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Wally Baer, CEO of Enform over the past five years and a friend and mentor of mine, retired at the end of May 2012. (*Enform is the Canadian Association of Upstream Oil and Gas Associations for Safety and Training, based in Calgary*). I was fortunate enough to be asked to say a few words at his retirement function in early May. Those words follow.....

As I have gotten to know Wally over the last 5 years he always impressed me with his outdoorsman-ship – a hunter – an outdoor guy - and a real man’s man. At one time he related the following story to me:

*During one of his physicals, his doctor asked him about his daily activity level, so Wally described a typical day this way:
"Well, yesterday afternoon, I waded along the edge of a lake, drank eight beers, escaped from wild dogs in the heavy brush, marched up and down several rocky hills, stood in a patch of poison ivy, crawled out of quicksand, jumped away from an aggressive rattlesnake and took four "leaks" behind big trees."*

Inspired by the story, the doctor said,

*"You must be one h*ll of an outdoorsman!"*

*"No," Wally replied, "I'm just a shi**y golfer."*

I think I may have been one of the few humans to have actually golfed with Wally. I had nagged him for a year or so to come out. When he finally caved in and agreed he told me that story by way of introduction. It was pretty close to the truth! That may be why Wally’s retirement from golf came sooner than his retirement from Enform.

On a more serious note:

The USA National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling released their final report in January 2011. Rex Tillerson, CEO of Exxon Mobil in testimony at the Hearing before the National Commission in November 2010, indicated that safety is not proprietary. And for that reason ExxonMobil shares its best practices within our industry and across other industries. We all seek to learn from others.

The CAGC asked Wally to write a piece for a recent issue of our magazine. He titled it “Musings of a Safety Association CEO”. It was printed in the spring 2012 edition of The Source, which is distributed with the RECORDER.

One quote from Wally Baer in that article was: *“Be proud of what motivated you to choose a career in safety. In my case, it really chose me. But once I was in it, especially working with families who had lost loved ones on the job, I realized that you can’t just be a witness or be neutral or untouched by it. It transforms you and demands your commitment and action”*

Wally in many ways has been a mentor to me over the last 3 years or so ago. Enform hit some financial challenges in 2009 right around the time I ended up serving as their Audit Chair. Wally and I, along with Rick Shatosky (CFO), worked together on these issues in the 2 ½ years that followed. As much as I may have helped Wally out, he helped me to grow on many levels.

We became good friends and I was fortunate to spend a few evening suppers with him along with taking in some Flames hockey games. Every once in a while we would be fortunate enough to attend an Edmonton – Calgary game – as much our own personal rivalry - with Wally being a lifelong Edmonton fan and myself supporting Calgary. Both teams of course – largely crashed and burned this year – but on those nights – someone had to win.

Wally’s 5 year tenure at Enform passed quickly. I am reminded of the analogy “ripples in a pond”. If you throw a stone in the water the ripples gravitate out from the center – for a short period of time. So Wally’s challenge in his tenure – as is the challenge for all of us – was how to create a lasting legacy in moving our safety and training association to a better place – a stronger place.

I wrote in one of my blog columns about the report I quoted from earlier on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill. Suffice it to say, for now the concept behind Enform is in many ways the epitome of the outcome of that report. I think a large part of that is Wally’s legacy and will live on.

Whether poems are appropriate or not at retirement functions, a couple came to mind. Macbeth’s Sound and Fury passage didn’t quite cut it – something about “struts and frets his hour upon the stage” – you can Google that if it isn’t ringing any bells.

A poem perhaps more appropriate was Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (1923)

*Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here*

To watch his woods fill up with snow.

*My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.*

*He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.*

*The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

So Wally – here you are stepping into another stage of life. I wish you all the best and safe travels in the years in front of you. Live life to its fullest. Enjoy the human experience,

And with that just a small parting gift – I titled it: From one Generation to Another – a couple of Edmonton Oiler collectables: A Grant Fuhr (goalie mask) and a Taylor Hall (hockey figurine). Thank you!

From the Thursday Files:

*I dream of men who take the next step instead of worrying about the next thousand steps.
~Theodore Roosevelt*