

**Constable David Nicholson**  
**August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1998**  
**Kitchener Waterloo, Canada**  
**GONE BUT NEVER FORGOTTEN**

<http://www.wrpa.org/content.php?doc=6&xwm=true>

On the evening of August 12, 1998, Cst. Dave Nicholson was called to the Parkhill Dam in Cambridge to assist with the rescue of a ten year old boy who had disappeared under the water. Mark Gage had been swimming in the area near the rear of the lowhead dam and had not been seen for over thirty minutes. Dave was part of the Underwater Search and Recovery team and together with Cst. Rob Sauve and Cst. Curtis Rutt began to search the area along the rear of the lowhead dam. Tragically, Dave became trapped in an underwater sluice, the same sluice, it turned out, that Mark had been sucked into. Despite the frantic efforts of Dave's dive mates and civilian bystanders, Dave could not be freed from the sluice. His dedication to duty and unselfish heroism will be remembered forever. Dave was the first officer that died in the line of duty in the 25 year history of the Waterloo Regional Police Service.

**Ontario Medal for Police Bravery (1998 Recipients):**

<http://www.jeanpaulleblanc.com/Canada.htm>

**Constable David Nicholson** - (Waterloo Regional Police Service) For his rescue attempt to save 12 year old Mark Gage who drowned while swimming in the Grand River. Constable Nicholson lost his life in his attempt to rescue the boy.

**Constable Robert Sauvé** - (Waterloo Regional Police Service) Dove under the waters of the Grand River three times trying to free his partner, Constable David Nicholson. Nicholson became trapped in the rushing water of the Parkhill Dam while trying to rescue 12 year old Mark Gage who drowned while swimming in the river. When his body was found, his arms were still wrapped around the child.



## News Alert

[http://www.canoe.ca/NewsArchiveAug98/candigest\\_aug13.html](http://www.canoe.ca/NewsArchiveAug98/candigest_aug13.html)

8-13-99

**CAMBRIDGE, Ont.** (CP) -- The bodies of a 12-year-old boy and the police diver who tried to find him are still trapped in the Grand River after extensive efforts to recover them failed on Thursday. Police spent six hours trying to stop the flow of water surging through the hole in the Parkhill Dam in this southwestern Ontario town where the diver's body is pinned. But they called off their attempts at about 3:30 p.m. EST. The officer's body was visible on underwater cameras lowered from a boat, but there was no safe way to reach the body with the strong water currents.

## News Alert

[http://www.canoe.ca/NewsArchiveAug98/candigest\\_aug15.html](http://www.canoe.ca/NewsArchiveAug98/candigest_aug15.html)

**CAMBRIDGE, Ont.** -- Hundreds of people who were rattled by the double drownings of two community members stood by as the bodies were finally recovered early Saturday. The deaths of a 12-year-old boy and a 32-year-old police diver have renewed concerns about the popular swimming hole well known for its dangerous swirling waters. 500. By Eric Volmers, the Cambridge Reporter. Member photo requested AM-Cop-Diver.

## Boy, police diver die: K-W officer drowns in bid to find Cambridge 13-year-old's body

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/33559.html>

21 August 1998 Steve Cannon, Tony Reinhart and Phil Jalsevac RECORD STAFF

A 13-year-old Cambridge boy and a police diver died Wednesday night, their bodies trapped beneath the water at the base of the Parkhill dam in Cambridge.

At the scene in the downtown Galt area early today, the dead officer's Waterloo regional police colleagues were in a state of shock as they and other rescue crews worked to recover the two bodies. "They're numb," Insp. Dennis Cullen said of his colleagues. Both victims had been pulled beneath the Grand River, the boy at about 7:30 p.m. while swimming with friends, the police diver three hours later while searching for the boy's body.

Neither body could be recovered from the churning waters Wednesday night, despite the frantic efforts of firefighters, police and even bystanders who had gathered on a hill overlooking the river. A shaken Insp. Rita Westbrook said no more Waterloo regional police divers would be sent into the water. "We've lost one and we're not prepared to lose another," she said.

A sombre Chief Larry Gravill, who earlier this week attended the funeral of a slain Toronto officer, declined to comment Wednesday as he struggled with the death of one of his own.

At the site again his morning, Gravill said, "It's very, very tragic. It was a brave act and we're so sorry to have lost one of our finest officers." He said officers were in a state of shock but "the time for mending will happen later. "We are doing everything we can to find the people trapped."

Called to the scene from home, Gravill watched Wednesday as rescue workers tried in vain to save the officer, who became lodged in a small hole, or sluice, at the base of the dam. Water travels through the 1.5-metre wide sluice for a distance of about five metres and flows back into the river. Police have not released the names of the victims.

What began as an evening of swimming for three friends turned deadly at 7:30 p.m., when one of the boys dove from the dam and never surfaced. At first, his friends, Ryan McPhee and B.J. Billings, both 13, thought their pal was playing a trick on them. They figured he must have surfaced when they weren't looking and went home. But Billings began to worry after a few minutes and ran to a nearby variety store to call police.

Later, as firefighters waded into the water looking for his friend's body, McPhee wrapped himself in a yellow blanket and wondered if he could have reacted quicker. "It's scary to me now 'cause I got to live with it," he said. "If he's dead, I mean, I sat there and thought he was joking and stuff. It's sad." Staff Sgt. Kevin Chalk, who would later don a wetsuit to try to free the trapped diver, said there was a remote chance the boy had slipped out of the water unnoticed.

But the boy never did show up at home and his gym bag, containing his in-line skates, was left on the shore. A man and woman, identified by onlookers as the boy's parents, held pictures of their son as they watched firefighters search for him.

When they could not find the missing boy, the police divers were called. It was already dark when the first officer entered the water, hoping to search about 30 metres along the dam using an underwater light. "They don't want to get too close to the chute (sluice) tonight, not while it's dark," said Chalk, who was at the scene initially to deal with the media.

Minutes later, the diver was trapped in the sluice and Chalk was joining the rescue effort. He said the missing officer went into the water about one hour after the boy had disappeared. The officer gave a pre-arranged signal to indicate he had found a body and "shortly after that there was one strong pull as the officer was pulled into the aquaduct (sluice)."

Chalk believed the officer was trapped on an obstruction in the fast-flowing water in the sluice. Even with the help of members of the public trying to pull the officer out, he was lodged so strongly the safety line snapped.

With some of the water diverted, the level in front of the dam is much shallower today. Heavy equipment was used to put concrete blocks a few metres in front of the sluice. Once the blocks are in place, officials intend to inflate a large balloon to block the water flow.

The dam has long been a magnet for young swimmers, despite several near-drownings in recent years. The kids either jump from the top of the dam into the calm water on one side, or slide down the small waterfall to the rock-strewn shallows below. Some dive to the base of the dam, where they allow themselves to be pulled through four holes that let water flow through.

It was in one of these sluices that the police diver became lodged, his tanks apparently caught on the sides. It is believed that the body of the drowned boy is trapped in the same sluice. For nearly three hours, rescue crews tried frantically to free the trapped officer. Using ropes attached to their air boat, Cambridge firefighters failed to pull the officer loose. The boat nearly went over the dam while they tried.

Officials with the Grand River Conservation Authority tried to reduce the current by diverting the water. At one point, dozens of the more than 200 people lining a hill overlooking the river were enlisted to help pull on more ropes tied to the trapped police diver.

Every effort failed.

By 1 a.m, it became clear that the diver could not be rescued. "We made every effort that we could possibly, humanly, think of," Westbrook said as several stunned colleagues milled around the police command post.

Despite warnings every summer from police and firefighters, young people continue to swim at the Parkhill dam, often with dangerous results. In separate incidents within a week in August 1996, a 12-year-old girl and 15-year-old boy escaped death when friends pulled them from the same part of the river.

Four years earlier, three young boys slipped into the current and were saved by a man fishing near the dam. And in July 1991, a 31-year-old man injured his back sliding down the dam.

Although many Waterloo regional police officers were on the scene today on their own time, Chaulk said regional police divers would not be entering the waters to recover the body. "It's too devastating for them to recover one of their own," he said. Instead divers from the Niagara regional police were called in to help.

The mood among members of the force was one of "emptiness, devastation," Chaulk said.

## **No easy solution to dangers of dam**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/33597.html>

21 August 1998 Christian Aagaard RECORD STAFF

It was a question on many lips as people watched the grim search for two drowning victims in Cambridge Thursday -- is enough being done about the safety of the Parkhill dam?

"I think it should be fenced off," said Carolann McQuire of Cambridge as she stood on the west side of Grand River, just below the dam. "It's a tragedy that it may take something like this before something happens. Police are there every day. As soon as they leave, the kids are back again."

The dam stretches about 67 metres (220 feet) across the Grand River, just north of the city's historic downtown core. The depth of water on the downstream side varies between about half a metre to just over two metres. Upstream, the depth ranges up to about four metres.

For as long as people can remember, the dam has been a popular, though risky, swimming area. On Wednesday night, the hazards of the dam -- specifically the enormous water pressure squeezed through several submerged sluiceways -- first killed a 13-year-old boy, then the police diver attempting to find the boy's body.

As scenic as the location is, something should be done to keep people off the dam, said Darwin Rice, also of Cambridge. In the meantime, he said, he'll be talking to his five-year-old son about being aware of hazards. "He'll soon be at that age where he'll be wandering a little farther," Rice said.

The safety of the dam will be reviewed by the city, Waterloo regional police, the Cambridge fire department and the Grand River Conservation Authority, Cambridge Mayor Jane Brewer told reporters Thursday.

But there isn't any quick fix, she suggested. Both sides of the river have been developed as part of Cambridge's Living Levee program to turn flood-control berms into attractive parkland. "How do you cut off access to the river?" she asked. "We've done a lot of work to have access to the river."

Signs prohibiting swimming disappear as quickly as they are put up, said Jim Reid, a spokesman for the conservation authority. "Are signs going to keep kids away from the dam?" Reid asked. "There has been extensive media coverage about this dam, and kids still keep coming back."

After responding to several alarms at the dam in 1996, including two near-drownings, the Cambridge fire department met with the conservation authority to review the hazards. They ruled out, as not feasible, barriers to keep people away and a boom across the dam to prevent people from being swept downstream.

Instead, firefighters stepped up stops at the dam to talk to people playing or fishing on it. And police Wednesday said they frequently order people off the structure.

Wednesday's tragedy came at a time when the Cambridge fire department is preparing a safety program for schools called RiskWatch. Produced by the U.S.-based National Fire Prevention Association, RiskWatch compels students from kindergarten and Grade 8 to consider eight risks, such as firearms, fire, traffic -- and water. It's similar in structure to the Learn Not To Burn program started a few years ago. Lessons are wrapped into the school curriculum. "When things like this happen, you say, 'We need a program like this,'" Capt. Bill Donahue said at the scene of the drownings. Donahue, public education officer for the Cambridge fire department, hopes to have the program ready by October for schools across Waterloo Region.

The Parkhill dam is about a half-kilometre down-river from another structure misused by children -- a railway bridge over the river. Fencing on both sides of the river hasn't stopped people from using the bridge as a crosswalk. "Our fences are constantly being repaired by our personnel," said Mike Fitzpatrick, a detective-sergeant with CP Rail police in Hamilton. "The fences are repaired, and then they are cut. If kids want to get in there, they are going to get in there."

CP police use patrols and school visits to "constantly hammer home" the risks, Fitzpatrick said. But, he said, it doesn't seem to be enough. "Until somebody gets hurt, these kids aren't going to listen to our message," he said.

## **PARKHILL DAM HAS LONG HISTORY**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/33596.html>

CAMBRIDGE CITY ARCHIVES, RECORD FILES

Friday 21 August 1998

The Parkhill dam, as the structure is commonly called, stretches 67 metres (220 feet) across the Grand River in downtown Cambridge. The concrete structure was built in 1913 to replace a wooden dam erected farther downstream in 1837.

The mill pond behind both dams provided water power for a number of mills on the east side of the river.

Some dates of interest concerning the mill pond and its dams:

- ◆ **May 22, 1878** -- With its rudder stuck, the Empress of India, a small steam-powered paddle-wheeler, topples over the wooden dam on a cruise around the mill pond. Eight of 17 passengers drown.
- ◆ **Aug. 24, 1980** -- Two Cambridge brothers, Stephen and Clyde Ivany, 41 and 54 years of age respectively, drown upriver from the dam. Clyde

Ivany apparently jumped in the river to save a dog. Stephen then tried to rescue his brother.

- ◆ **July 4, 1988** -- Gary Frye of Cambridge dies in an canoeing accident in the river at the foot of Todd Street. Two companions who were also in the boat swim to safety.
- ◆ **June 24, 1991** -- Anglers at the Parkhill dam find the body of a 43-year-old man floating in the river. Police rule out foul play in the death of Donald Hart of Cambridge.
- ◆ **Aug. 20, 1996** -- Teenagers Jared Montague and Joel Legere rescue Luke Booker, 15, from the swirling water around the dam.
- ◆ **Aug. 23, 1996** -- Teenagers Marcie McCarley and Walter Valentim pull Amanda Speed, 12, to safety after she gets trapped in the river at the dam.
- ◆ **Aug. 12, 1998** -- A 13-year-old boy goes into the river at the dam and drowns. A Waterloo regional police diver dies in the attempt to locate the boy's body.

## **Death transforms carefree children into grieving friends**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/33598.html>

21 August 1998 Paula Schuck RECORD STAFF

Mark Gage was an excellent swimmer and a fearless athlete, who never backed down from a game of road hockey. The 13-year-old vanished under the Parkhill dam in Cambridge while he was playing Wednesday night with friends. He was presumed drowned later that night by police. "He was a strong swimmer. He was an excellent swimmer. They had a pool at their house. Probably when he dove in, he hit his head," said Mark's uncle Thursday afternoon as he stood on the banks of the Grand River awaiting word on his nephew.

The boy's uncle asked not to be named, but he said his sister Jane Gage was Mark's mother. Acting as a spokesman for the family, he said Mark's parents -- who waited at the scene the first night -- couldn't bear to be there again today.

The boys "were just clowning around, just having fun. What makes it even worse is that somebody else had to drown, too. "That's just unreal. That's just unbelievable."

Waterloo regional police Staff Sgt. Kevin Chalk said the youth was playing with two of his friends, swimming -- he did not fall in the water. About 7:30 p.m., he disappeared under water, Chalk said. His friends thought he was just pulling a joke on them and waited before they called for help.

Three hours after police arrived, a local police diver who went in to rescue the boy disappeared inside the second sluice, an opening in the dam which

measures about 21/2 feet by three feet and is 12 feet long. "We knew when the divers went in we were not going to get the boy out alive," said an exhausted Chalk.

After sending a video camera into the narrow opening where they believed the two bodies were trapped, Chalk said they were able to see the police diver, who went in wearing two air tanks. They weren't able to see anything past the diver, but Chalk said they were operating under the assumption the boy's body was obscured from vision and trapped behind the diver.

On John Street, in an area only a short walk away from the dam, Mark lived with his two brothers -- one of whom was his twin -- three sisters, his mother, Jane, and father, John. "We're clinging to that one-in-a-million chance that he is OK and has washed up in Brantford," Mark's uncle said.

Just down from St. Andrew's Senior Public School, where the flag flew at half-mast for the boy, who would have been entering Grade 8 next month, many of his friends recalled him as a skilled athlete. "We always used to play road hockey," said Rene Berube, 13, who lives near the Gage family. "He was, like, a brave kind of person. He'd cut himself and keep playing."

Mark loved to play hockey at a neighbor's home-made rink, Berube said. "We played survival here on this street. It's a game like hide and seek." "We were on the basketball team together," said Matt Laracy, a schoolmate of the youth.

Adam Dixon described Mark as a good friend. "He liked to try new things. He was into sports, hockey and video games."

Both Dixon and Laracy said they know many kids who played in the water at the dam before. Some would jump from the bridge or fish on the edge of the river, they said. But they said they will avoid playing there in the future.

## **New tragedy stirs up memories of earlier drownings in Grand**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/33595.html>

21 August 1998 Christian Aagaard and Paula Schuck RECORD STAFF

The man leaned on his cane, sighed and said he had seen it all before, many times. "I've been around the river all my life," Jim Sheppard, 91, said Thursday as he watched emergency crews search for two bodies by the Parkhill dam in downtown Cambridge. "The river was our playground in the summer. We always stayed below the dam, but we also wanted to swim with the big kids. So, you went up to the dam."

A 13-year-old boy and a police officer died at the dam Wednesday night. The boy went into the water some time after 7 p.m. and never surfaced. The

police officer, a trained scuba diver, drowned about two hours later looking for the boy's body.

About 70 years ago, Sheppard recalled, a friend of his named Mike died by the dam. "I was here when they pulled him out," he said. "Police have tried for years to keep kids away, this summer especially. As soon as the cops leave, they are back in again. The dam was always a favorite spot, but it was a dangerous spot."

Cambridge resident Mark Legere, 32, laid part of the blame for this week's tragedy on city hall, complaining about the user fees charged at public swimming facilities. Young people, particularly those from low-income families, are tempted to splash and play at the dangerous dam because "there's no place in this town to swim free . . . this is sad."

In 1980, Gordon Ivany, 65, lost two brothers in a drowning accident upriver from the dam. According to a Record story, Clyde Ivany, 54, and Stephen Ivany, 41, were on the riverbank near a rail bridge, when Clyde jumped in to try to save a dog he thought was in trouble in the water. Stephen tried to rescue his brother, a non-swimmer, but also drowned. "I hate this -- it brings back a lot of memories," Ivany said. "I get a feeling that nothing will be done about this, this time either."

The search for his brothers was over quickly, he said, unlike the long effort under way Thursday afternoon. "I see the kids out here every day still," Ivany said.

## **Watching the watchers indulge morbid curiosity**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/33873.html>

21 August 1998 Brian Caldwell RECORD STAFF

There was lots to learn, even when there was nothing to see at the Parkhill dam in Cambridge. Little of it had to do with the two bodies believed to be stuck in a rectangular sluice under the surface of the Grand River.

It was almost certain they were dead, dead, still dead.

The lessons pertained to the living, breathing people who stared down from every vantage point that hadn't been cordoned off by police. Hundreds of them stood there for hours Thursday, hardly giddy, but not quite sombre either. Mothers led toddlers by the hand up low hills to the best lookouts. Groups of teenagers parked their bikes in piles on the grass. Couples shared take-out coffees and fast food. And on one side of the dam, in a restaurant solarium suited to special occasions, some even enjoyed sit-down meals.

I liked the kids who sat on a concrete wall and fished in a trickle far below their dangling legs, their oblivious chatter all about nibbles and bass sightings.

Almost everybody else made me want to leave.

It was a big event, a tragic event, and I can understand the urge to see where it happened, to get a fix on confusing reports about how the dam works. I went myself for much the same reason.

Seeing it helped explain how kids might get a kick out of diving into a pool at the top of the dam and hopping a free ride to the other side on water rushing through the sluice. It was easy to imagine, too, how somebody could get stuck in the narrow opening or flounder in the churning water below the dam, as has happened too many times before.

It was all terribly clear in about five minutes.

But on the banks of the river, the crowds did not come and go. People lingered shoulder-to-shoulder under the sun, mostly silent and gap-mouthed. Some heavy equipment squatted in the river while police and other emergency workers on the near shore made meticulous preparations for a recovery, not a rescue.

It wasn't hopeful or even particularly interesting, leaving only the perverse possibility that they might come up with a body or two sometime soon. Is that what everybody was waiting for, mothers with their kids, teenagers with their buddies, husbands with their wives?

Is that what they came to see, up close and personal? The corpse of a kid? The corpse of a cop? They'd deny it if you put it to them like that.

And yet they stayed, gawking long after ordinary curiosity about currents and sluiceways and water boils had been satisfied. They stayed, many of them, until the only plausible explanation for it was morbid fascination.

Maybe that shouldn't have been surprising. The same ugly side of human nature has shown itself at every bad traffic accident since cars started crashing into each other. Still, there was something about this scene that laid it absolutely bare -- the number of people, the snail's pace of the search, all those reporters watching the watchers. "If they pull up a body," said one cameraman to another, "get a shot of the crowd."

It was a disturbing day -- on the river and all along it.

Brian Caldwell's column usually appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. He can be heard on 96.7 CHYM-FM Tuesday at 7:50 a.m. and can be reached at the Record, 894-2231, ext. 656, or by e-mail: [bcaldwell@southam.ca](mailto:bcaldwell@southam.ca).

## Friends and neighbors remember fallen officer

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/33857.html>

21 August 1998 Barbara Aggerholm and Steve Cannon RECORD STAFF

**HEIDELBERG** -- He'd flood the village ice rink for kids, help push a stalled car to a friend's garage and pray over the death of a child.

Those who knew him best say the police diver who died Wednesday searching for a drowned child's body, went into the Grand River at the Parkhill dam prepared for whatever was going to happen.

(The Record is not identifying the officer at the request of Waterloo regional police, who asked the media to withhold identification until the body has been recovered). "I know that if he had a chance to think anything when he was trapped, it would not have been a fear of death," said Lisa Frey, a close friend who shared the officer's strong Christian faith. "He knew where he was going."

A father of three children, all under the age of 10, he and his wife lived in the village of Heidelberg in an older home they were fixing up. Neighbors knew them well. On Thursday, as police worked to recover the bodies, Mark and Lisa Frey sat quietly in their backyard. They wanted to hope for a miracle that their friend was still alive. They knew it was only hope.

It was the same up and down Heidelberg's main street, where friends remembered the best about a man with a ready smile and an easy way with people. They wept as they sat on the doorsteps of their homes. They came home from work early to sit together in their backyards, talk and hug their children.

Some took food to the home where relatives and friends were gathering. They cried with his wife. And some prayed. A man at the home, who identified himself as a relative, declined to comment on the officer's death, saying it was too soon.

But word of the tragedy made its way up Heidelberg's main street quickly, just as it has twice before recently. A few months ago, a neighbor's child died. A few years ago, an older man was killed by a falling branch. "This area's been devastated the last little while . . . three people you know by first name gone," said Bill Strauss Jr. "The first thing you say is, 'Why couldn't it be someone like me?' I'm single. I have no children," he said. "It was just his time, I guess."

The family has lived in the village only a few years and attend church in Kitchener. But neighbors said the couple became part of the community in no time. "I think the guy's a hero," said Chris Kerr. "To go in the water, knowing there's a chance the person you're looking for is dead, then to get killed

yourself is tragic. "It's tragic, but yet it's what these guys do. All these cops who do this (diving), they've got my greatest respect."

In addition to his regular police duties, the officer was one of six members of the Waterloo regional police dive team. Zelia Furtado worked with him as head of Citizens on Patrol in Kitchener and came to the river Thursday as soon as she heard "one of our guys was down."

Crying and hugging her 10-month-old goddaughter, Furtado talked about the officer's friendly and professional manner when on the job. "He never had anything bad to say. He was always there if you needed him," said Furtado, who earlier this week attended the funeral of a slain Toronto police officer. "Two in one week is just too much for anybody."

Those in Heidelberg who knew the officer as a casual friend remember chatting with him while getting their mail at the general store. They remember him helping a neighbor boy put his football equipment on in the right order, since the boy's father no longer lived at home.

And they remember him walking the village streets with his children, holding his wife's hand. "You could tell when they walked down the street they were still in love," said a woman, as she wept on the doorstep of her home. At the village hardware store, the clerks knew him as a regular customer who was forever buying building supplies for his older home. "He was always fixing something up on the house," said one clerk. "It's an awful thing that's happened. He'll sure be missed, I can tell you that."

Down King Street, at the Forwell Variety Store, Pam Dietrich's first thoughts were of his wife and children. But she knew the entire village would be grieving the loss of one of their own. "It's hit me pretty hard. This whole day has been pretty hard," said Dietrich, who took some comfort in reading about the rescue efforts, which included help from several bystanders. "I've got to give credit to those people," she said. "It's good to see regular people help, even if nothing could be done."

Back at the river, Furtado watched rescue workers struggle to free the bodies. "It's like losing a brother," she said, still hugging her goddaughter. "It's stuff like this that makes you think twice about life. You've got to say 'I love you' whenever you can."

## **River refuses to give up bodies of officer and boy**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/33594.html>

21 August 1998 Tony Reinhart, Joel Rubinoff and Geoffrey Downey RECORD STAFF

The heart-wrenching effort to recover the bodies of a 13-year-old boy and a police diver from the Parkhill dam in Cambridge resumed at dawn today, after ending in exhaustion and frustration Thursday night. "Everybody's

mentally and physically exhausted at this point, and it's time to shut it down for the night," Staff Sgt. Kevin Chalk of Waterloo regional police said at 10:40 p.m. on Thursday.

The boy, identified by family members as 13-year-old Mark Gage of Cambridge, dove into the Grand River from the dam at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday and never surfaced. Three hours later, while searching for the boy's body, a Waterloo regional police diver was sucked into an opening in the dam and became trapped in debris.

Police believe the boy's body is lodged, with the diver's, in the same two-by-three-foot opening.

**Officer's name withheld.**

The Record is not identifying the officer at the request of Waterloo regional police, who asked the media to withhold identification until the body has been recovered.

He is the first Waterloo Region officer to die in the line of duty.

Wednesday night's frantic effort to rescue the diver became a grim recovery mission Thursday morning. Numbled by grief and eager to end their nightmare, police were doing their best to free the bodies before sunset. "We're hoping (the boy) is with the officer and we can bring closure for his parents and the officer's parents and just end this thing," Chalk said at about 7:30 p.m.

But by 10:30, after 16 hours of painstaking work using heavy equipment, none of the three separate strategies to cut the flow of water to the opening had worked. Placing concrete blocks in front of the opening, with the intention of using a large balloon to help block the water flow, had proven unworkable.

Nor had a steel plate, lowered in front of the dam's downstream opening, done much to stem the current. And so it had come to this - the day's final attempt to tame the river, by lowering a steel plate on the dam's upstream side.

With the current pinning the plate against the opening, it was reasoned, it would block the water's flow through the hole. With the help of sandbags, if necessary, it would also cut off suction.

Divers on loan from Niagara regional police would then be able to head up through the bottom of the hole and retrieve the bodies. But the machine operator had trouble getting the plate to sit flat against the dam. Not only did the excavator lurch and slip on the river bottom, but underwater supports kept deflecting the plate as it was lowered.

Chalk was confident workers would be able to maneuver the plate around the supports when they resumed this morning. Throughout the day, hundreds of onlookers gathered on the slopes of the Grand, some since early morning, angling for a better view. Some went as friends, people who had known one of the deceased or someone that knew them. Some went to view what had turned into an unrelenting battle against nature.

Some went simply to gawk. "It's sad to see -- it should never have happened," said bystander Ralph MacGregor, who helped in Wednesday's rescue attempts and returned to watch the proceedings all day Thursday. "These currents are not something to play around with. One slip and you kill yourself."

Kate Maude of Waterloo went to the scene after learning of the tragedy Thursday evening. Maude went out of concern for the officers, whom she came to know as a student of the region's Citizen's Police Academy earlier this year. "At any given moment, they're ready to give their life for another person," Maude said as machines droned and rushing water pounded behind her. "We, as citizens, should tip our hats to them and show them a lot more respect."

Pointing to the large crowd behind her, she said, "I hope they're not just gawkers. I hope they've learned something about what the police do for people." Earlier in the day, Chalk laid out the sad progression of events Wednesday night after the 13-year-old Cambridge boy disappeared while swimming with friends. "The officer went in held by a lifeline held on the side of the river," he said.

After an initial pass of the area, the diver came up to speak with the dive captain, then went back down. "There was a signal given back to the ropeman on the shore that led the ropeman to believe he'd seen something," Chalk said. "It was just after that, moments later, that there was another full tug and we assume at that point that's when he was sucked into the sluice." The diver was instructed to go only so far, but may have spotted the boy's body and gone further to retrieve it, Chalk said.

A backup diver went in after his colleague and was so close to getting sucked in too that the current tore his mask off. "We were very lucky we didn't lose two," Chalk said.

On hand initially to brief reporters about the missing boy, Chalk had to don a wetsuit and join the effort to rescue the diver. He and a Cambridge firefighter made their way to the sluice opening, to catch the diver if he became dislodged.

Meanwhile, police on the top side of the dam tried to lower an air bottle to the diver, "but it's doubtful he got it. The pressure there is just so extreme," Chalk said. As hope hardened into fear, emergency workers tried to pull the

diver out by his safety rope. First they attached it to the fire department's air boat. When that failed, they enlisted about 100 people, including dozens of onlookers, to pull on the rope.

But it broke.

Around that time, a piece of the diver's regulator, which fed oxygen from his tank through a hose to his mouth, floated to the surface.

It was over.

"All the procedures were followed," Chalk said. "This is just a situation that the forces of nature took over . . . and there was nothing we could do about it." A pall settled over the area as reality hit the diver's stunned co-workers. High-ranking officers, well accustomed to other people's tragedies, had trouble discussing one of their own.

By Thursday, that pall had spread into every corner of the region, where officers had to keep on working under a burden of grief. Many of those not working Thursday gathered on the rock ledge near the dam to console each other. "It's affected us all on a very, very personal level," Insp. Steve Hibbard said. "I know that everybody right now is really frustrated, because they want some closure here."

Numerous police forces have called to offer condolences. Others have offered to loan officers to ease the burden, "but right now we're managing just fine," Hibbard said.

The recovery team has also been flooded with offers of such things as food, coffee and temporary sleeping facilities. Cambridge Mayor Jane Brewer, who was on hand for Wednesday's failed rescue attempt, was back at the scene Thursday. "I don't think there are too many people who lived in Galt and the surrounding areas that haven't used this river to swim in . . . it's a dangerous situation," Brewer said. "Our firefighters and the police are always warning people not to come down here. We have told them how dangerous it is. People need to take some responsibility."

A meeting between the city, Grand River Conservation Authority and emergency services will be organized "as quickly as we can get over what's happening here," she said. For now, police will remain focused on the recovery of the bodies, Chalk said. "Quite frankly, I think everybody in our service right now is numb. And until the officer is out of the water, and we've had chance to at least put that end of this to rest, I don't think anybody fully understands their feelings at this point.

"It's just numbness."

## **Inquest will be held, coroner says**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/33907.html>

21 August 1998 Paula Schuck RECORD STAFF

A coroner's inquest will be held into the deaths Wednesday of 12-year-old Mark Gage and a Waterloo Regional police diver.

In an interview at the scene of the Parkhill dam on Friday, Cambridge coroner Hank Nykamp said the decision had just been made to hold an inquest into the two drownings.

Nykamp waited near the Blackshop restaurant in the Galt section of Cambridge for several hours as police attempted to recover the two bodies, believed to be trapped in the second opening of the dam. "I've spoken with the regional coroner and Dr. (James) Young, provincial coroner and we've decided that an inquest will be held."

While Nykamp said it was much too soon to determine specifics about when one might be scheduled or what it might yield, he said they were all in agreement that an inquest is warranted. "They will look at all the issues there," Nykamp said.

Regional coroner Karen Acheson said the situation at the Parkhill dam "meets the criteria that it is in the public interest to know the circumstances of the deaths."

Mark Gage, a strong swimmer, who was expected to enter Grade 8 at St. Andrew's Senior Public School this September, was presumed to have drowned after disappearing while playing with friends in the Grand River Wednesday night.

A police diver who went into the dam about three hours later in the attempt to locate the body, was believed to have been caught in the second sluice, or opening, of the dam. Video cameras lowered into the opening Thursday showed his body and an unidentified obstruction within the tunnel. Staff Sgt. Kevin Chalk said the water was extremely murky and, while the camera could not see the youth's body, they were operating on the assumption that it had been hidden by the diver. "We want very badly to have answers here," said Regional Coun. Lynne Woolstencroft.

## **Ordeal at dam nears end**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/33915.html>

21 August 1998 Barb Aggerholm, Steve Cannon, Geoffrey Downey, Tony Reinhart Paula Schuck RECORD STAFF; CANADIAN PRESS

The Grand River appeared close to releasing its hold on the bodies of a police diver and a Cambridge boy late Friday, two days after they lost their fight with the currents that flow by Cambridge's Parkhill dam.

Just before midnight, exhausted rescue workers were preparing to pull the bodies of 12-year-old Mark Gage and the Waterloo regional police diver from the hole in the dam that had trapped them both.

Gage drowned while swimming with friends Wednesday night. The officer, a father of three from Heidelberg, died later that night while searching for the dead boy's body.

After two often wrenching days of recovery attempts, the breakthrough came at 8:15 p.m. when a steel plate was placed over the hole that lets water flow through the dam. Held tight to the wall by 2,700 kilograms of sandbags dropped in the water, the specially-made plate finally stemmed the water flow and made a recovery attempt possible.

Soon after, divers with the Niagara regional police were in the water and able to free Gage and the officer.

The deaths have hit hard the Waterloo regional police force and the communities it serves, like a loss in the family. Early in the day, a solitary police officer knelt by two bouquets of red and white flowers laid on a rocky ledge that overlooks the dam. One was for the diver, the other for Gage. As darkness fell, a candle was lit and placed on the ledge as well. More flowers, brought by school children, were laid on the Parkhill Bridge.

Grim-faced on- and off-duty police officers, their spouses and friends tried hard to contain their emotions as they watched from a nearby hill. But at home, they held fast to their children and family members. "I held my daughter and cried," said Const. Sherri Watkinson, who was at the dam with her 17-month-old daughter after working all night. "I thought ...of my co-worker and his small children and how that must feel for his wife. It's very important to be here. He (the officer) died knowing the risks and he died trying to help and that's what we all do every day."

Officers, most wearing black ribbons on their uniforms, told Cambridge Mayor Jane Brewer they appreciated the presence of people who care. "It's been interesting to have them come up and thank me" for the city's support, said Brewer, who has been at the scene from the beginning.

As the recovery attempt dragged through a second day, Staff Sgt. Matt Torigian said everyone remained hopeful the bodies would be recovered soon. "I think the best way to describe it is focused. Everyone is very focused," said Torigian, who is grateful for the outpouring of community support. "There are some engineers out there who are phoning in with ideas on how to help."

Joe Scott, who stood for hours at a time in the hot sun guiding the public away from police lines, said the tragedy made people remember their own losses. "I lost my son three years ago," he said, shaking his head. "I know what it is they're going through."

Earlier in the day, mourners filed quietly into Stanley Park United Brethren in Christ church in Kitchener to pray for the dead officer, his wife and three young children. They described the family, who were members of the church, as remarkable Christians who lived their faith. "I can picture him (the officer) free with his praise and affection for his wife and family," said one woman, clutching a Bible and weeping. "He was wonderful with children."

Trauma teams of police, fire and mental health workers from the regions of Waterloo, Peel, Halton and Hamilton circulated among the officers and their families. Police will be encouraged to discuss their feelings and will receive information about what to expect in the coming days, said Ron Dowhaniuk, a member of Waterloo Region's trauma team. "It may bring up issues that were in the past and they thought were dealt with," he said.

The school board's trauma team is also preparing for an outpouring of grief from students at St. Andrew's Senior Public School, where Gage would have entered Grade 8 next month. "This isn't the way you want to start the school year," said superintendent Howard Stone. "This is the life of a young student, a young child at a time when they should be enjoying the summer."

Gage had been doing just that Wednesday evening, until the river took hold of him. He and two friends had been swimming above the dam water that seems calm on the surface, but churns through holes dug about eight feet below. A strong swimmer, Gage dove from the top of the dam some time before 7:30 p.m. He never surfaced.

When firefighters failed to find his body by nightfall, the officer and other police divers began the grisly chore of searching the river bed.

Guided by a flashlight, the diver made an initial pass underwater, surfaced and signaled to an officer on shore. He may have been trying to say he found the child. He dove again and moments later the safety rope tied to him was pulled tight and the officer was sucked into a hole in the dam perhaps only two-by-three-feet wide.

Knowing their diver did not have much time, rescuers used a boat to yank on the safety rope. So did nearly 100 people, including dozens of onlookers. Nothing worked. Soon after, a piece of the officer's regulator, which fed him air from his tanks, floated to the surface. Hope began to fade.

The recovery attempt was a long and frustrating ordeal for the families, the officers and the heavy equipment operators called in to help. What seemed

to some like a straightforward task -- stemming the flow of water through a hole -- was complicated by the force of the river and bad luck.

Initial indications of the dam's measurements were wrong and a steel plate made to cover the sluice was not large enough, said Staff Sgt. Kevin Chalk. It was thought the side of the dam ran straight down. It turns out the face slopes outwards at a slight angle.

Police were told of the error by someone who had seen the dam in the 1970s, on a day when there was no water in the river. Chalk didn't know where the plans they were working from came from, but said this error would be "looked into down the road."

After many frustrating attempts to block off the dam openings, Chalk said the cost of the recovery effort was not even being considered. He estimated there were 40 to 60 officers working on the recovery. "Cost is not an issue," said Kitchener Coun. Jim Ziegler, who is also chairman of the police services board. "You have to do it. It's one of those extraordinary things that come up and you don't question it, you do it."

Ziegler also said the board will consider ways to recognize the dead constable's heroism. "I want our force to know the board is completely sympathetic and behind them in doing whatever is necessary and to recognize the bravery this man showed," Ziegler said as he watched the recovery efforts.

**"He will be acknowledged ...The man is a hero."**

## **ONTARIO DROWNINGS**

The deaths of a Waterloo regional police officer and a 12-year-old boy this week in Cambridge have added to the growing list of people who have drowned this summer in Ontario in a variety of tragic circumstances.

Here's a partial list of recent drownings in the province:

### ◆ **August**

- ◆ Mark Gage, 12, of Cambridge, drowns swimming near a dam in the Grand River.
- ◆ David Nicholson, a Waterloo regional police diver, drowns trying to recover Gage's body.
- ◆ Christopher Dewald, 12, and Jennifer Dewald, 10, of Leamington, drown while swimming in Lake Erie near Wheatley.
- ◆ Robert William Ruth, 35, after a boating accident near Penetanguishene on Georgian Bay.
- ◆ Jeremy Voortman, 7, of Brantford, dies in backyard swimming pool during a party in Pelham.
- ◆ Amber Botermans, 10, of Stoney Creek, dies in a neighbor's pool.

◆ **July**

- ◆ An 18-year-old man drowns during afternoon swim in a quarry south of Napanee.
- ◆ David Blackall, 20, of Toronto, drowns on Ril Lake, south of Huntsville, after swimming from friend's cottage.
- ◆ Ramesh Mistry, 41, of Kitchener disappears while playing in Lake Huron with his family.
  - Three men in their 20s from the Stratford area die when their sailboat capsizes on Georgian Bay.

◆ **June**

- ◆ Jeff Brassler, 16, and Chris Smith, 19, of Aylmer, drown after diving off Port Stanley pier.
- ◆ Brian Henry, 20, of St. Thomas, drowns after being swept off the same pier.
- ◆ Brenda Han, 4, and Daniella Pizzicarolla, 6, of London, drown in backyard pool.

◆ **May**

- ◆ Chelsea Wawzkiewicz, 2, of Niagara Falls, found dead in backyard pool.

## **State law to require warning signs at dams**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/34314.html>

21 August 1998 Christian Aagaard RECORD STAFF

Low-head dams in Pennsylvania, similar to the Parkhill dam in Cambridge that claimed two lives last week, will have warning signs and buoys next year, thanks to a new state law.

It took the death of a 14-year-old hero who was an expert swimmer to bring about the extra precautions. "They say everybody's life has a purpose," Janet Keller of York County, Pa., mother of the teen hero, said in an interview. "Maybe that was Joe's."

For Janet and her husband David, there is some small comfort that the death of their son may save lives in the future.

On Aug. 18, 1994, Joe dove into the water around a low-head dam near his home to rescue a drowning classmate. The classmate survived; Joe died in hospital three days later.

Pennsylvania's law will require buoy-and-sign warnings at privately and publicly owned dams throughout the state. The law takes effect Jan. 1. On Friday, Cambridge MPP Gerry Martiniuk sent a letter to Natural Resources Minister John Snobelen, asking the minister to "consider a similar law for Ontario."

Low-head dams sit low in the river. As water flows over the top of them and cascades down the face, the "boil" of turbulent water at the foot of the dam can be strong enough to capsize boats or pin and drown a person. There are hundreds of such dams in Canada and the U.S., generally built to create reservoirs for water-powered machinery operated by riverbank industries in the mid-1800s and early 1900s.

The Grand River watershed has 30 dams owned by the Grand River Conservation Authority, most of them of the low-head type. Big ones, such as those at Lake Belwood and Conestoga Lake, are part of the authority's flood-control program. Waterloo Region also owns a low-head dam. It's in Kitchener and is part of the region's water supply system.

In Pennsylvania, the Kellers campaigned with state legislator Todd Platts for the new law in hopes that people would realize how hazardous the water pressure and turbulence around low-head dams can be. The bill sets the fines high enough that owners of dams would rather pay \$500 to \$600 for buoys and signs, Platts said.

He compared low-head dams to icebergs -- benign above the surface, deadly at the bottom. "It's not what you see above the surface that's so dangerous, it's the hydraulics you don't see below the surface," Platts said, adding later, "These are true killing machines."

Gov. Tom Ridge signed the Pennsylvania bill in June. Under it, dam owners who don't install the required signs and buoys could face fines up to \$5,000. People who ignore the warnings can also be charged with committing a summary offence and fined about \$50. "If Joe had come home with a fine that day, I would have been furious with him," Janet Keller said. "But I would have gladly paid the fine. I think people don't realize how dangerous (a low-head dam) is."

Five low-head dams along the Grand River -- including the Parkhill dam -- have submerged chutes. They allow a bottom draw of water, which tends to cool the downstream outflow.

But, the conservation authority warns, these open chutes channel water at high pressure, posing a risk to swimmers and waders. If grates were installed across the chutes, the grates would clog with branches and other debris. Debris lodged in the one of the chutes at the Parkhill dam caused the deaths of 12-year-old Mark Gage and 32-year-old Const. Dave Nicholson last Wednesday night when they became caught and could not free themselves.

In the Grand River watershed, it's up to municipalities to decide whether dams should be removed, unless the structures are used for flood-control. Local councillors would have to consider the impact on the environment upstream and downstream, and whether their communities could afford to lose the recreational and scenic value of mill ponds.

Fencing off hazardous dams isn't always practical because fencing can be damaged by floods and river ice, said Jim Reid, a spokesman for the Grand River Conservation Authority. And land-use policies in urban areas of the watershed encourage, rather than discourage, public access to rivers.

## **Public support mounts for families of two Parkhill dam drowning victims**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/34232.html>

21 August 1998 Tony Reinhart and Eugene McCarthy RECORD STAFF

Dozens of mourners continued to gather over the weekend at the site of last week's tragic drowning of a Cambridge boy and the police officer who tried to retrieve his body.

As Waterloo regional police worked on plans for Const. Dave Nicholson's funeral on Wednesday, more than 100 floral tributes were laid near the Parkhill dam in Cambridge, where he and Mark Gage, 12, died last Wednesday.

Among them was a large wreath which two plainclothes officers set on the riverbank. Regional police have set up condolence books at all five divisions for the public to sign.

Several off-duty officers spent Sunday afternoon talking quietly near the dam, on a day the force had originally set aside for a big celebration. Instead, the force's 25th anniversary picnic, planned for the police recreation centre in Roseville, was cancelled. More than 2,000 present and former members of the force and their families had been expected.

The bodies of Nicholson, 32, and Gage were freed from an opening in the dam just after 3 a.m. on Saturday. They had been trapped there since Wednesday night, when Gage disappeared under the surface while swimming. As Nicholson tried to recover the boy's body, he was sucked into the dam, just as the boy had been.

Once the bodies were taken ashore, they were pronounced dead by a coroner and identified by family members. Then, with police forming an honor guard along Parkhill Road, the bodies were taken away.

A coroner's inquest will be held to examine the deaths and ways to prevent others in the future. At a news conference at police headquarters Saturday night, members of the victims' families voiced sympathy for each other. "It's the biggest personal tragedy that you would have, and we're sharing it with Dave's family," said Jane Gage, Mark's mother. "We know what a wonderful man he was, and we're so happy his family can be so proud of him. "He performed the ultimate Christian deed, giving his life for others."

Gage, who attended the conference with her husband, John, said the family's burden was lightened by the many people who called, wrote or approached them at the riverside during the recovery effort. "Sometimes when you're alone, and you think of what has happened . . . you know how that would be," she said. "This is real life, this is it, you know? We can't plan anything; these things just happen, and this is part of life. "But the beauty of it is the way that people are showing their love, and that we see the love in so many people."

Mark was the youngest of six children. The others are Matthew, 23, Meredith, 20, Sarah, 19, Laura, 17, and his twin brother, Ted, 12.

Bruce Nicholson, Dave's older brother, described a poignant moment during the recovery effort, when he was approached by Mark Gage's older brother, Matt, on the riverbank. "So we, the two big brothers, stood there watching for a while," Nicholson said. "And he expressed the family's love and thanks and concern for our family, and for our baby brothers being lost together."

Nicholson said his brother spent much of his life looking out for young people in trouble, through his church as well as his police work. It was not surprising, then, to find him in the river looking for Mark Gage.

In the days after the tragedy, Bruce Nicholson said he was approached by countless people who had been touched by Dave's ever-present smile, his concern, his willingness to help. "These are the things that took him to the place where the little brothers departed together, watching out for a young person in trouble."

Nicholson, a nine-year police veteran who lived in Heidelberg, leaves behind his wife, Wendy, and three young sons, Mitchell, 9, Reed, 7, and Josh, 3. He is the first police officer to die in the line of duty in Waterloo Region's 25-year history.

Police officers who worked overtime during last week's recovery effort are donating that money to Nicholson's family. Acting Staff Sgt. Paul Perchaluk said officers either worked extra hours at the dam site or were called in as backup to maintain normal policing operations.

The Cambridge Firefighters Association is also making a donation to the Nicholson family, said Platoon Chief Bill Chesney. He estimated more than 50 firefighters helped in the recovery, many completing their regular shift and returning as volunteers. And at least one Cambridge store put out containers for donations to the Nicholson and Gage families. Steve Linstrum, manager of Super Pet on Hespeler Road, said, "We thought we'd do what we could to help."

The police have also laid out condolence books at their divisions in Kitchener, Cambridge, Waterloo, Elmira and New Hamburg for people who wish to

express sympathy for Nicholson's family. They have also placed one at the Cambridge division so people can express condolences to the Gage family. Condolence messages can also be left at 650-8500, ext. 719, or on the police Internet Web site at [www.wrps.on.ca](http://www.wrps.on.ca)

Insp. Steve Hibbard said police funerals typically draw between 2,500 and 5,000 police officers from across the country, but "we just don't really know what to expect because of the events that have been occurring across Canada recently."

Nicholson is the third police officer to die on the job this year. All three deaths came within the past two weeks. Toronto Det. Bill Hancox was stabbed outside a strip mall Aug. 4. Just two days after more than 10,000 police officers attended his funeral, Nicholson drowned, and Cpl. Graeme Cumming of the RCMP was killed in a fiery chain-reaction highway accident in southern Alberta.

Staff Sgt. Kevin Chalk, Waterloo regional police spokesman, said 40 to 50 officers are working full-time on plans for Nicholson's funeral. A Toronto officer who helped plan Hancox's funeral is also involved. "Bear with us," Hibbard said. "It's a huge task for us, and it's something that we've never done before, and never want to do again."

### **FUNERAL PLANS**

Funeral plans are now complete for Mark Gage and Dave Nicholson. The Gage funeral will be held Wednesday at 10 a.m. at First United Church, Wellington Street in Cambridge.

Visitation will be held at Coutts and Son funeral home, 96 St. Andrews St., Cambridge, on Tuesday from 2 to 4 p.m., and 7 to 9 p.m. Nicholson's funeral will also be held Wednesday, at 2 p.m., at the Kitchener Gospel Temple on Conway Drive.

Visitation will take place at the temple tonight from 7 to 9 p.m.; on Tuesday from 2 to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m.; and Wednesday, from 9 to 11 a.m.

### **Vigil over for families and police**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/34225.html>

21 August 1998 Tony Reinhart RECORD STAFF

When the end came, the people were quiet

The families, the police officers, the hundreds of spectators, the journalists -- all watched from the riverbank in silence, as only two sounds filled the night air: rushing water and heavy machinery. "Every time we went down to the river, it was so quiet," Jane Gage would say later. "Everyone was so quiet, so respectful."

At 11:30 p.m. Friday, after police put a camera into an opening in the Parkhill dam in Cambridge, they confirmed what they'd thought all along: The body of Jane's boy, 12-year-old Mark, was stuck in the dam with that of Const. Dave Nicholson.

It looked as though police, with help from machine operators, might free the bodies from the dam by midnight. But after watching them try for two days, Jane Gage and everyone else knew this recovery hadn't been easy. They knew it might take longer, and it did.

It was after 3 a.m. when a Niagara Region police diver, a man not unlike Dave Nicholson, freed the dead from the dam, and the living from their agonizing ordeal.

But it was nothing to cheer about. Silence prevailed as the bodies were brought to shore in a front-end loader.

First the officer. Then the boy.

Both were taken farther along the river's edge, to a private spot where their families could see them, where the coroner could get on with the formalities of death. Then Nicholson's 20 closest colleagues, in their Emergency Response Unit uniforms, filed down the bank to see their friend.

Their footsteps made no sound.

By 4:30 a.m., the last family members, colleagues and friends had emerged from the secluded site. Many were in tears. Some held hands or clutched each other. A few feet away, Bill Donahue, a Cambridge firefighter, quietly explained the rush of emotion after the bodies came out. "You knew they were in there," Donahue said, "but when they came out, there was a shock, like it had just happened."

Moments later, the emergency response officers stepped onto a waiting bus, and every other officer, uniformed or not, lined up on both sides of Parkhill Road. A sharp voice pierced the quiet.

"Ten hut!"

The vans carrying the bodies began a sombre procession over the Parkhill bridge, destined for Cambridge Memorial Hospital. Relatives of Gage and Nicholson fell in behind them in their cars.

"Salute!"

When all had gone, a weary police Chief Larry Gravill, Insp. Steve Hibbard and Staff Sgt. Kevin Chalk fulfilled an earlier promise to hold a news

conference. The glare of lights and the electric crackle of the microphone mocked the quiet darkness. It was 4:45 a.m.

Gravill, normally butter-smooth, struggled to deliver a written statement. It had been optimistically dated Friday. "Mark Andrew Gage was 12 years old," he said. "He was the youngest son of John and Jane Gage, and brother of Matt, Meredith, Sarah, Laura and Ted, his twin brother. "Mark attended St. Andrews School and did well in his studies. Mark will be greatly missed by his family and friends."

Then, on to his colleague. "Const. Dave Nicholson became a member of the Waterloo regional police in 1989. "Dave leaves behind his wife Wendy and three sons, nine-year-old Mitchell, seven-year-old Reed and three-year-old Josh. "Dave was a very personable officer and was very well-liked by every member of our service. He will be sadly missed."

With that, Gravill had to stop to collect himself. He stared at the statement, not moving. After a long, pained silence, he found his voice and thanked all who helped in the recovery.

Hibbard then read a letter from the Gage family. He struggled, too. Finally, Chalk -- who had been here from the beginning, who had put on a wetsuit and felt the river's power as it took his friend -- answered a few questions. Yes, there will be a full police funeral.

It was a tree stump that had trapped the bodies in the dam. There will be investigations, but let's not discuss that now.

Chalk then handed out pictures of Mark Gage and Dave Nicholson, alike in the brightness of the faces, the darkness of the backgrounds. It was time to go home.

The end had come, and the people were quiet.

### **'We smile when we think of him,' Mark's mom says**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/34675.html>

21 August 1998 Liz Monteiro RECORD STAFF

Even in the womb, Mark Gage was a ball of energy who loved to make people laugh. During a routine ultrasound procedure before he and his twin brother were born in late 1985, the technician couldn't stop laughing. One baby kept rotating and wouldn't settle. "Now I'm sure it must have been Mark," said his mother, Jane Gage, with a chuckle during an interview at the family's kitchen table Monday.

On the table stood a vase of roses, one for each member of the family, from the principal of St. Andrews Public School, Mark and Ted's school. Four of

Mark's five siblings listened as their mother talked about him. "He was such a happy boy. We smile when we think of him," Jane said.

Jane and John Gage lost their youngest son Wednesday when Mark drowned along with Const. Dave Nicholson, a police diver who attempted to retrieve him from the Grand River. Mark had disappeared while swimming near the Parkhill dam. Both bodies were finally removed early Saturday.

From the word go, Mark was on the move. While his twin brother lay still, Mark rocked himself out of his cradle. When the twins got older, they shared bunk beds. Ted was quiet, but many times Mark had to be told to stop talking and go to sleep.

Like most 12-year-olds, Mark enjoyed playing road hockey with neighborhood buddies, swapping Nintendo games with friends and watching TV. He enjoyed babies and recently started babysitting. " He was very entertaining," Jane said. "He had fun all the time. He didn't dwell on things." She described him as a risk-taker. "He wasn't worried or cautious. He never thought anything would go wrong. I didn't think of him as reckless. He just had no fear."

Mark was three when he gave Jane her first scare. He and Ted had joined their three older sisters in a fun house in the tourist area of Niagara Falls while their mom and dad waited outside. About 10 minutes later, the children came out, but there were only four of them -- no Mark. "I had this awful feeling of dread. I had this sinking feeling," Jane recalled.

In a panic, they checked everywhere. Minutes later, they saw Mark across a busy street on the shoulders of a police officer, smiling proudly as he wore the cop's hat.

Then about two winters ago, the boys and their parents went to the Grand River to watch patches of ice being carried down the waterway. Jane recalls the weather being so cold she couldn't stand it any longer and went for a hot chocolate.

Mark and his friend were supposed to join them, but Mark went to the river and fell in. He was able to pull himself out by grabbing on to the ice. "God helped him out there," said Jane. "He has had a lot of close calls."

One of them came when Mark was struck a glancing blow by a car as he chased his brother home from school one day. Jane said all the close calls were in preparation for last week. "God knew he was to be born Nov. 21, 1985, and stay until Aug. 12, 1998. He gave us these mementoes and memories."

Mark's funeral will be held Wednesday at 10 a.m. at First United Church on Wellington Street in Cambridge.

## **Officials agree to install signs, fences at dam**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/34666.html>

21 August 1998 Philip Jalsevac and Geoffrey Downey RECORD STAFF

Fencing and warning signs will be installed at the Parkhill dam in Cambridge to try to avert another tragedy like the one that claimed the lives of a police officer and 12-year-old boy last week.

The Grand River Conservation Authority announced plans Monday after consultation with the City of Cambridge. "This is an immediate, easy agreement. There may be other things that we do in the future," said GRCA spokesman Jim Reid.

Warning signs will be posted at each end of the dam and fencing will be installed at a sluice gate structure at the west end. As a radical measure, the dam could even be removed entirely. No one has proposed that or studied its implications, but Reid said that, as a matter of GRCA policy, that decision would rest with the local or area municipality. That's because the dam in the downtown Galt section of Cambridge is not used for flood control.

Reid could not say whether it would be up to the city or regional government to decide. Whatever the case, Cambridge Mayor Jane Brewer said the option will be examined. Brewer said any such decision would be subject to public process before a final decision could be made.

Before the dam could be removed an environmental impact assessment would have to be completed and Reid said any such assessment would be a serious undertaking because of the range of issues surrounding a major structure like the dam.

As for the perilous chutes in the dam, built in 1913 but not acquired by the GRCA until 1971, Reid couldn't say anything about their original purpose. He talked to senior engineering officials at the GRCA and said "it was so long ago that we're not sure of that . . . we don't know what they had in mind when they designed those openings."

Reid noted that a variety of similar designs have been incorporated into more modern dams built by the GRCA. They allow a bottom draw of water which tends to cool the downstream outflow and enhance aquatic life and help to prevent the build-up of sediment upstream of the dam.

The danger from low-head dams like Parkhill comes from the turbulence of water cascading over the top to the foot of the dam. It is compounded in Cambridge by the submerged chutes about eight feet below the water line through which water passes with enormous force and suction.

It was in one of those chutes that Const. Dave Nicholson became trapped as he tried to recover the body of Mark Gage, who was also sucked into what

some people call "drowning machines." It took more than two days to extricate the bodies after they became lodged inside the chute by an obstruction that turned out to be a tree stump.

Reid said it's possible the GRCA could install metal grates at the entrance of the openings in the Parkhill dam to prevent people entering.

Reid recalled how "extraordinarily difficult" it was some years ago to clear debris from a GRCA pond where the water flow was much less forceful. Reid said the GRCA is planning to review safety issues at five low-head dams in Cambridge, Paris, Brantford, Caledonia and Dunnville.

## **Public service is deserving of our respect**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/34553.html>

21 August 1998 Brian Caldwell RECORD STAFF

Const. Dave Nicholson wasn't supposed to be a hero when he put on his gear and went into the water at the head of the Parkhill dam.

Police divers almost never are.

It's not in the job description, especially in a large area like Waterloo Region with relatively few bodies of water. Drowning takes a couple of minutes. Getting to the scene of a drowning takes a lot longer.

The unfortunate result, as I had it explained to me once, is that police divers don't do rescues. They go in to help fish out a car that's missed a turn or a weapon that's been dumped to get rid of the evidence.

And sometimes they go in because it's necessary to retrieve a body.

The only possible ending then is a sad one. The only hope is that it will give grieving friends and relatives a sense of closure. It was like that when Nicholson, 32, answered the call with his colleagues and went to the Grand River in Cambridge last week.

Hours had passed since 12-year-old Mark Gage slipped under while swimming with friends and did not come back up.

There was a faint hope the boy might have played a trick on his buddies, surfaced unseen and made it safely to shore elsewhere. But if he was going to find anything while searching along that dam, Nicholson probably knew it wouldn't raise a cheer from the crowd that had already begun to form.

It was a chore, an unpleasant job, something that had to be done. That it was also terribly dangerous didn't come out until it was too late.

## **Pride in professionalism**

Had the recovery gone smooth as silk, as most dives do, nobody would have called Nicholson a hero. Nor, I suspect, would he have considered himself one.

The divers I've met pride themselves on professionalism -- the ability to check their emotions, focus on the task at hand and get on with it. That takes absolutely nothing away from the tributes that have flowed in since Nicholson got trapped and died in the same narrow sluice as the boy he was searching for. He died in public service. The public can't pay too much respect.

But while that process continues, I think it's important to put the circumstances of his tragic death in perspective. Nicholson didn't rush into a burning building to scoop up a child or hurl himself in front of a bullet intended for somebody else. He was not, by all accounts, on a rescue mission.

Rather, he was doing the kind of dirty work that often makes civilians wonder why anybody would go into policing. Opportunities to save the day are few and far between.

Considerably more numerous are the times an unruly drunk has barfed, a woman has been bloodied by her abusive husband or a car is wrapped around a utility pole.

How do cops handle all that stuff? Day in and day out, they just do it because it has to be done. It's entirely fitting that Nicholson be considered a hero in the eyes of this community. He paid the highest price possible. Still, we should see his heroism as the kind that owes more to dedication and duty than extraordinary derring-do.

He was doing a job on our behalf that few of us could face. That was already more than enough to earn our admiration.

Brian Caldwell's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. He can be reached by phone at 894-2231, ext. 656, or by e-mail at: [bcaldwell@southam.ca](mailto:bcaldwell@southam.ca).

## **16,000 could attend funerals of drowning victims, police say**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/34721.html>

21 August 1998 Barbara Aggerholm and Frances Barrick RECORD STAFF

It was a community in pain Monday, looking for ways to express the hurt. Amid plans for funerals that up to 16,000 police officers and civilians will attend on Wednesday, the people of Waterloo Region found more personal ways to remember a dead police officer and a 12-year-old boy.

Hundreds came through the day to write messages of sympathy, fax poems, lay flowers or lower flags for Mark Gage and Const. Dave Nicholson. Hundreds more came at night to the Kitchener church where the body of Nicholson, a 32-year-old father of three, now lies.

Over 31/2 hours, about 600 mourners filed past his coffin at the Kitchener Gospel Temple on Conway Drive.

An officer in full dress uniform stood arrow-straight at each end of the casket, which was draped with a police flag, and topped with the officer's hat and police photo.

With military precision, the guards were changed every half-hour.

While many knew Nicholson the police officer, the Alviano family knew him as that nice boy next door. Nicholson was just a toddler when his family moved in beside the Alvianos in Kitchener's Stanley Park area in 1969. Mike Alviano, 28, was always the tag-along when his older brother, Geoff, played with Nicholson. "We used to go to Dave's church and play floor hockey," he said. "They wouldn't let me the one day, and I was at the back crying, and Dave came over and looked after me."

Years later, Nicholson the police officer would look in on Stages nightclub while on patrol and wave to Alviano onstage as he played with local band Strange Days.

Also on Monday, Kitchener council observed a moment of silence in honor of Gage and Nicholson. Speaking of Nicholson's sacrifice, Mayor Carl Zehr said: "It's that kind of service that we are indebted to in this community." Strangers in life, Gage and Nicholson were found together in the Grand River early Saturday, two nights after drowning in the waters that churn by the Parkhill dam in Cambridge.

Caught in a sluice that runs beneath the dam, Gage died while swimming with friends. Nicholson, a police diver, was trapped in the same hole while trying to find the boy's body. "It's a community in mourning," Brad Grimwood, a Cambridge firefighter, said after signing condolence books at the Cambridge detachment of the Waterloo regional police. "There's not a lot you can do but show support and express sympathy."

Throughout the day, people filed into five area police stations to gaze at photographs of a boy and a man most had never met. Some said silent prayers while others picked up black ribbons to wear. Most wrote messages from their hearts. "As the wife of a firefighter, I share in your incredible pain and sorrow as you live the nightmare that we all fear," one message read.

On the hills above the dam, where hundreds of people had watched the recovery efforts, bouquets of mums, roses, daisies and lilies lay on trampled grass.

Nestled among them was a framed picture of Mark Gage, glancing lazily at the photographer as he floated on a raft in a swimming pool. It was placed there by Gage's big brother, Matt. A plaster angel, a Beanie Baby and a balloon lay nearby, reminders that a child's life has been lost. "He was a little boy and little boys get into trouble," said Jane Lambert of Cambridge, who brought her 12-year-old granddaughter to sign a condolence book. "It has been so sad lately."

At noon, the hills overlooking the dam fell as quiet as a chapel as four women, carrying single roses, held each other and placed flowers beside other bouquets. The women, support workers at police headquarters, had known Nicholson well. "We called him Super Dave because he was such a super man," one of them said, laughing between her tears. "He had a big heart."

While the public found ways to work through its grief, Nicholson's colleagues used work to help them through theirs. Up to 120 officers and volunteers filled board rooms and the cafeteria at police headquarters to plan the funeral. It will be the largest ever in the region, with up to 8,000 officers from across Canada and the U.S. and an equal number of local residents expected to attend.

Canadian Airlines and Air Canada are offering out-of-town officers cut-rate ticket prices, as is Budget Rent-A-Car. While area hotels are expected to fill quickly, some officers will be housed in dorm rooms at Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo.

Chief Larry Gravill, who had watched in helpless horror as rescue workers tried to free his officer from the river last week, remains emotional even now when speaking of Nicholson. "He gave the ultimate sacrifice to serve his community. He was a leader, but he didn't have to lead from the front," said Gravill, who feels the emotional weight of Nicholson's death; the first officer to die in the line of duty in the force's 25-year history. "He was the model of the type of people who we would like to hire," the chief said.

Nicholson, who had only recently returned to work after being injured in a car accident, was a police diver as well as a member of the force's emergency response unit.

Const. Nancy Baumgart, who worked with Nicholson as a patrol officer in Kitchener, described her friend as a compassionate officer who could be tough when needed. Together, they had worked undercover to nab prostitutes in the summer of 1995. After work, they'd sometimes go out and

discuss movies over a Coke. He was the "cream of the crop, which makes it all the more tragic," Baumgart said of Nicholson.

Staff Sgt. Kevin Chalk said it would be important to Nicholson that both his and Gage's death receive equal attention. Members of both families and police officers will attend the two funerals.

Gage's memorial service will be held at 10 a.m. at First United Church on Wellington Street in Cambridge. He will be buried during a private ceremony Thursday, but a police guard will escort his body back to the Coutt's & Son funeral home after the service.

At 2 p.m., Nicholson's funeral will be held at Kitchener Gospel Temple on Conway Drive, across the street from Kitchener's Stanley Park Mall. After the service, a four-kilometre funeral procession will carry Nicholson's body to Kitchener's Woodland Cemetery for a private burial.

Condolences can be left at police divisions in Kitchener, Cambridge, Waterloo, Elmira and New Hamburg. Messages can also be left on the police Web site at [www.wrps.on.ca](http://www.wrps.on.ca) or at 650-8500, ext. 719.

#### **DONATIONS**

Separate charitable foundations have been established in memory of Mark Gage and Const. Dave Nicholson, who drowned in the Grand River last week at Cambridge's Parkhill dam.

Donations can be made at any Toronto Dominion or CIBC branch in Waterloo Region, but must be made in either cash or by debit card. Cheques can mailed or delivered to the Canadian Red Cross, at 17 Cambridge St. in Cambridge, N1R 3R8.

Donations will be accepted up to and including Saturday, Sept. 5, and donors are asked to specify which charity they wish their money to support.

#### **Demolition of death dam to get close look by council**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/35015.html>

21 August 1998 Barbara Aggerholm and Paula Schuck RECORD STAFF

The fate of a Grand River dam where a 12-year-old boy and a police officer drowned last week is in the hands of the public.

Cambridge residents are telling politicians they never again want to witness a tragedy like the one last week, when police pulled the bodies of Const. David Nicholson and Mark Gage from the water at Parkhill dam. If that means the dam must be demolished, so be it, said some Cambridge councillors polled Tuesday.

They agreed that demolition of the dam may be an emotional response to last week's tragedy. "With the heavy equipment there last week, I was thinking, 'Why don't we just smash it? Why don't we just knock it down?' " said Coun. Karl Kiefer, who witnessed efforts to recover the two bodies. Cambridge Mayor Jane Brewer, who returned to the site daily while recovery efforts were under way, said she wants the public consulted before any decision is made about a dam that has become identified with death. "I think the demolition of that dam is one thing that needs to be looked at," she said. Councillors welcomed the decision to install fencing and warning signs immediately but said those measures are not enough.

Of the Grand River's five low-head dams -- dams that sit low on the river -- only Parkhill has bottom-draw openings. That makes the structure dangerous for two reasons: the turbulence of water cascading over the top to the foot of the dam, and the submerged openings through which water shoots with enormous force and suction.

Nicholson became trapped in one of the chutes as he tried to recover the body of Gage, who had also been pulled into the opening.

The Parkhill dam, located in the downtown Galt section of Cambridge, was built in 1913 to provide water power and assist river transportation. It has been owned by the Grand River Conservation Authority since 1971. The dam is not used for flood control. If the community wants the dam removed, the authority would work with the public as it did in Brantford, where the Lorne dam was removed about eight years ago, GRCA spokesman Jim Reid said. "For a water control structure that is not a flood control structure, the local community's wishes have priority," Reid said.

But first the effects on the environment, recreation and other areas would have to be studied, officials said.

Councillors Doug Craig and Ben Tucci said it's important to wait for recommendations from a coroner's inquest before taking action on the dam. A date for an inquest has not been set.

Coun. Fred Kent said he doesn't want to wait for an inquest, which could be months away, and he would support getting rid of the dam immediately. "I'd like to see it replaced," Kent said. "That style of dam has always been the dangerous one all along. It sometimes takes a tragedy to wake us up." In the end, no matter what is done, water will always hold a fascination for people, said Coun. Ted Fairless. "I honestly don't know whether removing the dam would improve anything or not," he said. "The possibility of people drowning in the river is still there. You cannot stop life, so to speak."

## **Memorial might stop swimmers, woman says**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/34806.html>

21 August 1998 Barbara Aggerholm RECORD STAFF

A Cambridge mother believes a monument for a dead boy and a police officer would stop children from swimming around Parkhill dam.

Lynda Fritz did not know Const. David Nicholson or 12-year-old Mark Gage. But she wants to remember them. And as a mother, she feels she must do something to stop other children from entering the dangerous waters at the Cambridge dam.

Signs and fences are not enough to deter children, said Fritz, who has a 22-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter. "We all know kids don't read signs and kids climb fences," she said.

A monument, with photographs of the water's victims and the names of others who have died near the dam, might make children think. "If it turns one child away, those lives were not lost in vain."

Fritz has met with city and police to discuss building a monument on the rock at the river's edge near Parkhill dam. As well, she believes two plaques, one on each side of the river, should be placed at the hilltops to warn children away from the river entirely.

While the idea has had a positive response from officials and residents, it won't go ahead unless it has the full support of the Nicholson and Gage families, she said. They are to be approached soon. Fritz said she would like the monument to be a community effort, with schools and other groups helping to raise money to pay for it. Cambridge Mayor Jane Brewer said she has received calls from residents asking about a memorial. "I think we need to support that," as a deterrent and a remembrance of the young boy and officer, she said.

Anyone who wants to discuss the idea can call Fritz at 622-3966.

## **Crowds mourn 2 killed at dam**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/34755.html>

21 August 1998 Frances Barrick RECORD STAFF

The community and police from across Canada were united in grief today as they mourned the deaths of a 12-year-old boy and the young officer who died attempting to recover the child's body from the Grand River in Cambridge.

About 200 Waterloo regional police officers were scheduled to attend the 10 a.m. funeral of Mark Gage, who died Wednesday night when he became trapped beneath the water at the base of the Parkhill dam in Cambridge. Four hours later, those officers were to join thousands of others from across Canada and the U.S., along with thousands of citizens, to attend the funeral of 32-year-old Const. Dave Nicholson.

In addition to mourning the loss of one of their own, officers "feel a deep attachment to the Gage family," because the boy and officer died together, Staff Sgt. Kevin Chalk said Tuesday.

Officers attending the boy's funeral in Cambridge include Chief Larry Gravill and members of the force's diving team and emergency response unit. Nicholson, a father of three, was a member of both police teams.

Members of the Gage and Nicholson families planned to attend both funerals. CKCO will broadcast the Nicholson funeral live. Rogers Cable 20 plans to rebroadcast the service at 9 p.m.

Dignitaries expected at Nicholson's funeral include Ontario Premier Mike Harris, Lt.-Gov. Hilary Weston, Ontario Solicitor General Bob Runciman and local politicians.

Const. Curtis Rutt, Nicholson's diving partner, was to give the eulogy at the Nicholson funeral. Rutt was the officer who held the safety line when Nicholson went into the river to try to recover Gage's body. Rutt felt three tugs on the line, a pre-arranged signal indicating Nicholson had found the boy, Chalk said.

Seconds later, the line went taut as Nicholson was pulled into the chute of the dam. The bodies of Gage and Nicholson were not recovered until early Saturday because of strong water currents at the base of the dam.

Chalk said Rutt, one of the pallbearers, was overwhelmed with feelings of helplessness after the accident. Other pallbearers were friends of Nicholson and members of the force's tactical and dive teams.

Gravill was to speak on behalf of the force at the funeral and Nicholson's brother, Bruce, was to give a tribute.

Following the 2 p.m. service, a four-kilometre procession of regional officers and dignitaries was scheduled to leave Kitchener Gospel Temple on Conway Drive and travel to Woodland Cemetery.

A private burial was to take place at the cemetery.

Nicholson is the first officer to die in the line of duty in the force's 25-year history and planning a funeral that could be attended by as many as 16,000 officers and civilians was a mammoth task for the force.

An army of 120 officers, retired officers and volunteers turned board rooms and the cafeteria at police headquarters into meeting rooms as they tackled the logistics of the funeral. To allow as many regional officers as possible to attend the service, about 175 officers from nine other forces volunteered to police the region. About 20 local firefighters were to help out along the parade route.

At the end of the boy's funeral at the First United Church on Wellington Street, Cambridge, members of the force's emergency response unit and dive team were to form an honor guard as the casket bearing Gage was taken from the church back to the funeral home.

A private burial for the boy is planned for Thursday.

### **Song honors slain officer**

Marilee Arthur, a Plattsville mother of two, has written a song called David's Song, which she was to sing at his funeral today. Inspired by the words of another friend, the song's theme is, "It's not important what happens when you are here, but what happens when you're gone."

### **David's Song**

Chorus:

It's not what happens while I'm here  
It's what remains,  
And hopefully when I'm gone,  
It won't be the same.  
But remember more than anything,  
That our place is for a time,  
Let the memory that's mine  
Remain for a lifetime.

#### **Verse 1:**

While you reflect on who I was  
Don't forget that I lived because  
Of a love from my God above,  
And his love gave me love.

#### **Verse 2:**

At this time, when you feel such loss,  
My new home had a human cost,  
But I leave this land as a free man,  
To a place, a heavenly place.

#### **Verse 3:**

Now reach the hand that stands next to you,  
Remind yourself of what I'd do,  
What I gave didn't come from me,

You need to see, this is the key.

To hear a sample of the song, phone the Record Infoline at 894-2000 and press code 4405. Compact discs of David's Song will be sold to the public for \$10, with money going to a fund for the officer's family. To order a copy, call 1-519-684-6941.

## **Ordinary moments, exceptional ceremonies**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/35136.html>

21 August 1998 Brian Caldwell RECORD STAFF

The funeral of Const. Dave Nicholson was framed for me by two of those ordinary moments nobody could have scripted. The circumstances, of course, were all exceptional: the quiet of the crowd, the depth of emotion, the ceremony befitting a fallen officer.

At its most touching times -- and there were many -- the solemnity helped hone our grief to a fine, pure point. It hit the mark. It made us stop and feel and think.

And yet, for all it did to focus a community on the momentous, there were also oddly reassuring signs that normalcy is never far away. Before the service, while the band played and officers assembled, one of the lead limousines pulled slowly up to the front of the Kitchener Gospel Temple. A back window came down and out of that window popped a small boy in a yellow vest, straining to take in the scene all around him.

Three-year-old Joshua Nicholson, youngest son of the dead officer, was full of energy and wide-eyed curiosity. It was so natural, so like a little boy.

Hours later, after the hymns and the prayers and the tears, the limousine returned to pick up its passengers. Joshua, his energy and curiosity exhausted, had to be carried away, soundly asleep in the arms of his uncle, Bruce Nicholson.

It was so natural, too, so like a little boy.

Life does go on, even in our deepest grief, in all the small, decent, everyday ways that keep us grounded. Children, shielded by innocence and fuelled by exuberance, show it best at times such as these.

But at a truly dignified gathering planned down to the finest detail, many others couldn't quite contain their essential humanity either. It was in the occasional police officer who was chewing gum while marching in step in wave after impressive wave. It was in the steady slamming of doors while officers in all their different uniforms ducked into the portable washrooms before setting off.

It was in the kick Girl Guides and Boy Scouts got out of delivering bottled water to waiting officials, grouped under shade trees. And earlier in the day, at a much smaller but equally moving memorial for 12-year-old Mark Gage in Cambridge, it was just about everywhere.

Jane Gage, an amazing woman who must be an amazing mother, helped put mourners at ease by addressing them as if across a kitchen table. "Hi, everybody," she said, before asking them to rise and sing Jesus Loves Me for the children.

Her youngest son had his own say at the service when an "autobiography" he had written as a school assignment was read aloud. He got a welcome laugh with a line about it being better to play defence in hockey when the forwards on the team are good. And he struck a chord when he wrote that he liked "wearing baggy clothes because it is more comfortable."

One of the last people allowed into First United Church as it filled to capacity was a young man about Mark's age, a gangly kid in new white running shoes, baggy black pants and a billowing white shirt.

He smiled when he got the nod, a sweet, honest smile that might have been a pumped fist and a resounding "yes" in another time and place. He couldn't help himself. None of us really can.

Brian Caldwell's column appears Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. He can be reached by phone at 894-2231, ext. 656, or by e-mail at: [bcaldwell@southam.ca](mailto:bcaldwell@southam.ca).

## **'I wouldn't want to be any other person in the world'**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/35054.html>

21 August 1998 KITCHENER WATERLOO RECORD

Mark Gage wrote about himself last year in a school project called My History. It was read at his funeral.

### Chapter One

My name is Mark Andrew Gage.

I was born on Nov. 21, 1985, at 8:43 a.m. I weighed five pounds, 11 ounces. I was born at Cambridge Memorial Hospital.

My mother's name is Jane Margaret Gage and my father's name is John Harvey Gage.

When I was born I had three sisters and two brothers. Their names were Matt, Meredith, Sarah, Laura and Ted.

I used to be afraid of the dark when I was younger and I used to think banks just gave away money and I thought that when you wanted to move you just traded houses with people.

#### Chapter Two

I have brown hair and eyes. I am kind of skinny. I am a boy. I weigh 92 pounds. I am five foot, my shoe size is 9 1/2 and my pant size is 18.

I am a fast runner. I like playing hockey and football. I play defence in both. I like wearing baggy clothes because it is more comfortable. I'm not good at tennis because I always hit the ball too hard. I'm not good at golf because I can't hit the ball far and I'm not accurate.

#### Chapter Three

I have three sisters and two brothers, which you already know because I told you that in Chapter One.

It is sort of weird being in my family because it is so big and my parents are busy almost all the time. But I like being in this family a lot and I wouldn't want to be any other person in the world.

I like being in my family because we have a pet bird named Oka which is blue and green and can talk.

We have an in ground pool with a blue slide that was just put in this summer. Also, my parents bought my brother and me Nintendo 64.

#### Chapter Four

I like to play hockey. I play in a league and my position is defense. I like defense the best because if the forwards are good it won't make a difference if the defensemen are bad.

I also like playing video games. I have a game called Wayne Gretzky's 3D Hockey. In it you can be almost any player in the NHL and on any team in the NHL.

Some summers I play baseball. I usually play third base because I can throw pretty good. I'm a good batter. In the last regular season game in 1996, I hit a grand slam in the last inning when we were losing by one with two out.

### **Mourners reminded of boy's zest for life**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/35060.html>

21 August 1998 Paula Schuck and Liz Monteiro RECORD STAFF

For those who knew him, it seemed impossible to believe the 12-year-old child who had been so active could now be still.

Mark Gage had a zest for life, his friends and family recalled Wednesday for the 700 mourners gathered at the First United Church in Cambridge. Each member of the Gage family had arrived at the church holding a single white rose. The flowers were placed on the casket, which lay in front of the altar, along with a porcelain hand holding a small child.

And when Mark's mother, Jane, walked to the pulpit to address the congregation at her youngest boy's funeral, many expected to hear a tearful farewell. Instead, the crowd heard from a serene, smiling woman, secure in her faith that Mark was going to a better place. "Hi everybody. Thank you for being here," she said, as her husband, John, stood behind her with his arms around her waist.

Among the mourners was Const. Dave Nicholson's widow, Wendy, who was led in on the arm of one of her husband's colleagues. Nicholson, 32, a police diver, also died last week after he located Mark's body trapped in the second sluice of the Parkhill dam where they both became entangled.

The pews near the altar were filled with family, close friends and local dignitaries, including Cambridge Mayor Jane Brewer, city councillors and teachers from St. Andrews Senior Public School, where Mark was to enter Grade 8 this fall.

During the eulogy, Pastor Leo van Pelt, a close friend of the family's from of the Worldwide Church of God in Kitchener, read from an autobiography Mark wrote for a Grade 7 assignment last year.

Apart from the basic facts of his life, Mark described how he thought banks were places that gave away money and that people who wanted to move from their homes, just traded houses with each other.

Mark said he played defense in minor hockey and the crowd chuckled when van Pelt told them why he liked playing that position. "I like defense the best because if the forwards are good, it won't make a difference if the defensemen are bad," Mark wrote.

Van Pelt said he saw Mark hours before he died.

The pastor was at the family's Cambridge home, when the boy crashed down the stairs and out the door, a tangle of gangly arms and legs zipping down the street on inline skates.

Dave Schlei, a physical education teacher at St. Andrews, rattled off a list of sports Mark had mastered, including road hockey, basketball, football and baseball. "When I met him he had an ever-present twinkle in his eye and a look on his face that said, 'This is my place. You stay out of my way.' " Schlei said Mark had many female admirers, who looked up to him for his athletic ability and zest for life. "He was willing to try anything if it was going to be a

challenge or fun," he said. "If you were Mark Gage's friend, you were in good company." Schlei added that Mark often came to the aid of other children he thought were being picked on.

A song in tribute to Mark and Dave was sung by family friend David Kennedy. Throughout the community of Cambridge, dozens of flags flew at half-mast. Busloads of police officers from Peel Region, Niagara, Guelph and Hamilton-Wentworth came to express their support for the Waterloo regional police and the Nicholson and Gage families. "I think Dave's family and the Gage family have very strong faith and to some degree that's bound them together," Staff Sgt. Matt Torigian said outside the church.

For many of Mark's close friends, the funeral was a first: the first time they'd seen death up close, the first time they realized it could happen to them. Adam Dixon, a schoolmate, came wearing one of the black ribbons that police officers circulated in honor of the two drowning victims. "I wasn't going to come today because I wanted to remember Mark the way he was, always doing stuff," Adam said.

After visiting Mark's family and sharing memories of his friend earlier this week, Adam said he changed his mind. "I was talking to his parents and they told me to come over some time when it's not so busy. I thought it was pretty good of them considering what they are going through."

All along the street and behind the church, people gathered with heavy hearts. Many of these people had also come to the Parkhill dam faithfully every day, praying for that one-in-a-million chance the 12 year old and the police diver would be found alive. For two days and three long nights they lined the banks of the river.. "It's just such a sad sad thing," said Roslyn Tucker. "And it was such a frustrating, long search."

Employees took time out from their work day, standing in doorways, picture windows, on stairs and balconies waiting quietly and sharing the family's grief.

Many of those who paused temporarily had never met John or Jane Gage. They'd never met Mark or the five other Gage children. Some had been to the dam in recent days leaving flowers, balloons, Beanie Babies and tokens of sympathy.

On the banks of the Grand River, just down from a poem left by Mark's oldest brother, Matt, letters remain in children's handwriting. Some letters urge Dave Nicholson's wife to "Tell your three sons that their dad was brave." Others recall Mark as a carefree spirit and a fearless athlete, "who died too soon."

## 'Family' of thousands pays tribute to officer

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/35053.html>

21 August 1998 Barbara Aggerholm and Steve Cannon RECORD STAFF

They stood ramrod straight, in T-shirts and their Sunday best, holding flowers, children, or their own hands in front of them. Some looked as though they would fall apart if they let them go. "It feels personal," said Debbie Samuel, one of thousands who stood in the sunshine and sadness outside a Kitchener church to remember Const. David Nicholson. "We think of them as our officers."

For a large crowd, it was unusually quiet during the two-hour service, broadcast to those who gathered around Kitchener Gospel Temple. There was little movement, unless it was to soothe a child crying from the heat, or to make way for a police officer doing his job. Up to 5,000 officers from across North America stood shoulder to shoulder outside, filling the same streets Nicholson had biked as a boy, streets he had patrolled as a man.

Later, as they marched en masse to Woodland Cemetery, strangers shook their hands and children threw flowers at their feet. Few of the officers would have known Nicholson, had they passed him on the street a few weeks ago. It was his uniform, so much like their own, that they recognized. "You hear people talk about the brotherhood, the sisterhood, but it's real and it's very strong," said Const. David Van Dusen of the Belleville OPP.

Throughout the moving service a little boy, no more than three, peppered a Peel regional officer with questions. "Are those your friends?" the boy asked of the sea of officers before him. The officer glanced around, knelt down to the boy and in a firm voice, answered, "Yes."

As the wife of a Toronto police officer, Debrah Auger knows the dangers of the job. She thinks about them every day when her husband, Const. David Auger, kisses her goodbye.

And she thinks about them when her five-year-old daughter started asking daddy not to leave after Toronto Det.-Const. Billy Hancox was murdered earlier this month. "She cries when Daddy goes to work now," Auger said. "She doesn't want him to leave. She finds pictures that have to be colored, just to hang on a little bit longer."

March to cemetery

After the service, the officers marched in unison on a four-kilometre parade to the cemetery. Along the way, mothers held babies on their laps and hushed them when the horse-drawn carriage rolled by with Nicholson's casket inside.

Old men, who march in memory of their own fallen friends every Remembrance Day, got up from their lawn chairs as the first officers passed.

They did not sit again until the last officer was gone. As they passed, the scarlet of the RCMP uniforms stood out in the waves of greys and blues, like poppies on a cenotaph.

One officer, who wore white gloves on his hands, said he was wearing his heart on his sleeve. Others talked lovingly about a man they never knew. "These are sad times," said RCMP Sgt. Robert Boyd, as he gathered with other officers from Newmarket. "It's gone over and over in my mind how he was just doing his job, how it could happen to any of us."

But you didn't have to wear a badge to feel for Nicholson's family.

Standing outside the church, holding hands and wiping their eyes, Sheri and Wade Chapman listened to the kind words being said about their friend. They had met Nicholson five years ago, when he came to their home after Wade was the victim of an assault. Nicholson, who needed only 20 minutes to get a report, stayed two hours. "We just talked and talked," Wade said. "No matter who met Dave, he was your friend. He was the big brother that you looked up to, or even that little brother you wanted to protect."

On a grassy hill nearby, Brian and Cailin Daub listened to the service on a giant speaker and remembered Nicholson much the same way as the Chapmans. The Daubs had cut short their vacation to stand for hours in the sun because Nicholson was their friend; a high school buddy from their days at Eastwood Collegiate and a fellow Christian. "I guess we came to celebrate his new life in heaven," Cailin said. "He's gone, but he's not lost. We know where he is."

## **Tearful partner recalls last dive**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/35345.html>

21 August 1998 Frances Barrick RECORD STAFF

Police diver Curtis Rutt said he will never forget the last tug on the safety rope indicating that his diving partner was returning after finding the body of the Cambridge boy who had drowned in the Grand River.

Instead, a week after that rescue, which ended in tragedy, Rutt was delivering the eulogy for his best friend, Const. Dave Nicholson. "Dave, you are my hero. I will not forget you," the Waterloo regional officer said in an emotional eulogy at Nicholson's full-police funeral Wednesday in Kitchener. It was on Aug. 12 at about 7:30 p.m. when police received the call that 12-year-old Mark Gage was swimming with friends when his body was pulled beneath the river at Parkhill dam in Cambridge.

The force's seven-member scuba team was called and, at dusk, Nicholson, a two-year member of the team, dove in to get Gage. "We all knew this dive was more dangerous than most dives" because of the proximity to the dam and it was nighttime, Rutt told mourners at Kitchener Gospel Temple.

If the drowning victim had been an adult, the dive might not have occurred, he said. But a child was different.

Rutt said he was on shore holding on to the safety rope attached to Nicholson. They communicated with each other through a series of tugs. One tug meant to let the rope out another foot, two tugs meant OK and three tugs meant he had found Gage. "The mission was going on as planned. As I was tying the locating knot on the top of the line, I felt one tug. Then nothing. I pulled again. "The line would not budge. We knew that Dave must be caught in the sluice" of the dam, Rutt said.

Two other divers went into the water, which almost led to another fatality, he said. "I am not a religious person. But when I was in the water I said, 'Please God, help us bring Dave back.' "

On the shore, more than 100 people pulled on the rope and a winch was used in a futile attempt to save Nicholson. When the rope went slack, Rutt said officers' hearts sank. "We had to resign ourselves to the fact that he was not coming back," he said.

Two days later, when Nicholson's body was recovered, "he was seen hugging the boy," Rutt said, fighting back tears. "I would like to believe that as Dave spotted young Mark, he reached out a comforting hand. May be he thought to himself, if they were my sons, I could not leave them without trying to bring them back. Just one inch further." Nicholson was the father of three young sons. "He went honorably. A true hero," said Rutt, wiping away tears.

In a statement to the news media before the service, Rutt said in a quiet voice: "He was my partner. He was my best friend. He was a good member of the team. He was mission-oriented. I think he has one more mission. He is in a better spot now, looking after his teammates and dive buddies."

## **Communities unite for final goodbye**

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/35336.html>

21 August 1998 Tony Reinhart and Frances Barrick RECORD STAFF

As the Grand River took Const. Dave Nicholson's last breath, his arms were wrapped in a protective hug around Mark Gage. It was fitting, then, that their families stood together to say goodbye Wednesday, surrounded by about 5,000 police and thousands more regular citizens. "I think Dave's family and the Gage family have very strong faith and to some degree, that's bound them together," Staff Sgt. Matt Torigian said outside the Gage service in Cambridge.

Under a flawless blue sky, much of Waterloo Region paused in silence Wednesday to reflect on the lives and deaths of Gage, 12, and Nicholson, 32.

The same silence blanketed the riverbanks last week, as recovery crews tried for more than 48 hours to free their bodies from the Parkhill dam.

Last Wednesday night, Gage dove into the Grand River in Cambridge and didn't surface. In an attempt to recover the boy's body, Nicholson, a police diver, was sucked into an opening in the dam. His colleagues and dozens of bystanders tried to pull him out by his safety rope, but the river's force was greater. The rope snapped, and the officer was lost.

At his funeral at the Kitchener Gospel Temple, those who knew Nicholson, and some who did not, spoke of his devotion to family, friends and the police work that cost him his life. "There were no facades with Dave," Waterloo Region police Chief Larry Gravill told the 800 mourners gathered in the church's main sanctuary. "He was a police officer with a cause, a reason, a purpose: to help others. "And as he had done on so many occasions, he had done just that on Wednesday night."

Calling Nicholson a "distinctive and committed police officer," Gravill said Nicholson "will forever be a part of the fabric of our force."

Apart from the many police chiefs, fire and ambulance officials in attendance, numerous local, provincial and federal dignitaries dotted the crowd inside the church. They included Premier Mike Harris; Solicitor General Bob Runciman; Lt.-Gov. Hilary Weston; Health Minister Elizabeth Witmer; Waterloo Region Chairman Ken Seiling; the mayors of the region's seven municipalities and several city councillors.

Asked what the province was prepared to do to make the Parkhill dam safer, Witmer said, "Whatever we can do to eliminate that danger for others, obviously we would want to support it."

Echoing comments he made at the funeral of his own Const. Bill Hancox just last week, Toronto police Chief David Boothby said, "When one falls, we all stumble." Harris said Nicholson's death is a reminder of the dangers inherent in policing. "They put their lives on the line every day, and they have to be prepared to accept that."

Cambridge Mayor Jane Brewer, who kept a quiet vigil on the banks of the Grand throughout the effort to recover the bodies, arrived at the service with a full box of tissues.

It was half empty when she left.

Ted Thornley, president of the Waterloo Regional Police Association, said Nicholson's death was a "wake-up call" for officers who may become complacent about their work. "Our association certainly has a heavy weight on their hearts today and our hearts go out to the families," Thornley said. In a stirring eulogy, Const. Curtis Rutt, Nicholson's diving partner, described in heartbreaking detail how he felt one last tug on Nicholson's safety rope as

he was sucked into the dam. Moments earlier, Nicholson had given Rutt a signal indicating he'd found Gage's body.

During Rutt's speech, as on many occasions throughout the service, tears welled in the eyes of many in the hexagonal church, in the church auditorium, and outside, where loudspeakers carried a live broadcast. The Waterloo regional police male chorus, along with musicians from Nicholson's own church, filled the building to its wood-timbered ceiling with inspirational music.

Marilee Arthur performed David's Song, which she wrote upon hearing of the officer's death last week.

And through it all, sitting a few feet from their father's flag-draped coffin, Nicholson's sons stayed close to their mother, Wendy Nicholson. Reid, 7, sat in her lap, while Mitchel, 9, the eldest, sat beside her, caressing her shoulder from time to time. The youngest, three-year-old Josh, slept through much of the service, cradled in the arms of relatives. "Dave was an excellent father," Pastor John Pearce said during his sermon. "He had a perfect blend of love, affection and firmness."

With his wife, Nicholson shared "a depth of intimacy and love that was a rich treasure," Pearce said. Bruce Nicholson, the officer's older brother, received a standing ovation after an emotional address about the bond among police officers. "These guys and these ladies know ...that they are prepared to literally lay down their lives for each other, and for us," Nicholson said. "And that forms a bond that needs more understanding by the rest of us."

Before filing out of the church and into the brilliant sunshine, the crowd listened as Pearce prayed to God. "Strengthen and guide those who go from here, to return to work where danger is always present. "Comfort and heal the many who carry deep pain from these days of trauma. "Guide and protect those who must now rebuild their lives, with a very big piece missing."

Then, Nicholson's closest colleagues on the Emergency Response Unit rose to exit, in front of the casket.

Outside, where it was almost as silent, the casket was placed into an old-fashioned horse-drawn carriage. On foot and in cruisers, on motorcycles and on horseback, police officers, from as far away as British Columbia, Quebec and New York State, fell in behind the carriage for the four-kilometre trek to Woodland Cemetery.

And after attending their second funeral of the day, Mark Gage's family turned and headed for home.

## Holes plugged at Parkhill dam

<http://www.therecord.com/news/special/story/46592.html>

2 October 1998 KITCHENER WATERLOO RECORD

A safety project at the Parkhill dam in Cambridge has finished well ahead of schedule.

This week, crews under the supervision of the Grand River Conservation Authority plugged two passageways leading from the upstream to the downstream side of the dam, which spans the Grand River in Cambridge's old Galt core. The other openings on the downstream side were closed with grates.

The authority undertook the work following a meeting last month with the regional coroner, who has called an inquest into the Aug. 12 deaths of Mark Gage, 12, and Waterloo regional police Const. Dave Nicholson.

To plug the passageways on the upstream side, crews lowered a steel grate over each opening and anchored it with bags of cement. Openings on the other side were shut with grates.

The portage around the dam has been re-opened to canoeists. Signs have been posted to try to keep people off the dam.

## Outdated maps consulted before fatal rescue dive

[http://www.thestar.com/editorial/updates/news/200005170\\_DAM-DEATHS-1.html](http://www.thestar.com/editorial/updates/news/200005170_DAM-DEATHS-1.html)

May 17, 00:02 EDT

**CAMBRIDGE, Ont. (CP) - Rescuers used outdated blueprints for a dam in which a boy and police diver drowned, an inquest heard Tuesday.**

Divers stood on the riverbank with a flashlight and the outdated map of Parkhill Dam while the correct map, showing the location of underwater sluices, were locked in an office, testified a water quality technician for the Grand River Conservation Authority.

John Bartlett said he gave police the blueprints Aug. 12, 1998, even though they didn't show any underwater openings in the dam. But he said he told police about two known sluices before Const. David Nicholson made his last dive to look for Mark Gage, 12, who had disappeared in water near the dam some three hours earlier. "We all observed the sluice openings were not marked on the diagrams," Bartlett said during the sixth day of a coroner's inquest into Nicholson and Gage's deaths. "I tried to make it clear, it was unfortunate they weren't on the diagram, but that they existed and you could see the discharge from below the dam."

The authority is responsible for overseeing the Parkhill Dam, built in 1913. It inherited the dam and original blueprints in 1971 from the former city of Galt for \$2.

Bartlett testified he received an emergency call at home the evening of the dive from the authority's duty officer. He was asked to collect all of the drawings of the dam he could find. "I wasn't the first on his list," Bartlett said of the duty officer. "He had tried to call a number of people before me. It being August, many of them were not available and on holidays."

Bartlett headed to where he knew maps were kept and grabbed a bundle of about eight drawings.

It was about 9:55 p.m and in the growing darkness, he spread the drawings out on a rock for everyone to look at, he said.

### **Coroner's jury makes police-diving recommendations**

[http://www.thestar.com/thestar/editorial/updates/news/200006220\\_CAMPPA\\_RKHI.html](http://www.thestar.com/thestar/editorial/updates/news/200006220_CAMPPA_RKHI.html)

Jun 21, 13:33 EDT

**CAMBRIDGE** - Police should be exempt from diving regulations when performing an emergency dive to save a life, a coroner's inquest recommended yesterday.

That was the most contentious of the 40 recommendations made yesterday by the five-member jury probing the Aug. 12, 1998, deaths of 12-year-old Mark Gage and Contable David Nicholson at the Parkhill Dam in Cambridge. Nicholson, a police diver, had dived in hopes of finding Gage alive in an air pocket. Instead he became trapped in the same sluice as the boy and both drowned.

The officer's widow, Wendy Nicholson, feared a blanket exemption would come at the expense of police safety. But she was satisfied with the jury's decision because jurors buffered the exemption with a call for improved training, increased monitoring and an unqualified right to refuse a life-threatening dive without penalty. "I do believe they have considered diver safety with their following recommendations," Nicholson said after the verdict was read, wrapping up a seven-week inquest.

Fourteen of the recommendations were directed to the Ministry of Labour. They included taking a more proactive role in educating divers about safe diving practices, enforcing the legislation and amending the rules to include a training standard and a clearer distinction between commercial dives and emergency water rescues.

Bridget Lynett, the lawyer representing the ministry at the inquest, said the report will be carefully reviewed. But no decision has been made about

implementing the recommendations. "Rewriting legislation is a long process," she said.

The ministry opposed the exemption for divers. Lynett said the ministry was concerned that any exemption would come at the cost of safety - even with a clause giving workers the right to refuse.

The jury also called on the Grand River Conservation Authority, which owns the dam, to permanently seal the sluices. Two that remained open after renovations in 1979 were closed by packing them full of bags of concrete a month after the deaths. The jury wants any remaining gaps grouted shut to seal the holes so erosion doesn't re-open them.

In addition, the authority was directed to improve after-hours access of senior staff, to post signs warning of specific dangers and finish its master index of all maps and drawings. That information should be made available to emergency personnel and conservation employees.

Drawings given to rescuers the night Gage disappeared above the dam while swimming with friends didn't show any underwater sluices. More accurate blueprints were locked away, their existence unknown to rescuers at the time.

Nicholson's employer, the Waterloo Regional Police Service board, will also be taking a cursory look at the report. The dive team was disbanded a year after Nicholson's death and services have since been contracted out to the Niagara Regional Police dive team.

Anything that prevents another drowning is welcomed by Gage's parents, John and Jane, and five siblings, his mother said. Jane Gage was also pleased that the jury responded to her request to post signs with messages clearly spelling out the hazards, along with fencing, where practical, to restrict access to all dams.

Since the tragedy, the authority erected a fence near the side spillgate on the west bank of the dam and posted no trespassing and danger signs. Gage and the jury would like to see stronger messages, such as Extreme Currents or Deadly Undertow. "I thought the jury made excellent recommendations in all areas," she said.

What wasn't in the recommendations was a call to demolish the dam, something suggested by Wendy Nicholson and some area residents in the wake of the accident. The dam creates an ideal spot for fishing and boating, but in the aftermath of energy deregulation could prove to be a money maker if converted to generate power.

What also wasn't covered by the jury was the question of whether or not police had any realistic hope of rescuing Mark Gage. He was in the water for nearly three hours when Nicholson became trapped.

Regional coroner Doctor Karen Acheson said after 22 days of testimony from 34 witnesses and 84 exhibits that it was reasonable to believe police had a faint hope he'd survived in an air pocket

## **David Nicholson receives Distinguished Alumni Citation**

<http://www.huntington.edu/news/9900/nicholson.htm>

October 2, 1999

HUNTINGTON, IN— The Huntington Alumni Association presented its Distinguished Alumni Citation to fallen Ontario police officer David Nicholson in an afternoon ceremony on campus today. Nicholson, a police diver, died in 1998 while attempting to rescue a young boy from turbulent river water.

The Distinguished Alumni Citation is the Alumni Association's most prestigious award, and recognizes those who have best represented the highest ideals of the Christian liberal arts college.

In the ceremony today on Huntington College's Alumni Plaza, Jim Hoffman, director of alumni relations, described Nicholson's heroism, his devotion as a father and loving husband, his distinguished career with the Waterloo Regional Police Force, and his service as a role model to youth, colleagues, and friends.

Citing the Gospel of John, Hoffman said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

The ceremony was attended by several hundred Huntington College alumni, as well as Nicholson's family and friends.

## **Scuba diving inquest**

<http://list.uvm.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=SAFETY;IOPBmQ;20000530161717-0400E>

30 May 2000 Frances Barrick RECORD STAFF

## **Drowned diver, boy intertwined**

Bodies recovered at same time from Parkhill Dam sluice, inquest told

The bodies of Const. Dave Nicholson and Mark Gage were intertwined when they were recovered from the Parkhill Dam, over 50 hours after they became trapped in a sluice in 1998, a coroner's inquest heard Monday.

"Both bodies were basically recovered at the same time," said Const. Bill Wiley, supervisor of the Niagara regional police dive team, which retrieved the pair.

Wiley was narrating a 74-minute videotape taken of the recovery operations involving police divers and Cambridge city workers using bulldozers and a front-end loader.

The video, taken by a Waterloo regional police officer, started a few hours after 10 p.m. on Aug. 12, 1998, when Nicholson, a police diver, became trapped in the sluice that earlier claimed the life of 12-year-old Gage. It ended with the recovery of the bodies shortly before 3 a.m. Aug. 15.

When a Niagara police diver made a final dive to attach a line to Nicholson to retrieve him, he didn't see Gage, Wiley said.

That's why police were surprised to retrieve both bodies when two officers pulled on the line from outside the sluice, he said, adding that police thought the boy was further up the sluice.

When the officers pulled on Nicholson's line, "his body moved freely and at the same time that he moved, Mark Gage's body came from underneath him," Wiley said.

The bodies, covered with a shroud, were brought to the shore in a front-end loader -- first the officer, then the boy. "We wanted to do this with as much dignity as we could. But it was rather tough to do with so many people watching. There were enormous crowds there," Wiley said.

But long before the bodies were removed, the water levels at the sluice had to be lowered by using 130 sandbags and placing a metal plate at the upstream side of the sluice. And even after reducing the water levels, there was still "a very significant flow" that would "quite literally knock somebody off their feet" and made the operation "pretty precarious" for the divers, he said.

The biggest obstacle was tree debris in the sluice which caused the pair to become trapped, the officer said.

It took three police dives to remove three large branches and tree stumps. Divers placed a sling-like rope contraption around the heavy branches and a front-end loader was used to pull them out. "What happened is we pulled one obstruction out, and then we would be faced with another obstruction. "This happened three times," Wiley said.

Monday also marked the second time that one of Nicholson's three sons attended the inquest.

Sitting next to police Chief Larry Gravill in the back row, nine-year-old Reid seemed more interested in his hand-held computer game than listening to the testimony. At one point, Reid whispered to the chief that he needed to go to the washroom and the chief escorted him.

Later, during the airing of the videotape, Reid sat between his mother, Wendy Nicholson, and his uncle, Ron Montgomery, at the counsel table at the front of the room. Periodically, his mother glanced at him anxiously, but the tape didn't appear to upset him.

In earlier testimony Monday, Waterloo regional deputy police Chief Roger Hollingworth said an internal review of the force's dive team after the accident recommended keeping the seven-member team together, and cited three options pertaining to the team's equipment needs.

But all that changed when the Niagara regional police force offered the services of its well-equipped, full-time team to Waterloo regional police, and that became the chosen option, Hollingworth said.

The local team was disbanded and a two-year agreement was signed with Niagara Region police which promised to respond to calls within three hours, the deputy chief said. "We haven't had to call on them so far," he said.

On the night of Aug. 12, 1998, Hollingworth said he was driving his father back to his nursing home when he heard on the police radio in his car, that a young boy had disappeared after diving into the river near the dam.

With his father still in the car, he stopped by the dam at 8:45 p.m. to offer his support and ensure officers had the equipment they required.

There, he spoke with three officers, including Sgt. Bruce Tucker, head of the dive team, who he said assured him that Nicholson would stay clear of the dangerous sluice. "The general impression is if there was any chance of rescuing this young lad, they would like to try this one dive," Hollingworth said. "They were going to take every precaution possible."

Then two hours later, he was called at home and told Nicholson was stuck in the dam. When he returned to the dam at 10:55 p.m., "there was lots of commotion, lots of activity."

Wayne Wrightson, a former inspector with Waterloo regional police, said he always viewed the dive team as a recovery unit because it took about two hours to assemble it. "Generally, when we arrive at the scene . . . hope is gone," said Wrightson, who before his retirement in July 1999, headed police operational support services, which included the dive team. "If there is a chance to save somebody's life, we will try to do that," he said, adding that is a police officer's job.

And when questioned by Kitchener lawyer Ross Wells, who represents the regional police association, Wrightson conceded that this incident posed some "rescue opportunities," such as the possibility of air pockets near the dam.

When asked for his recommendations, Wrightson said the question is how long is the public willing to wait for the retrieval of a loved one. "That is a tough call and one that has to come from the community," he said.

The inquest continues Wednesday.

## **AT THE INQUEST**

The coroner's inquest is examining the Aug. 12, 1998, drowning deaths of 12-year-old Mark Gage and Waterloo regional police diver Const. Dave Nicholson at the Parkhill Dam in Cambridge.

This is week four of the scheduled six-week inquest at Cambridge City Hall on Dickson Street in downtown Galt.

The five-member jury will make recommendations to help prevent a similar tragedy.

26 people have testified to date, including 14 police officers, five firefighters, three civilians, two officials with the Grand River Conservation Authority, one coroner and one investigator with the Ontario Ministry of Labour.

[http://www.therecord.com/news/news5302000\\_121927.html](http://www.therecord.com/news/news5302000_121927.html)

Jennifer E. Minogue, B.S., M.S.P.H.  
Hazardous Materials Safety Officer  
Environmental Health and Safety  
University of Guelph  
Guelph, Ontario N1G 2W1 Canada  
519-824-4120 X3190 Fax 519-824-0364

## **A dam's murky legacy**

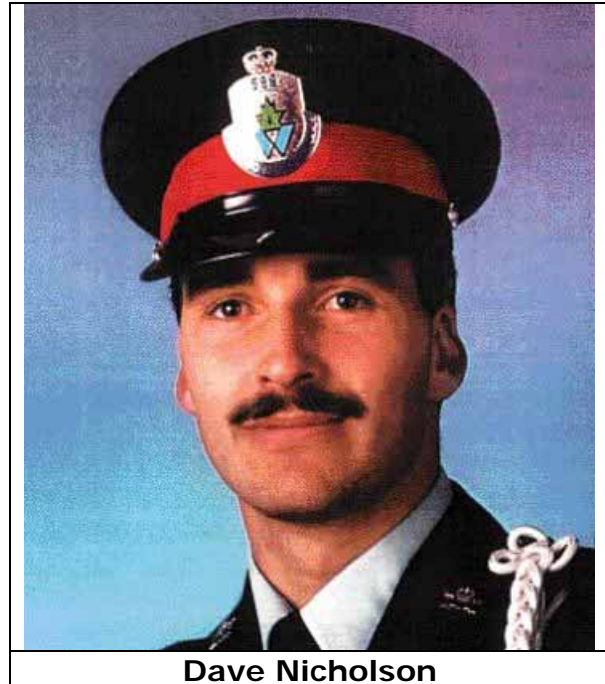
<http://news.therecord.com/News/CanadaWorld/article/395819>  
August 09, 2008 **FRANCES BARRICK** [fbarrick@therecord.com](mailto:fbarrick@therecord.com)  
RECORD STAFF

It was about midnight on a hot August night in 1998 when the doorbell woke Wendy Nicholson up.

Three Waterloo regional police officers were standing at the front door. "You know it is the knock on the door that all police wives dread," Wendy Nicholson recalled, 10 years after the night that changed her life forever.

Three hours earlier on Aug. 12, 1998, her husband Dave Nicholson, a police diver, had been called away from their son's football practice in Waterloo for a call about a 12-year-old boy caught in a dam where the Grand River flows through downtown Cambridge.

One of the officers standing at her door was a co-worker of her husband's. "I saw John Stemmler's face and the look on his face told me it was something bad about Dave," she said. "I said the first words. I said, 'Do I need to go to the hospital?' "



**Dave Nicholson**

They asked to come in.

"They told me that Dave had two hours of air in his tank, but that he had been down longer than that," Wendy said. "But there was still hope he might be in an air bubble."

For three days, Wendy Nicholson held on to that hope. "I could not believe that Dave was dead." Then on Aug. 15, 1998 -- Wendy Nicholson's 31st birthday -- the bodies of her husband and Mark Gage were recovered. They had both been trapped in an open sluice in the Parkhill dam.

Nicholson is the only officer killed in the line of duty in the force's 35-year history.

Wendy has never been bitter about what happened that night. "I believe Dave was following orders . . . They thought a boy might still be alive so they were doing what they believed was the right thing to do," she said. "I would never hold that against anybody."

Today, Wendy Nicholson lives in Grand Haven, Mich., with her new husband, Todd Hostetter, a church pastor. They have four sons, including three from her first marriage, and five-year-old Caden from her second marriage. Todd Hostetter was not a stranger to Dave and Wendy Nicholson, since the three attended Bible college together in Indiana. Hostetter's wife was killed in a car crash two years after Dave Nicholson died.

Wendy said her three sons from her first marriage are like their father in different ways, she said. The eldest, Mitch Nicholson, is 19. This fall, he returns to the University of Waterloo for his second year. He's a member of the university's football team.

Reid is 17 and Josh is 13.

"We are just so thankful for our lives," she said.

## **10th Anniversary Celebrating Lives of Dave Nicholson and Mark Gage**

<http://www.wrps.on.ca/news-centre/10th-anniversary-celebrating-lives-of-dave-nicholson-and-mark.htm>

**For Immediate Release: August 12, 2008**

### **10th Annual David Nicholson Slo-Pitch Tournament benefits KidsAbility while celebrating the lives of Cst. David Nicholson and Mark Gage**

**Waterloo Region, Ontario** – The Waterloo Regional Police Service (WRPS) will celebrate the lives of Constable David Nicholson and Mark Gage recognizing their outstanding contributions to the community on August 12, 2008, at 10am at the Parkhill Dam Memorial.

Mr. Doug Craig, Mayor of Cambridge, Mr. Tom Galloway, Police Services Board Chair, will join Chief Matt Torigian, members of the David Nicholson Slo-Pitch Tournament along with family members of the Gage and Nicholson Family to pause and reflect on the tenth anniversary of their passing.

"Constable Nicholson is a mentor to all of us, who as a proud member of our community and Police Service, excelled in public service through his selfless, gentle and compassionate approach to policing. His legacy lives-on through our members philanthropic efforts while supporting local children's charities including KidsAbility, he truly is a hero in life not death," said Chief Matt Torigian.

In 1999, members of the WRPS Dodgers Softball Team launched the annual David Nicholson Slo-Pitch Tournament. Since then, more than 300 teams have raised more than \$100,000 for local children's charities in memory of David and Mark.

In June 2008, the organizers celebrated the 10th Anniversary with the unveiling of Heroes in Life, an original painting by Mr. Rick Murphy, d3 Artworks of the city of Cambridge.

In honour of Constable Nicholson's badge number, 589 limited edition, artist

signed reproductions were created. All proceeds go directly towards KidsAbility, a local children's charity that assists in helping children in Waterloo Region with physical, developmental and communication disabilities, enabling the children to realize their true gifts, talents and abilities.

Constable David Rodney Nicholson, a ten-year veteran of the WRPS, died in the line of duty while attempting to rescue Mark Gage from the Parkhill Dam on Wednesday, August 12, 1998. Constable Nicholson is the first officer in the Service's history to die in the line of duty.

### **"Heroes in Life not Death"**

#### **Media Inquiries:**

Inspector Bryan Larkin  
Executive Officer, (519) 650-8500 ext. 8713

Olaf Heinzl  
Public Affairs Coordinator, (519) 650-8500 ext. 8773

### **Remembering Parkhill dam tragedy**

<http://news.therecord.com/News/Local/article/397755>

August 13, 2008 Frances Barrick RECORD STAFF

#### **CAMBRIDGE, MA -**

With the roar of the water in the background, more than 100 people gathered yesterday at the Parkhill dam in Cambridge to mark the 10th anniversary of the drowning deaths of a 12-year-old boy and a police officer.



"Ten years ago today, two lives came together,"

police Chief Matt Torigian told the gathering of police officers, firefighters, politicians, residents and family members of Mark Gage and Const. Dave Nicholson.

"We saw two families come together and a community come together," the chief said.

On Aug. 12, 1998, Mark Gage drowned when he was sucked into a sluice in the dam. Nicholson, a 32-year-old police diver, died trying to recover the Cambridge boy's body.

For three days, hundreds of people silently lined the riverbank watching efforts to recover the bodies. The only sounds were the roaring river and the clanking and rumbling of backhoes trying to divert the water so divers could reach the bodies. The boy was found in the officer's embrace.

Yesterday, high water levels created an almost-deafening sound at the dam. Bruce Nicholson said the noise took him back to the sounds he heard 10 years ago as he watched efforts to recover his younger brother's body.

"The sound of the river means life. It means enjoyment. . . . It also has risks and dangers attached to it and it can take lives, which we all painfully know," said Nicholson, who attended the brief ceremony at the dam with his sister, brother-in-law, a niece and her two young sons. Wendy Hostetter, Dave Nicholson's widow who has since remarried, didn't attend.

"It is a hard place for us to be," said Sonya Wilkins, a niece of Dave and Bruce Nicholson.

Torigian, who was a staff sergeant in 1998, was at the dam during those three days fielding questions from media from across the country. "It was surreal," he said of the crowd at the dam. "It wasn't morbid curiosity. It was people who were upset, hoping for a different outcome."

Strangers mourned together and it was that community support that helped police cope with the grief of losing the first officer in the force's history, the chief said. "It was so very much public . . . because we all went through it." John and Jane Gage, Mark's parents, said it meant a lot to them that friends, neighbours and strangers took time out of their busy day to mark the anniversary with them. The Gages' five other children, including Mark's twin brother, were also present, along with a son-in-law and an infant grandson.

"It shows what a community can do when tragedy happens," John Gage said. [fbarrick@therecord.com](mailto:fbarrick@therecord.com)