

## Confessions of a Torch Shuttle Host Two

### Celine Dion

I had a man named Frederic Rehayem who was a quality assurance analyst at Bombardier ride along on our shuttle bus for a day. He had come all the way out from Quebec to experience first hand how the torches his team put together would hold up on the road. Traveling with him, while dropping off torchbearers, he let me



in on a couple of secrets. One of them involved the people at the Bombardier plant that assembled the torches. Apparently it was quite an honor, privilege and coo to be chosen, or given the right to actually assemble the torches. About a dozen Bombardier staff were assigned to the prestigious task for two or three months as the 12,000 torches were made. Each of them had such a sense of pride in their jobs that they actually signed the inside panels of each torch after they built them. It's true, I have dismantled dozens of them as part of my Shuttle Host job and each torch bears the signature of a proud Bombardier employee who made it. Now here is where it gets kind of fun; one of the women who works in the Bombardier plant has the name Celine Dion. It's her real name, and Frederick told me to tell all of the Vancouver 2010 torchbearers who purchased their torches to disassemble them at home and look for the famous autograph. Now I just have to decide if I am going to tell them it wasn't the real Celine Dion????

### Honey what are you putting in our Freezer?

His second story involved the quality assurance of the Bombardier torches for cold arctic temperatures. In the early stages of developing the torches he would take them home and put them in his freezer, store them for a couple of hours and then pull them out to test them. This way he could see how they lit up after being in minus forty temperatures. I asked him during those clandestine testing sessions at home with the torch ignited, "you must have taken a photograph of the flame lit with your wife and kids?". He claimed he didn't, and said the testing was strictly scientific and although the thought crossed his mind it wouldn't have been professional or appropriate to take advantage of having the torch at home. So he resisted the temptation. He seemed like an honest guy and I believed him.

On one occasion on the road with Frederic, he watched the torch being brought into an evening celebration. It was in Campbell River. It was dark and the flame on the particular torch we were watching was large and robust; a perfect orange and yellow hue, it was at the desired size ideal for being photographed, and very esthetically dramatic. It must have been exactly the kind of flame they had in mind when they sat down at the drawing board years ago. I turned to look at him for his reaction and he was crying.

## **Whose that guy in the funny uniform?**

I am at the Torch Bearers collection point at Bowring Park in St. Johns on day 15. Two 30-something male torchbearers that seem to me like they are obviously good buddies show up to sign in. They are early, and I listen to them kibitz, joke around and pass the time. As I eaves-drop more it becomes clearer to me that they are friends. Then the time comes for me to hand out their pre-assigned stickers, which will determine who they pass their torch to. In the mail they received notification that they were numbers 152 and 153 meaning they would be passing off to one another. They both started laughing as I applied the important sticker to their uniform jackets. Then they let me in on the fact that they were both looking for the collection point in St. Johns and had only just met ten minutes prior on the street. You need to keep in mind that one of them came from Salt Lake City to carry the torch and the other came from Toronto. They recognized each other's bright white uniforms on the cold dark street, and banded together to collectively seek their destination; my bus. It took ten minutes for them to find us and in that time they became friends. They were both absolutely delighted, astounded and joyful that their new-found friendship would culminate in them passing the flame to one another. Not to mention that by pooling their intellectual resources they found us - a small bus, parked in tiny lot, thousands of miles from where they both lived.

## **The Loonie and Twoonie drive**

All torchbearers have the option to purchase the torch they run with. They cost \$400 purchased from the bus. On Friday November 13<sup>th</sup>, the day before grade ten student, Chris Tremblett was to run the Olympic flame through his small hometown of Gambo Newfoundland, he had not made arrangements to purchase the torch. The Principal of the school found out and put a plea out to his classmates at Smallwood Academy to each contribute a two dollar or one dollar coin that day to underwrite the costs of Chris's torch. On the beautiful Saturday afternoon that we traveled through this small community, which was the birthplace of Joey Smallwood, Canada's last father of Confederation, the entire school lined the side of the road. Judging from their cheers and the smile on his face, I think that they got their return on investment.

## **Stomachs Full of Butterflies**

If I was to be asked to identify the one dominant feeling that all Torch Bearers have just before they run I would have to say nervousness. That emotion would be followed closely by excitement, pride and joy; but the nervousness is the one that percolates to the surface, is outwardly displayed and is common to all of them. During my briefings as a shuttle host I try to allay their concerns. I can just imagine them thinking "what if I drop the torch?, what if it goes out while I am running with it?". I have been told by several Torch Bearers of them enduring sleepless hours in bed the night before, horrified of the thought of being responsible for breaking the

chain of flame across Canada. You know what it's like with the fear of something unknown, especially when you focus on it the wee small hours. It can keep you up all night long. Then when the moment finally arrives I am not sure if I help matters much as I start to brief the group of them on the bus prior to dropping them off at their insertion points by re-emphasizing the historical importance and incredible significance to the country of what they are about to do. Also statements that I make like "this is about to be one of the most incredible experiences of your entire life" probably increase anxiety as opposed to alleviating it.

In actual fact they have nothing at all to worry about. The running procedure is pretty straightforward and fool proof and another part of my job, throughout all of my interactions with the Torch Bearers on my bus is to calm them down, and help them to relax so that they can enjoy the experience.

It is hard to get people excited and calm them down at the same time.