work continues.

The diaspora that followed the upheaval of the '70s sent people to the four corners of the world. Farmers who would have worked these lands, entrepreneurs who would have been employers, teachers who would have taught at schools where children no longer went.

But some, like the McGregors, stayed. Then in their early 40s, in an act of stubborn faith, they raised their young family and continued to rent their own home for the next half century. Gord, our Honourary Chair, and his wife Myrna – now in their mid-90s – defiantly kept their community, the Brougham Recreation Society, and our historic Brougham Hall going until the pandemic shuttered its doors. Imagine the ghosts if we had been able to gather there....

Some, like the Tapscotts, stayed and farmed their rented fields. And others from the original Technical Team stayed and kept fighting. Lorne Almack was arguing against an airport and for farmland to his dying breath. And Brian Buckles is still fighting the good fight, with few signs of slowing down.

But now, finally, none of us has to argue against an airport. And that is something. I'll close by borrowing words spoken by Ronnie Tapscott after the announcement: *"When you're on the back side of the month of May and you're looking out your window at the fields, you get to thinking it just might be worth it."*

Intros

We have a special guest today..... Crispin Pemberton-Pigott, son of the one and only Brenda Davies, legend. Crispin was among that diaspora, leaving Pickering to live and work on four continents, flying in today from Edmonton to celebrate with us.

[Crispin, wielding his guitar, delights the crowd when he belts out the first three of the thirteen stanzas of his mother's clever take on the lyrics of a popular song, "The Railroad Comes Through the Middle of the House" – except that this time (1974), it's a runway:

*"Oh, the Runway comes through the middle of the house,
The Runway comes through the middle of the house,
Right Smack Dab through the middle of the House,
Since the Government took my land.*

*They let us live in the front of the house,
They let us live in the back;
But there ain't no living in the middle of the house,
'Cause that's on the Radar track.*

*Mr. Lamport came to visit our house;
He knocked and banged on the door;
So we sat him right down in the middle of the house,
And he never came back no more, no he never came back no more."*

And another special guest: The Honourable David Crombie, who literally and figuratively brought us the City of Toronto. As Mayor in '73 his council approved money to hire lawyers to fight the airport, and in the dying days of the citizen action he rode across a field in a pickup truck to bring the flag of the City of Toronto to Brenda, Fran, and Annie, barricaded in the house. In recent years he has been an invaluable ally, opening doors and introducing us to, among other people, Margaret Atwood, who provided this delicious quote: *"I've never understood why anyone would want to put an airport there. But then again, I have never had a very good imagination."*