



Garth at SPAADS Ottawa 2006

Garth King Mawhinney
19 June 1939 - 1 February 2019

I departed Vancouver Friday 14th June for Toronto, thence North Bay, arriving in a downpour at 11:00 pm. I was there for the funeral service of Garth Mawhinney, 427 Squadron & Air Canada.

After over three years battling pancreatic cancer, Garth finally succumbed February 1st, 2019. Saturday at 11:30 am, Walt Pirie and Dale Horley arrived from Ottawa at Tim Horton's. We drove to the Union Cemetery, where we joined up with Larry Hill to complete the roster of the remaining four SMU (Single Men's Union.) Garth wished to be buried next to his grandparents who had raised him; hence, our journey to North Bay.

Garth enjoyed a great rapport with his neighbours at Gilford, Ontario, Brian & Kelly Johnston. Kelly is a nurse, and both provided immeasurable support during Garth's illness. Brian presided over the service, attended by his family, Garth's relatives, school time friend Sharon Brown, and the SMU. Wayne MacLellan, former Vice-President - Air Canada Flight Operations had planned to attend; but unfortunately his flight went astray due to inclement weather.

While standing behind the attractive granite gravestone, featuring etchings of a Sabre and Garth's two golden retrievers (his boys), Brian told of their close relationship, saying, "Garth was a good friend for over 20 years. He was part of my life and family, and we miss him dearly." Brian's son Connor and Sharon's great grandson each recited a poem.

Walt then delivered his remarks:

“My name is Walt Pirie from Ottawa, Ontario. Garth and I have known each other for 58 years, since we were gung-ho fighter pilots serving on 427 Squadron in Zweibrücken, Germany as part of Canada’s contribution to NATO’s deterrent force opposing the Warsaw Pact nations during the Cold War.

On a squadron of 31 pilots, we were part of a fairly unique group of five single guys that we called the SMU or Single Men’s Union. The five of us have remained close through those intervening 58 years. Two of us stayed in the RCAF and the other three joined Air Canada in the mid 60s, Garth via a short stint with Qantas Airline in Australia. The other three of Garth’s friends and members of the SMU are also here today. They are Dale Horley from Vancouver Island, Dick Dunn from Vancouver, and Larry Hill from Bracebridge, Ontario. It has been a wonderful and fulfilling friendship that continues today.



Four remaining SMU

We stayed in touch with Garth throughout his debilitating illness

by phone and, at one point, the four of us made our way to Gilford to visit Garth at his home. I hope and believe that those contacts made things more bearable for Garth.

Garth will be remembered by many but will always be in our hearts as a member of the SMU and a true and loyal friend.

To Garth’s family and other friends, and specifically to Brian and Kelly Johnson who adopted Garth (and his boys), not just as good neighbours, but as friends, and looked after him throughout his illness, we offer our heart felt condolences.

Farewell old friend and may you rest in peace on your new squadron.”

I then told of our time instructing on the T-33 at Gimli and of his move to Australia. A letter from me probably persuaded Garth to abandon Australia and return to Canada and join Air Canada. When Garth transferred from Montreal to Toronto, I organized a “Smess” Dinner at 401 Squadron Officers Mess to send him on his way. Wine soaked buns were the order of the day.

Brian placed the urn in the grave and dropped a scoop of soil over the urn, as did the rest of the assembly in turn. Lastly, Brian placed Garth’s photos on top of the Urn .

Sharon Brown poured champagne for the Toast to Garth. We then drove to a nearby restaurant for a lunch reception, hosted by Garth “in absentia.”

On behalf of the 427 Lion Squadron Association, our sincere thanks to Brian for organizing the ceremony. A class act!

Dick Dunn
June 2019



Brian Placing the Urn



Group Photo



Covered grave - Photo by Sharon Brown