

Sketch of a West Pointer – Rob Dickinson



Rob Dickinson was born in Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire, England in November 1942. When Rob was 5, his father was offered an opportunity to start a branch of the company (which specialized in industrial coatings, varnishes, paints and especially printing inks) in South Africa and so the Dickinson family emigrated in 1948.

Rob grew up in Johannesburg and attended a boarding school in Hilton Natal. At school he played on the tennis team, was a sprinter on the track team and played rugby. Rugby was compulsory for high school boys, but he loved it. He tried cricket but was afraid of the fast bowlers!

After passing his final exams for Chartered Accountancy in 1967, Rob left South Africa with the goal of “working his way around the world” and going to the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico. Arriving in London, he worked as a construction labourer until landing an office job. Rob and 3 Aussies toured Europe in a VW Beetle and a tent; some of their adventures included running with the bulls at Pamplona, crossing into West Berlin to check out The Wall, and drinking beer at the Oktoberfest in Munich. From London, he and an Aussie plumber friend immigrated to Canada; it took 24 hours to get your papers in those days!

He was fortunate to get a job with IBM as a Cost Accountant at their factory in Don Mills, Ontario. He lived in Toronto near Yonge Street in a 6-bedroom house which was occupied by members of the Toronto Wanderers Rugby Club. Rob reports that there was a bar in the basement where they sold beer – Carling Black Label. The price was 4 bottles for a dollar and all profits financed the ongoing costs of the club. The Wanderers included many Brits and South Africans, some from his old rugby club in Johannesburg. They played rugby, met girls, sang drinking songs and generally had a ball. One Sunday morning they achieved the Grand Slam, which in that house meant 12 for breakfast.

In those days, Ontario school buses were retired from service after 10 years. The result was that there was a massive lot outside of town with these perfectly good and well-maintained buses that you could buy for about \$50. Rob and 4 friends purchased one, converted it into an RV over the spring and summer of 1968 and then headed south to Mexico City, achieving his goal to attend the Olympic Games. This was the first time that a ‘developing’ country had been awarded the games and Rob remembers that, despite dire predictions, everything ran like clockwork and the Mexican people were extremely proud of it all and were wonderfully hospitable. Highlights were Cassius Clay winning the gold medal in boxing, Bob Beamon jumping beyond the sand onto the track to break the world long jump record and the Black Panther sprinters protesting on the podium during the raising of the American flag and playing of the anthem. They were stripped of their medals and sent home; today Rob says, “It doesn’t seem like much has changed!”

When the Games were over, the guys drove up the coast through Hollywood, Las Vegas, The Grand Canyon and all of that, finally ending up in Vancouver, where they sold their school bus/RV to a hippie. Where did he plan to drive it, you ask? Mexico.

In Vancouver, Rob worked as a Project Accountant for Bulkley Valley Forest Products who were building a new sawmill and pulp and paper complex in Houston, BC. His enduring memory from that worksite is the canteen, where the men, who worked twelve hour shifts to get the plant ready and the roof on before the snow started, would ignore the plates, take the food tray and pile it high with the cold cuts and salads, fish and chips, and the roast beef, vegetables and gravy to overflowing and then sit and wolf down the lot – and that was lunch!

Rob returned to South Africa in 1970 but stopped along the way in Hong Kong for a while, working for a CA firm doing audits for companies in Vietnam during the war. He remembers that you could get beautiful suits made to measure with 3 silk shirts thrown in for extraordinarily little money. You could eat out every night, never at the same place. He made stops in Egypt and Kenya before arriving home in Port Elizabeth to see his mother and sister, after his 3-year absence. Of course, there was no Skype, Zoom or anything like it back then to stay connected.

In Johannesburg, he became Partner and Director of a management consulting company that specialized in computerized management information and modeling systems. He renewed acquaintances with his girl friend, Rosemary, from three years before. They married in 1972 and had two children. Rosemary was pregnant with their third child when they decided to immigrate to Canada. Rob recalls the officer at the Canadian Embassy in Pretoria saying, "You've already done this once." His reply, "I know, but this time it's for real." That was 1976. Their 3 children all live in BC and there are 6 grandchildren.

Rob reports that he played a bit of golf in Johannesburg but had no clue what he was doing. Huddle Park is a city-owned facility that includes 3 full-sized 18-hole golf courses in beautiful surroundings. Imagine McCleery, Langara and Fraserview all on one property – that was Huddle Park – locally known as Cuddle Park because there were a few good parking spots near lakes where one could drive to at night. Rob was the sole patron at the driving range one day. As he hacked away, he noticed a man sitting nearby. Eventually the gentleman approached Rob, introduced himself as a golf pro, and said, "I can't stand to watch you another second – everything you are doing is wrong!" He gave Rob a free lesson on the spot.

Another golf memory from Huddle Park occurred on a hole where the tee jutted far out into a lake with the fairway about 130 yards away. In order to play at the course, you were given a caddy to carry your bag. They were usually young African boys, aged 12 or 13. The caddies would make private bets with each other as to who they thought was going to win, so generally they gave good advice. One golfer in Rob's group teed his ball up and promptly drove it into the lake. The next one also skipped into the water. By the time the sixth ball got wet, the golfer was seething and threw his driver into the lake. He grabbed his bag from the caddy and tossed that in, too. The caddy who was laughing also got thrown in and then the irate golfer jumped in!

Rob recollects scoring a hole-in-one on a course near Mt. Baker where they owned a ski cabin. From 150 yards, his drive landed on the fringe, kicked left and rolled into the cup. His wife was the sole witness!

Upon returning to Canada, Rob had several jobs and ended up as Vice President Finance with Sandwell Engineering, a company specializing in pulp and paper and ports and marine projects. They had offices all over Canada and the US as well as London, England and Lagos, Nigeria. After 13 years, Rob left the firm and started his own accounting and tax practice, serving family-owned businesses and self-employed professionals. At age 65, he sold the practice and retired. Golfing with West Point began in 2011 after he was encouraged to join by Jim Trotter and Peter Kidd, both of whom had wives who played with Rosemary

at Musqueam. In his second year with West Point, Rob was elected to the Board of Directors and served two years as our Treasurer.

Rob's favourite courses are Langara and Riverway, if only because he sometimes plays well there. His best handicap index thus far is 22. Rob used to enjoy watching Ernie Els on the links and once followed him around the Sony Open in Hawaii. It was the Thursday round with minimal crowds, and Ernie was paired with Steve Stricker. With the light crowds, you could literally walk step by step with the pros. Rob cheers for Rory now.

Among his hobbies, Rob lists woodworking (mainly making toys for the grandchildren), playing tennis and following world sports – primarily rugby, tennis, golf, Manchester United and the NFL, and has recently completed a Family Tree project using Ancestry.com.

*Material submitted by Rob to Lorne
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