

ATLANTIC BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP SPRING 2008
Vin Rushton Memorial Luncheon
“Memories of Vin”
Presented by Robert E. Rushton

Vincent Vernon Rushton was born the son of a coal miner in Springhill Nova Scotia in 1920. He eventually collected five degrees in history, divinity and education from his beloved Acadia University.

Dad was always a lover of history. Some of my earliest memories were the stories he told of our family. Later it was the history of the United Baptist Church in the Annapolis Valley and how it had grown and prospered over the past 150 years.

With great care and strength of feeling he would tell me how each Baptist Church was an independent institution that was part of a unified body called the Atlantic Baptist Convention. No President, Prelate or Bishop could dictate to them. These churches had the right to make their own decisions. He also explained how they recognized there was strength in numbers and so they met annually as part of a democratic convention process.

These were sacrosanct doctrinal values that formed the foundation of his thinking and religious teachings as a missionary, clergy, teacher and parent.

While we were in India in the 1960's Vatican II and the expansion of *ecumenicism* became an exciting time in his life. Many times he would share with me how he had met at a once forbidden seminary with clergy from all walks of the Christian faith. It was with great joy that he talked of how these men and women (for there were also nuns present) met and talked of their common God that all them worshipped through Christianity. This sharing of faith and the crumbling of theological walls built over centuries of conflict was a time for great rejoicing in his theological life.

Then in the 1970's when we had returned to Nova Scotia I began to hear his concern about a shift to the theological “right” within Convention. This was his wake up call! It was as if his whole life had been in preparation for this one moment in Baptist history. What could he do about? He soon found out he was not alone. Not everyone was willing to “park their brains at the church door”. So they began to talk and gain strength from one another. They realized if they were to succeed they must be part of the political process. After all, *this was a democracy!* Let the members of convention see that there existed a group of people who felt this new direction was inappropriate for the denomination. Make the Convention think! Challenge the motions put forward so that the “light” of open-minded reason could be allowed to shine. And so it was with great passion he would talk to me about each controversial motion that came on the floor of Convention. In great detail he would explain his arguments to be presented or the thoughts of those who would support him in this quest.

And so, the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship was born.

Dad was actively involved in the formation of the group and became an enthusiastic participant whenever meetings were called. He eventually went on to serve in several official capacities within the organization.

He always had his camera ready to take pictures of those assembled. His study was littered with countless photographs of these important gatherings. They were not always organized but they were never thrown out! It was with great pride that he would show me how they had been used in a Bulletin or Newsletter. Speaking of Newsletters, I don't believe he ever threw one of those out either. He kept them by the hundreds, neatly bound in what eventually became known in their house as “The Fellowship Room”.

One day he came to me with a rather stunned expression on his face and said:

“Some members of Convention think we’re trying to cause a split”. He was upset that this had been raised for it was abhorrent to him. He was hurt by the accusation and returned to the Fellowship determined to somehow solve the problem without causing deeper wounds. Later, it was with a great sense of joy that he shared with me the formulated statement that I have seen countless times on bulletins and newsletters about how the Fellowship would work “within the Convention”.

In his later years as his health began to decline, the old spark that had always been such a vital part of my Dad’s life began to diminish. His life became more sheltered and insular and as a family we witnessed a dramatic change in his personality. And then to our great joy we would hear the fateful words: “There will be a Fellowship meeting in Amherst” or “Springhill” or “Truro” or wherever.

And like the rejuvenated EverReady Bunny he would rise and gather the important things necessary to accommodate his attendance at these meetings. Then with mother dutifully at his side they would drive off with a great sense of urgency and happiness. They were going to be part of a wonderful group of like-minded people who shared a love for the Baptist faith and the independent institutions it stood for.

I salute you Dad, and all that you worked and stood for. I also salute the many wonderful people with whom you chose to share those dreams and passions.

Following the address several members of the audience spoke either publicly or personally of their reflections of Vin and the ABF.

I remember your Dad very fondly... I had the image in my mind of your Dad sitting in the “Fellowship Room” calling one of us after another seeking a place for the ABF in our Church budgets. He was not so much concerned about the amount as he was to have the Fellowship included in the budgets of as many congregations as possible. That yearly call became somewhat of a ritual! And we do not have anyone doing that now! **Rev. John Boyd, Minister of the Oxford Street Baptist Church in Halifax:**

“It was your father (Vin) who called me when I was in the United States to see if I would be interested in coming back to the area – to First Cornwallis. As in so many other cases, he helped churches find ministers he thought would suit them. He was ABF’s *area minister*. I don't think I would ever have come back, if it hadn't been for your father.”
The Rev. Dr. John Churchill, retired Prof. of Finance, Acadia University.