

1973-2023 Wostawea Time Capsule Story

“A Memorable Ride to the Charlo Loppet”

Story shared by David Palmer

One fine late winter morning many years ago, after a skiff of snow had fallen the night before, we left Fredericton early for the Charlo loppet.

By we, I mean myself, my wife Doris, our son Sebastian, and Ernie MacGillivray and his two oldest boys Stewart and Duncan. Ernie was driving the family van on Killarney Road, and at the end of the long straight stretch just before the windy section to old Route 8, a pink Cadillac passed us and weaved as it got back in the right-hand lane.

“He’s drunk,” I said to Ernie. We followed the caddy up the winding Nashwaak highway and held our breath in horror as the driver repeatedly pulled out to pass the car in front, swerving dramatically and tucking back in his lane at the last minute to avoid a head-on collision.

At Lower Portage, the guy pulled over onto the snow-packed shoulder, and Ernie stopped 50 metres behind. We had already contacted the Fredericton police dispatcher and they had briefed the RCMP officer working the district that Sunday morning, but it was going to be a while before he could get to us.

“What are you going to do?” I asked Ernie as he opened the van door and strode swiftly towards the caddy. “I’m going to take that guy’s keys away from him”, he said. “I’m right behind you”, I said, hurrying to catch up. The driver tried to take off when he saw us coming but spun his tires hopelessly in the fresh snow. Ernie opened the door, reached across, and, meeting no resistance, took his keys! That was when we noticed a second guy passed out on the passenger seat. The driver got out of the vehicle and started walking north, wobbling from side to side.

We called the dispatcher again with a status update. After speaking with the RCMP, the dispatcher asked if we could have somebody remain with the vehicle and sleeping passenger while somebody else followed the guy on foot, keeping him in sight. Ernie stayed with the sleeper, and I followed the walker with Doris and the kids in the van, keeping a discreet distance.

After about 20 minutes, our guy crossed the highway and stuck out his thumb. The first southbound vehicle stopped to pick him up and Doris said, “He’s getting away – you have to do something.” I pulled up to the driver and signalled for him to lower his window. “Do you know this guy?” I asked. “No,” he replied. “Well,” I said, “the police are looking for him and if I were you, I wouldn’t give him a ride,” whereupon the driver turned to his passenger and politely asked him to get out. Surprisingly, the guy passively obliged and set off walking toward Fredericton.

A few minutes later the police arrived, and after supplying them with statements, we continued to Charlo. I don’t remember much about the loppet other than lots of challenging hills and bright sunny conditions.