

# *Five Schafer Youth and Family Stories*

D. Paul Schafer (2021)

*To Murray, with much love*

## **1. The Knife Story**

Every Saturday night in the fall, winter, and spring when Murray and I were young, we would listen to the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey games on the radio with play-by-play calls by the legendary broadcaster Foster Hewitt. The Leafs had winning teams in those days, and this quickly evolved into a ritual we repeated without interruption for many years from the mid-1940s through the early 1950s.

The ritual was always the same. We would go up to Scotty Bremner's variety store on the north-east corner of Vaughan Road and Arlington Avenue in the central part of Toronto to get our "scoff" for the game. This usually consisted of a bottle of ginger ale, nugrape, or orange crush (they were real drinks in those days), a bag of chips (I think it was Hostess even back then), and a Crispy Crunch or Sweet Marie chocolate bar. We would return home from the store and lie on the bunk beds my father had made for us and listen to the hockey games. Since my parents were in a bridge club that met every weekend, they were seldom home on Saturday nights. This was a real bonus for us, as it meant that we had the house all to ourselves, if only for a few hours.

We could just picture the games down at Maple Leaf Gardens with players like Syl Apps, Max Bentley, Bill Barilko, Turk Broda, and Teeder Kennedy of the Toronto Maple Leafs; Toe Blake, Rocket Richard, and Doug Harvey of the Montreal Canadiens; and numerous stars from the other teams among "the original six," stick handling their way up and down the ice. We would wait patiently for Foster Hewitt to utter his classic phrase, "*He shoots, he scores!*" hoping it was a Toronto Maple Leafs' player who had put the puck in the net.

One Saturday night, we went to Bremner's variety store as usual to get our scoff for the game. We had just returned home and entered the front door when we heard a noise upstairs. Since my parents were out and we didn't have any pets at the time, we were mortified by the noise. Being extremely frightened, we pondered what to do next . . .

Suddenly, Murray had an idea. "Let's go to the kitchen and get the butcher knife," he said. So we tip-toed into the kitchen, got the knife from the drawer, and tip-toed back to the foot of the stairs. Murray then turned to me and said, "You go up the stairs and I will follow you." I couldn't believe my ears! "Why should I go up the stairs first when you have the knife?" I asked. "Don't you get it, stupid," Murray replied. "If he gets you, I'll get him."

So this is what we did. We tiptoed up the stairs, but fortunately there was no one there. Feeling a great sense of relief, we promptly took our scoff to the bedroom where—if my memory serves me correctly—we listened to the Leafs beat the Montreal Canadiens. Does it get any better than this for a Leafs fan?

## 2. Boogie Bass on the Chimes



The Schafer boys in the choir at **Grace Church on-the-Hill**, Toronto, Ontario, Christmas, 1949.  
Murray, 3rd row, second from the right; Paul, center of 2<sup>nd</sup> row (fifth from the right).

Music played a very important role in my life when I was growing up. I took piano lessons and singing lessons when I was young—which were paid for in monthly instalments by my parents—and sang in the choir of mid-town Toronto’s historic Grace Church on-the-Hill for many years.

While I enjoyed listening to music and singing in the choir very much, I wasn’t particularly good at singing, performing, or practicing. This was especially true for performing and practicing the piano. My piano teacher, John Hodgins, who was also the organist and choirmaster at Grace Church on-the-Hill, said it was because I had a “lazy left-hand,” which was surprising because I was (and still am) left-handed. My mother always had to bribe me to practice. She kept a record of my practice time on a blackboard in the kitchen, and rewarded me with peanuts for the

amount of time I practiced. One day, I recall getting three-and-a-half peanuts for practicing thirty-five seconds. I was more interested in playing ball hockey on the street.

My brother Murray was also very involved in music when he was young and was in the Grace Church on-the-Hill choir as well. While he probably didn't like practicing any more than I did, he went much further in his musical studies than me. In high school at the recommendation of his piano teacher Douglas Bodle, Murray went on to earn an LRSM, a Licentiate of the Royal Schools of Music in London, England. He passed the rigorous requirements for this certificate with distinction and the adjudicator, Sir William McKay (organist at Westminster Abbey who had come from England to administer the licentiate exams), asked to come to our house to hear my brother play some more after grading Murray's formal recital. I think it was a Mozart piano sonata which Murray performed on our Chickering piano in the living room that evening, after which McKay encouraged him to consider pursuing a professional career as a concert pianist. Later at the University of Toronto, Murray studied piano with Alberto Guerrero—the same teacher who taught Glenn Gould—and harpsichord with Greta Kraus, an internationally-renowned harpsichordist.

While Murray was very talented at playing classical music, he also liked to improvise a great deal, which is not surprising in view of the fact that he eventually became a composer. I often recall Murray sitting at the piano and improvising for what seemed like hours on end. His particular interest—and specialty—was jazz. Like everything Murray did, he put his whole heart and soul into it, and was always listening to and studying the music of the great jazz masters of the day such as Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, Dizzy Gillespie, and so forth. He knew their music intimately and incorporated much of it into his improvisational activities.

One day, when Murray was fooling around on the piano, he decided to teach me how to play a boogie bass line. I think it was because he wanted someone to play the boogie bass while he explored various themes and rhythms in the treble. I quickly incorporated the boogie bass into my own repertoire, and often played it on the piano when I had some free time.

Every Wednesday afternoon, we had our choir practice at Grace Church on-the-Hill. One Wednesday afternoon, I arrived at the church early. I always rode my bicycle there after school and discovered that I was all alone in the church ... or so I thought. I was always intrigued by the organ, since it had so many different stops and pedals and could make so many beautiful sounds.

I suddenly began to wonder what the boogie bass line Murray had taught me would sound like on the organ. However, my next move would make my music making very public, as I promptly pulled the device for the church's chimes—which I was familiar with because I sometimes turned pages for John Hodgins when he played the organ at church. I then launched into the boogie bass and instantly heard the sound reverberate inside the church as well as outside in the surrounding neighbourhood. The next thing I knew The Reverend G. Hasted Dowker, Rector of Grace Church, was flying across the chancel in an absolute rage. It is the only time I can remember seeing him go from one side of the chancel to the other without stopping in the middle to bow to the altar. He immediately demanded that I stop playing, which I did right away.

Boy, did I get it that day! I was thoroughly rebuked by Rev. Dowker, as well as severely reprimanded by John Hodgins and docked a month's pay. But somehow it was worth it! My boogie bass serenade didn't go on for very long, but it fully satisfied my curiosity. Most likely, it also amused people in the Lonsdale-Russell Hill neighbourhood—one of the most coveted and wealthy neighbourhoods in Toronto at the time—if only momentarily. I doubt very much if anything as bold or daring has gone on in that up-scale area or fashionable church ever since.



*The choir boys return:* Murray and Paul outside of Grace Church on-the-Hill, March 2015

### 3. Saloon and Stagecoach Days

One of the most enjoyable experiences I had when I was young was going to the Vaughan Theatre on the north-west corner of Vaughan Road and St. Clair Avenue to watch movies on Saturday afternoons with my friends, Barry and Arthur Witkin. It was usually a “double bill”—two western movies with heroes like Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy, Tom Mix, and the Lone Ranger—although occasionally we would get a movie with Mario Lanza, Fred Astaire, or Ginger Rogers in it.

The ritual was always the same. We would collect empty pop bottles during the week worth two cents each in order to get the twelve cents that was required to gain admission to the theatre. If we were really lucky, we would find a few extra pop bottles so we would have enough money left over to buy a pop and a box of popcorn or a bag of chips at the theatre. And, if we were exceptionally lucky, we would find enough pop bottles for our favourite treat: buy an order of fish and chips to eat on our way home from the movie theatre at the fish and chip shop on the south side of St. Clair Avenue near Christie Street. We treasured this last possibility immensely, since it was undoubtedly the best fish and chip shop in Toronto, if not (one wonders) the entire country. We ate them exactly the way people eat them in England—wrapped in newspapers with lots of salt and malt vinegar oozing through our fingers.

While Murray seldom went to the movie theatre with us, he was always thinking up challenging things for kids in the neighbourhood to do. One day, he decided to create a saloon in the garage behind our house, much like the ones we saw in the movies. So we cleared out most of our double-car garage, resuscitated an old wooden filing cabinet that was stored there, mounted it on a couple of old saw-horses to create a bar, brought in some old tables and chairs that were in the basement, and then decorated the walls with pictures of cowboys and other western paraphernalia. After that we got some old shot glasses and whiskey bottles and were really in business.

Did we ever have a lot of fun in that saloon! We would amble through the garage doors, saddle up to the bar, and say “*Donnez-moi un whiskie*” to the bartender of the day. (I think this line came from a western movie we watched in French one day at the Vaughan Theatre). We also had our fair share of fights in the saloon. Some were make-believe and others were real, depending on how we felt that day and whether or not we were all getting along with each other at the time. On a couple of occasions, after we managed to find some old toy pistols and holsters, we would have an old-fashioned “shoot-out” western style. (It wasn’t as serious or as bloody as the one at the famous O.K. Corral in Tombstone, Arizona, which I

visited many years later with my wife Nancy, and daughters Charlene and Susan on a family trip to Arizona and New Mexico. Being at the scene of the famous gun fight brought to mind many boyhood memories, as did seeing a number of old-style western saloons in the Tucson area.)

One day, Murray was seized with a fantastic idea! Why not create a full-sized *stagecoach*? He and the rest of us quickly scoured the neighbourhood looking for materials and spare parts. We used several wagons for this, as well as some old “beaverboards” (a stiff, light board of compressed wood fiber) we found in the garage, a number of two-by-fours, a few old blankets, and so forth. By the time the stagecoach was completed, it bore a striking resemblance to the real thing, with an interior area for passengers and two seats up top for a driver and a sharp-shooter riding shot-gun.

There was only one problem—after the stagecoach was completed, we discovered it was too big to get it out of the garage! So it had to be dismantled, and then reassembled in the driveway in the backyard. After having achieved this, Murray was seized by another impulsive idea: “How would it work if the stagecoach was wheeled out of the driveway, onto the road, and rolled down the street?” Finally, he couldn’t contain his curiosity any longer—nor could the rest of us to be honest—although we were much more reluctant about this than Murray. So this is what we did.

Murray turned to me and said, “You sit in the driver’s seat,” and then turned to Arthur Witkin with the instructions, “You ride shot-gun beside Paul.” Although rolling the stagecoach down the street sounded like a great idea in theory (a street that was very steep from our house to the corner I might add), it didn’t work very well in practice. As Murray, Barry Witkin and the others began pulling the stagecoach down the street, it gathered momentum much too quickly and they lost control of it, primarily because of its weight and the steepness of the street. They were forced to let go of the handle and get out of the way, and so with nothing to steer the stagecoach, Arthur and I were both rather helpless and on our own. We tried our best to reduce the rocking of the coach from side to side, but it was to no avail. We soon lost complete control of the makeshift stagecoach and were totally at its mercy as it continued to gather momentum, rolling faster and faster down the street. Finally, it reached the bottom of the street, swerved around the corner at Valewood on a ninety-degree angle, flipped over on its side, and toppled Arthur and myself out onto the road.

Fortunately, we weren’t hurt too badly and had only a few small cuts, bruises, and scrapes to contend with. However, it was some time before we got involved in

another one of Murray's "hair-brained schemes." As I recall, it also brought an end to our stagecoach and saloon days, despite the fact that we often recount these tales today.

#### 4. "Don't Let Them Score!"

Football was always a big part of our lives when we were young. We played touch football on the street from the time I was in Grade 4 or 5, and tackle football in a vacant field on the northwest corner of Humewood Avenue and Windley Avenue near Cedarvale Ravine when I was in Grades 6, 7, and 8.

We followed the two major professional football teams in Toronto at the time very closely—Toronto Balmy Beach and the Toronto Argonauts—especially the Argonauts because they were winning a number of Grey Cups at that time with outstanding players like Joe Kroll, Ted Copeland, and Rod Smiley. We also followed the bantam, junior, and senior football teams at Vaughan Road Collegiate Institute with great interest, and used to sneak into the games that were played between Vaughan Road Collegiate and Oakwood Collegiate at the stadium behind Krang's swimming pool on St. Clair Avenue near Robina Avenue. The games played between these two rival schools were called "Turkey Bowls" in those days because they were always played on or around Thanksgiving.

It wasn't long before football was dominating our lives and Murray was thinking about starting a football team of his own from boys in the neighbourhood. Since we played at the top of Rushton Road and drew on a number of players from north of Vaughan Road, we decided to call the team the Rushton Hilltops. Fortunately, an outstanding football player from Vaughan Road Collegiate Seniors —Al Butler by name—lived on Windley Avenue across from Gordon, Ian and Donald MacRae, our very close friends whose father was Reeve of North York for a time. One day, we screwed up our courage and timidly rang Al Butler's doorbell to see if he would coach our team. To our great surprise and pleasure, he said yes. During the next year or so, he taught us a great deal about football in general and coaching football in particular.

We also followed American football very closely at the time, and were familiar with all the great players and legends who played the game there, including Otto Graham and Lou "The Toe" Groza of the Cleveland Browns; Sammy Baugh of the Washington Redskins; Sid Luckman of the Chicago Bears; Elroy "Crazy Legs" Hirsch of the Los Angeles Rams; and Bob Waterfield, also of the Rams—whose wife Jane Russell was a famous Hollywood movie star and the heart throb of all of us. Our preoccupation with the football legends who came later continued for

many years, especially when television arrived in 1952 and we were able to watch stars like Frank Gifford, Dick Butkis, Johnny Unitas, Tobin Rote, Raymond Berry, and the winningest coach of them all, Vince Lombardi.

It wasn't long before Murray was deep into coaching football himself. I remember him writing to many of the great coaches in the United States—giants in the game like Bud Wilkinson of the Oklahoma Sooners and Knute Rockne and Frank Leahy of the Notre Dame Fighting Irish—to acquire their coaching books and manuals. He followed all the great college football teams in those days, with heroes and legends such as the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame, Red “The Ghost” Grange, Jim Thorpe, and many of our favourite teams like SMU (Southern Methodist University), Colgate, Bucknell, Cornell, and others.

By this time, there probably wasn't anyone in our area who knew more about football in general—and coaching football in particular—than Murray. He studied the game relentlessly and assiduously. He knew every player, team, and coach of any significance in the game, and forced us to practice constantly and repeat plays again and again in order to “get them right.” It wasn't long before we were making mincemeat of all the other teams in the neighbourhood. The Rushton Hilltops were the talk of the town, and definitely the team to beat in an area bounded by St. Clair Avenue to the south, Spadina Avenue to the east, Lawrence Avenue to the north, and Dufferin Avenue to the west. There may have been better teams in Toronto, but we certainly didn't know anything about them, nor encounter them on the football field.

Several years later, Murray set his sights even higher when he decided to coach a team in the Kiwanis League at High Park in western Toronto. It operated a Kiwanis-YMCA (“Ki-Y”) League that had many teams in it, teams which were divided into different weight categories and which played their games on Saturday mornings at the various football fields in High Park. I recall Murray entering a team in the under-100-pound category one year, immediately commencing the search for the best football players he could find in this weight class in Toronto. Like everything Murray did, he didn't settle on just any players—they had to be the best players available at every position, regardless of where they were located in the city. Some, such as Arthur and Barry Witkin, Moe Haber and Humpy Simon were brought in from the Vaughan Road area, while others, such as Brian Emery, were recruited from the Davenport area. Still others were brought in from farther afield.

Murray insisted on practice, practice, and practice as the key to success and “getting it right.” If players were not prepared to put in the effort and attend all the



practices—and I mean *all* the practices—they would simply be let go and Murray would commence the search for others players to take their place. By the time the season rolled around, Murray had assembled a roster of great players and had created a very well-oiled machine. They had been put through their paces time and again, and knew their positions, assignments, and plays backwards and forwards and inside out. As one coach put it after seeing Murray’s team practice and play its first few games, “I have never seen such a well-coached football team, even among the professional teams I have watched in Canada and the United States.” They were just that good.

It wasn’t long before the Kiwanis-YMCA League was getting quite concerned about the pummeling Murray’s team was dishing out to other teams in the league, as it was soon getting out of hand. His team was rolling up scores the likes of which the league had never seen before: 87–0, 53–0, 45–0, and so forth. There was even talk of dismantling Murray’s team since the lopsided scores were demoralizing other teams. Then one day, a team appeared on the field that looked like it would give Murray’s team some real trouble. They were well coached, but some of the players appeared to be well over the 100-pound limit for teams in that division. There was even one player who looked to be at least 150 pounds. We complained bitterly to the administrators of the league about this, but they said that every player on the team had been weighed in and weighed below the legal limit. When the game started, it was clear that this opponent was going to give Murray’s team a real battle. However, Murray’s players didn’t get ruffled. They responded extremely well, and were leading 27–0 in the fourth and final quarter. Then it happened! The other team got on a roll with its over-sized players and marched down the field towards the end zone defended by Murray’s team. Murray was frantic by this time, and was racing up and down the sidelines imploring his players, “Don’t let them score!” “Don’t let them score! “Whatever you do—don’t let them score!!”

But it was too late. One of the biggest players on the other team—the one who looked like he was 150 pounds—punched the ball over the goal line from the 5-yard line. This made the score 27–6, which is more or less the way the game ended, since it was near the very end of the game by the time this team finally managed to score.

Murray was devastated—it was the first time another team had scored on his team. I have never seen him so utterly dejected, but his dejection was understandable: yes, his team still had a perfect win-loss record; yes, they had won all of their games handily (including this one), and securing the league championship was still firmly in place; however, for my dear and very driven brother—who put his whole

heart and soul into all his chosen pursuits—this still fell short of the mark. It was not only being scored upon for the first (and only) time, what he deeply lamented losing was the chance to achieve a unique and quite unimaginable perfection.

### **5. “I’d Know My Son Anywhere”**

Mothers are famous for believing they would know their sons and daughters anywhere and anytime. And why not? Having brought them into the world and nurtured them through the formative stages of life, they develop bonds, links, and connections with their children that are stronger and deeper than can possibly be imagined. This was certainly true for my mother, Belle Schafer. She went through numerous trials and tribulations with Murray when he was young because Murray had some exceedingly difficult health problems to contend with—problems that were far more painful and excruciating than those for most children and their mothers.

Murray completed Grade 12, but was not interested in continuing with what in Ontario at the time was Grade 13, wishing instead to devote himself to music studies. Thus began a rather nomadic eight-year journey for my brother commencing with a year at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. This was followed by a year at the University of Toronto in its Faculty of Music’s Artist Diploma program, after which Murray was drawn to live and study in Europe. Since he lacked the money for this venture, he got a job on a tanker on the Great Lakes with the help of our father who worked for Imperial Oil, and in doing so Murray managed to save enough money to head to Europe in March of 1956.

Murray landed in England for a short stay first, and then on to Vienna where he stayed with Uli Kraus, nephew of Greta Kraus, Murray’s harpsichord teacher in Toronto. Uli had an apartment in Vienna and Murray rented a room from him. Murray’s close friend, a writer named Bob Walshe, later joined Murray at Uli’s apartment around Christmas time. We always looked forward to receiving letters, post cards, and parcels from Murray when he lived in Vienna. His letters and cards were always fascinating to read and full of valuable information about this beautiful city. They were usually accompanied by drawings of people, cathedrals, and various other scenes, since Murray was also a talented artist who could have pursued a professional career in the visual arts instead of his chosen field of music. In preparation for the trip, Murray had spent time re-learning what little German he knew which came courtesy of a Prussian refugee who lived across the street from

us in Toronto. When Murray got to Vienna, however, he discovered that the Viennese didn't seem to understand a word he said, largely because they spoke an entirely different dialect than the one Murray learned at home. This led to many amusing stories about things Murray would order in restaurants or buy in stores that turned out to be totally different from the ones he thought he had ordered or purchased.

Using Vienna as his base, Murray travelled widely including many locations in Germany, Brussels, London, Greece, Crete, Turkey (to see the archeological site of Troy), and Barcelona, ending with several months in France, before returning to Canada in December of 1957. My restless brother, however, was eager to return overseas and began his second stint in Europe in February of 1959 which, using London as a base this time, included a memorable trip through a number of Eastern European countries—Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Hungary—studying their music and their folk music in particular. (With his interest in the various regions' folk music, Murray was following the footsteps of many well-known European composers, partly because they wanted to use this folk music for the basis of their own compositions and partly because they felt it was necessary to preserve this music before it disappeared forever. This was true for Franz Liszt and Johannes Brahms in the nineteenth century, and Zoltán Kodály, Béla Bartók, and Georges Enescu in the twentieth century, the latter composer writing two very famous rhapsodies based on Romanian folk tunes.) I can recall Murray's time in Romania vividly because he sent home many 45 rpm records with extremely beautiful Romanian folk music on them which I still have and cherish today. One of the most exquisite was a piece of music in the Romanian folk tradition animated by Norman McLaren, the world-famous animation pioneer who worked at the National Film Board of Canada, for his 1968 award-winning short film *Pas de deux*.<sup>1</sup>

After his adventures in Eastern Europe during the summer and fall of 1959, Murray returned to London. He studied and became acquainted with a number of well-known British composers there, including Peter Racine Fricker, with whom he would later study, and Malcolm Arnold, who wrote the film scores for *Bridge on the River Kwai*, *The Belles of St. Trinian's*, and *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*. During his considerable time in England, Murray conducted a series of interviews with sixteen British composers (including Fricker, Arnold, Michael Tippett, Benjamin Britten, and William Walton, among others), which later became the

basis for his first and very well-received book, *British Composers in Interview* (Faber and Faber, 1963).

Murray returned to Canada for good in 1961, however, it was his first back home in December of 1957 that was the most memorable for me. On the scheduled day for Murray's arrival in Toronto, Mom and I went down to Union Station to meet him, much as we did when my father, Harold Schafer, returned home after one of his long trips for Imperial Oil to different parts of the country. Murray's train was coming in from New York, to which he had travelled from England by boat. (I seem to recall that Dad was away at this time and was not able to join us at Union Station to welcome Murray home, which was unfortunate since Murray had been away for such a long time.) When Murray's train arrived, the passengers began walking down Union Station's long runway with brass rails on either side of it to make their way towards the exit. *I remember this day like it was yesterday!* And while there were many people filing through the runway that day, our eyes were totally peeled for Murray.

Suddenly, I saw someone walking past us who looked very much like Murray, although I must say he looked more like a European refugee seeking asylum rather than a native son returning home. He had on a bulky, home-knit sweater, a pair of brown corduroy pants, a pair of peculiar looking shoes, a big duffle bag slung over his shoulder, and last but far from least, a heavy and full beard. No sooner was this person past us and making his way to the exit than I turned to my mother and said, "I think that's Murray!" "Don't be silly," my mother confidently asserted, "I'd know my son anywhere."

However, as this individual approached the exit, I cried out, "Murray! Murray! Murray!" after which he turned around very slowly and started walking back towards us. It was indeed Murray! A tearful reunion followed as you can imagine, since we had not seen Murray for such a long time. It was especially tearful for my mother, who couldn't wait to get her hands on Murray once again and have him home with us. He did look very different compared to when he left Canada—partly because we didn't expect him to be dressed that way—but largely because of the heavy beard.

My mother never did admit that she didn't know her son at Union Station that day, although she did admit that he looked very different. When Murray came downstairs the next morning for breakfast, she immediately started working on

him, “When are you going to shave your beard off Murray?” she asked in a pleading voice. This went on for years, and became a standard joke in our family. However, Murray persevered, and never did completely shave off what had become his iconic beard. He did, however, eventually shorten it a bit and trim it more frequently. Whether or not this was a concession to my mother, heaven only knows.



*The two couples:* Eleanor James, Nancy Schafer, Paul, and Murray in Murray’s studio at Murray and Eleanor’s farmhouse, 24 July 2014, Indian River, Ontario.

---

<sup>1</sup>The music for the film *Pas de deux* was performed by panpipes soloist Constantin Dobre and the United Folk Orchestra of Romania; music editing was by Maurice Blackburn.