COMING HERE, BEING HERE

A Canadian Migration Anthology
Canadians are, after all, as varied as pebbles on a beach.
Coming To Canada — Age Twenty-One

The postcard said: COME BACK SOON
There was a mountain, a faded lake
with a waterfall and a brown
sun setting in a tan sky

Aunt Violet’s Canadian honeymoon 1932
It was swell and she
always meant to go back
but her life got in the way

It was cool and quiet there
with a king and a queen
and people drinking tea
and being polite and clean
snow coming down
everywhere

It took years to happen:
for the lake to fill up with snow
for the mountain to disappear
for the sun to go down

and years before COME
BACK SOON changed to
here and now and home
the place I came to
the place I was from

(Carl Shields, from Coming to Canada, Carlton University Press,
Ottawa 1995, reproduced here with permission
from the Carol Shields Literary Trust).
To all who came, are coming,
and will yet come to this incredible place;
to those among them whose goals remained,
or will forever remain elusive;
to those who needed to be here but never arrived;
to all who died trying to get to this safe haven called Canada.
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by Donald F. Mulcahy

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In early 2003 John McLay and I discussed the possibility of a prose anthology, devoted to a common theme. At the time he was working on a sequel to *On Mountaintop Rock* and would be unable to participate as co-editor. We both felt that immigration would be a worthy theme, but concluded little beyond that. By September however I had rediscovered two elementary letters among the belongings of my late mother-in-law, Elizabeth Jones, written to her by a teenage friend who had emigrated from Wales to Canada in the 1920s. The letters, reproduced verbatim here in ‘Letters from Ceinwen,’ brought to mind the myriad other stories that must exist in a country where it is claimed that twenty per cent or more of the population are foreign-born immigrants. At that juncture I decided that the common, unifying topic should indeed be the inseparable themes of emigration and immigration, relative to Canada.

Although the initial intention was to create a literary anthology of works by established immigrant writers, the project’s mandate soon morphed from strictly literary to all-inclusive, an outcome that was dictated not only by the collection’s ongoing need for more writers, but also by the assorted variety of writers who showed an interest in participating. I eventually concluded that a
A more diverse roster of writers might well be seen as reflecting the diversity in Canadian society; might even be considered a metaphor of sorts for our complex multicultural population and its varied voices. Canadians are, after all, as varied as pebbles on a beach.

Despite everything, including my congenital pessimism, after three years the initial collection ultimately reached completion point—except insofar as the stories of immigration will never, ever be complete. The shared sagas of people coming here is sure to continue for as long as more are needed to populate this intriguing, gargantuan geographic space, that has become the final home and resting place for so many who have ventured here over the centuries.

I have served only as this anthology’s coordinator. Credit for this volume must, naturally, be allocated to the publisher and the Guernica staff, for their belief in the project, and for their welcome refinements. But it is the authors themselves who created the very possibility of an immigration anthology, by placing the need for such a work above all material and other, less creative, more egocentric concerns. This is their book.

I am deeply indebted to Guernica Editions, and especially to Michael Mirolla, for recognizing the need for a book of this type at this time; to John McLay, for helping me to hatch the concept of an immigration anthology in the first place; to Iris Kool, for sharing her amazing computer genius with me; to Susan Ouriou for her invaluable translations from the French, and to my wife and primary editor, Iris, for her grit, patience and understanding throughout the multi-year bout of my chronic anthology obsession.

—Don Mulcahy
Strathroy, Ontario
Jan 8th 2015
**Come from Away in Newfoundland**

Roberta Buchanan

*(Come from away: a person “not from here,” i.e., Newfoundland)*

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I Leave England.

It was 1964, the year of Shakespeare’s quadricentennial. Here I was at the prestigious Shakespeare Institute, Birmingham University, where I had gone to do my Ph.D. After two years my fellowship ran out, and I still hadn’t finished my thesis. I was hired as a research assistant, then promoted to research associate at a stipend of fifty pounds a month. I was employed in the menial but necessary tasks of checking quotations and bibliographical references, proofreading the Institute’s publications, doing research for the Director, Professor Spencer; and, on one occasion, rewriting an article for *Shakespeare Survey*. When the librarian suddenly left, I was also asked to fill in her position, on a temporary basis. At the weekly seminars I made the tea and handed around the biscuits. For distinguished guests, wine and food were served. I bought the food, arranged tasty morsels on little crackers in an aesthetic way, and concocted porcupines of toothpicks bearing little pickled onions, olives, and cubes of cheese stuck into an apple. Mrs. Spencer told me I had a “talent” for this kind of work.

I was not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be, but one of the attendant lords, a useful tool, presumed to be deferential and glad to be of use, like T.S. Eliot’s Prufrock.
At Birmingham University, the social and academic hierarchy was rigidly maintained. I found myself in a kind of grey area. I was neither student nor faculty. I was not entitled to eat in the nice Faculty Club; my place was in the cafeteria with the staff. I had my lunches and my morning tea with the secretaries, all perfectly good and kind people. All the same, I was given the message that my status was somewhat lower than a faculty member. I could babysit their children, but I was not their social or intellectual equal. There seemed no prospect of advancement. Young male graduate students were “mentored,” as we say now, given some teaching experience; women students weren’t. In 1964, the term “glass ceiling” had not yet been invented. It was more like a concrete ceiling. Glass at least suggests that if persistent you could smash your way through it.

I was unhappy in Birmingham. It was an interesting city all right, with two theatres, two excellent art galleries, nice shops, and a lively market on Saturdays. But I had no friends, no boyfriends. I lived in a room in a dreary red brick terrace house on the Bourn Brook, just opposite the University, a polluted trickle garnished with rusting bicycles, old paint cans and other urban trash. The Bourn Brook valley always seemed to be shrouded in industrial smog. Every morning I walked up the hill past the university gates to the Shakespeare Institute, a large rather gloomy Victorian mansion. By the time I got there I was wheezing and gasping for breath. Sometimes I was so ill the secretary had to drive me home. I became more and more asthmatic, more and more depressed. I had to get away—but how? Desperation gave me courage.

I opened The World of Learning, a huge compendium of all academic institutions in the universe, and began at A. I sent a letter to the University of Alaska—the farthest possible spot from Birmingham—asking them if they had any openings in their English Department and enclosing my CV. I got a polite but negative response: “Thank you for your interest in the University of Alaska...” I scrutinized the weekly job ads in the Times Literary Supplement. Universities in Ghana, the Gold Coast, Khartoum, and Malta were looking for lecturers in English literature. I was interviewed for Malta, but the other candidate, a handsome young man from Oxford, got the job. Another ad: Memorial University of Newfoundland, in Canada. I sent off an application and my CV. One day a telegram arrived at the Stygian gloom of the dark-panelled Shakespeare Institute—immediate reply demanded, prepaid—offering me a job as lecturer in the English Department at the princely salary of $6,500 per annum—$500 above the minimum rate for lecturer. I was ecstatic and accepted immediately. “You’re just the kind of person we need in Canada,” said the young man interviewing me at Canada House for my immigration papers. I was staggered! I seemed to be superfluous in overcrowded England. As Professor Spencer so delicately put it at my farewell party at the Institute, I was part of the “brain sewer.”

I sailed on the Empress of England from Greenock (my parents lived in Scotland) to Montreal, with my immigrant’s suitcase—a heavy affair with a wooden frame and a tray inside. My journal at the time recorded my departure from the Old Country:

Bagpipes on the tender boat. Felt rather tearful, mainly because hadn’t slept much last night, but went and had a lager and felt better. The virtues of alcohol proved once more. Ghastly feeling alone and knowing no one. Lots of smart Americans (Canadians, I suppose). Even the fattest-assed wears Bermuda(?) shorts—long shorts ending above the knee. Am in a cabin with three other ladies, all grandmothers. One is Irish and quiet, the other English and voluble, the 3rd Canadian, rather deaf and depressed and widowed with “a lovely little home.” Had tea with the English and Irish, after a horrible solitary lunch with 4 deadly Scottish girls who spoke only to each other, and a deaf old man who spoke only to the waiter. Superb food, however, like a 1st class
hotel, only more variety. Lackeys buzzing around the sauce boats like black bees. I wish I had gone on that cargo boat, however, with single cabin and “sharing private bath,” and only 14 passengers [the Furness Withy Line to St John’s; their passenger service ended that year]. One feels a bit lost among all these crowds, and no one speaking to each other. So tired I can hardly write. Canadian widow is dolling up in a chic écru knitted ribbon outfit. One dresses for dinner. It all seems rather archaic. (12 August 1964).

The voyage to Montreal, which took five days, soon became tedious. There was nothing to do except walk up and down the deck. One evening I was leaning against the rail in my golden Cleopatra sandals and yellow stretch pants—the latest fashion, contemplating the path of moonlight on the sea, when a man approached me. At last a flirtation! He was the boatswain. Socializing between crew and passengers was strictly forbidden, which lent an air of intrigue to the encounter. I had to hover near the connecting door to the crew’s quarters. When the coast was clear, the boatswain beckoned to me and we had to slink furtively through the corridors to his cabin. Once there, he plied me with “seduction doses of gin and rum” (I recorded in my journal) and I was soon “swallowing alcohol and flat-tery alike in large and willing draughts” while soft music played on his record player. As we sat side by side on his bunk, he told me how he had once rescued a girl from drowning. What a hero! I murmured appropriate admiration. He took my hand and placed it on his fly. I felt something large and swelling. I felt very nervous and said I had to go. After that he took up with an American woman of uncertain age and possibly freer morals. I wrote to my friend in London that I had a new swain—a boatswain, which she thought very witty. Despite this brave face I felt I had made a fool of myself.

Now I sit here, an object of ridicule in the writing room, with drunken dancers staggering through, writing, to crown it all, my diary like a schoolgirl. Work is the only thing, and that I avoid like the plague. I must work and read. I am going to be pressed for time as it is when I arrive there [in St John’s]. Yet my eternal frivolity, my vanity in my Cleopatra sandals, my avoidance of reality, e.g. at this moment, I don’t even know the value of a dollar. Such is my ostrich-like ignoring of the Canadian realities soon to hit me. (Journal, 15 August)

We disembarked in Quebec for immigration. After our documents had been “sternly inspected” several times, “beaming officials” gave us tea or coffee in paper cups—“Rather Alice-in-Wonderland-ish.” On the walls were photographs showing immigrants of every conceivable nationality in “Worthwhile Jobs” (19 August). But I was impressed by their smiles and their welcome to Canada.

In the afternoon I took a tour of Quebec city. I was not impressed. The atmosphere struck me as repellent: ... antagonistically French—Wolfe’s statue taken down—the whole town seems dominated by a Plains-of-Abraham complex. Worst French aspects.

On the other hand, Montreal delighted me:

... Most beautiful city I’ve seen—clean and spacious. A lot of the centre is very recent beautiful skyscrapers. But there is also the old French and international quarters. Went on 3 hour bus tour with a driver-guide not unlike a Richler character—very witty and amusing, and obviously very fond of his city. He pointed out details with loving care, and told us all about his marriage to an Irish woman, and how she made him leave the French outside: English inside, and how they adopted two children. I’m in love with Montreal completely. Re-read Duddy Kravitz. (Journal 19 August)

Mordecai Richler was one of the few Canadian writers to be found in English libraries.

I had to wait four hours at the CN station for my train. Here I
witnessed my first bit of Canadiana: people eating turkey sandwiches smothered in gravy, and with salad! I thought this was the funniest thing. The food was delicious—$1.05 at the Buffet de la Gare for a Spanish omelette, chips, peas, salad, bread, coffee and wine. Thus fortified, I boarded the train that was to take me to the east coast. How superior the Canadian train seemed to the dirty, shabby, overcrowded trains of England.

The roomette turns out to be a toilet with a let-down bed in it! Very comfortable seat for day. Iced water. Fan. Basin, wardrobe, shoe-locker. It seems a bit unhygienic to use the toilet, but I suppose that’s what it’s for.

Everything is so convenient—the dial for heat, for the fan, bell for porter, thermos of iced water and paper cups, and even soap and matches! Negro porters, who come at a touch of the bell. (19 August)

Revelling in this luxury, I woke up in my new country:

... to find myself in a beautiful little town, with wooden houses painted turquoise and lovely rich pink, the fields with long islands of boulders in the middle—what they’ve cleared when ploughing I suppose. The untreated wooden fences—beautiful silver weathered timber. The feeling that there’s plenty of land. The little river solid with logs. Tears come into my eyes when I think of Birmingham—I feel I shall wake up any minute out of this pleasant dream and find myself there again. What a comparison of filth and cleanliness, crowdedness and space!

Just passed a pink house with a blue roof—fabulous. Churches like icing-sugar. (19 August)

At length I arrived in Newfoundland, via the ferry to Port-aux-Basques:

Everything so clean and pure-looking. Pure clean sands, utterly empty, bleached tree-trunks. Frame houses ptd heavenly pastel shades. Haystacks round as in Scotland with hairnets. Children’s and animals’ country—plenty of space to play and roam around in. Iodine-coloured streams. Not unlike Scotland but heavily wooded, bigger, more spacious.

Ferry—tho’ sunny, pretty rough sea—dolphins—old lady being delicately sick in paper bag for “mal de l’air”—“motion sickness”—a peculiar way of putting it. Shocked by 2 teenage girls wearing curlers, in public, bobby-socks and trousers—the women not at all smart on the whole—tasteless clothes. Men have check shirts and unmatching ties—very far out. Close cropped hair—Beatles not caught. Plenty of children, well treated.

(I Journal, “4th day in Canada”)
On Monday, I went to the bursar’s office to get a loan to tide me over until payday; they refused. (In England when one got a new job one could always get a salary advance). Here was a dilemma! How was I to manage? I must move out of the expensive Kenmount Motel at once. Most of the faculty were away for the summer, but fortunately I met a colleague in the English Department, Dr. Francis, a tall, red-bearded man (also English). He drove me around town and up Signal Hill in his red sports car, and told me I must never call New-fin-land New-found-land. Then he cooked me lunch in his apartment, and “gave a long disquisition on the irrationality of women.” I summed up his character in my journal:

He is very dogmatic, in that he does not expect dissent from his opinions. I argue a little, but not much as it (argument) seems ultimately futile—altho’ he thinks it changes all minds but women’s. (22 August)

Despite his odd opinions of women, Dr. Francis was kind and helpful. He found a widow who took in a respectable female boarder at a very reasonable price, breakfast and dinner included—more for the company, she told me, for she had been married to an American G.I. and had a generous pension. She showed me a room filled with an enormous double bed covered with a bright pink satin spread, and just enough space to cram in a large dressing table with mirror. I paid my “astronomical” bill of “over twenty-seven dollars” at the motel, and moved in immediately. (Afterwards I found out that Memorial would pay for my hotel as part of my moving expenses.)

Dr. Francis showed me around the university—“the MUN, as they call it here”—which seemed very small compared to Birmingham University. It was built on an exposed position on top of a hill
students would return and term would begin. How would I manage? One evening at dinner I could no longer suppress my anxiety and started to cry. My motherly landlady packed me off to bed.

My long-time dream was to have a place of my very own, instead of living in a room in someone else’s house, as I had done in England. Dr. Francis took me to see an apartment (I learned not to call it a “flat”) on Queen’s Road. On the third floor, it had a large sitting room with a fireplace, a bedroom, kitchen with fridge and stove, and bathroom; hardwood floors. Best of all was the large window with a stunning view of the harbour, Signal Hill and the Narrows. All this for a hundred dollars a month, heating included. I could watch the sun rising over Signal Hill, shining on the sea, the ships sailing into the harbour through the Narrows. From that moment I fell in love with St. John’s.

I found out that it was easy to get a bank loan in Canada, and borrowed $100 against pay day. I bought an iron bedstead from a friend of my landlady for $20. At a second-hand furniture store I bought a table, some chairs, and a chest of drawers for a very modest sum, delivered. (I grandly gave the men a dollar tip.) My crate of books and pictures arrived. I was delighted. The living room had not only the view of the Narrows but also of Prescott Street, which plunged steeply to the harbour, and I could look down into the tall row houses and see people washing dishes in their kitchens. The bedroom had a view of the Basilica with its clock, Queen’s Road, and Rawlins Cross with its two drugstores and Murphy’s Superette, which sold everything from plastic buckets to rabbits (in season), from coal to carrots. On Prescott Street there was a tiny basement Chinese laundry where I could take my sheets.

My spirits rose. I had a good job—University Lecturer—with generous pay of $400 per month. (I immediately put down $100 on a record player, to be paid in instalments.) I had an apartment of my own. Best of all, I had escaped from grimy old England with its wretched cold bed-sitters and dank bathrooms with wet towels, Birmingham
Thus fortified, I went to my first class—Bibliography and Research. All I had to do was explain to the students what the course was about, and give them a reading list. These were all honours students, the crème de la crème. To my horror, my tongue felt thick, my speech was slurred, and I found it difficult to think! Tranquilizers were not the answer.

What a semester that was! I've never worked so hard or been under such pressure. It was worse than Finals. I had a nine o'clock class on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (English 200, 50 students); an evening class, Tuesday and Thursday (Elizabethan drama); and my bibliography class Monday and Wednesday. I had cut one hour of the bibliography class so that the students could go to the library and look at the bibliographies assigned for that week, and report back on them to the class. That still meant eight hours of lectures to prepare. After my nine o'clock class I rushed home to write the lecture for my evening class. This class had several highly intelligent teachers in it, and I was always crippled with nervous diarrhoea before it. Luckily, as soon as I started my lecture, it disappeared. On Sundays, I had to research and write the bibliography lecture on *The History of the Book*. And how I wrestled with Aristotle's *Poetics*—a difficult text that I could hardly understand myself and that was hell to explain to the second year students. No sooner was one lecture prepared and delivered than it was on to the next one. I was always in terror that some student would ask a question I couldn’t answer, for a professor should know everything about her subject, I thought. I read as much as I could!

I knew what kind of professor I didn’t want to be. I didn’t want to be like Dr. H, at Keele, who looked over the students’ heads at the wall behind us as if we were contemptible. I didn’t want to be sarcastic and put students down. I would treat them with respect, always. I would never, ever say, like Dr. K, that Jane Austen was a great writer because she had a “masculine mind.” And I was not going to treat Newfoundland with disdain, as the intellectual and

with its polluted air, rows of grey dismal houses, and snobby university. Here wooden houses were gaily painted in different colours. The sun shone and sparkled on the sea. I had finally “arrived.”

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Teaching was just talking about literature, wasn’t it? How difficult could it be? After all, I loved literature! I bought a second-hand tape recorder, and attempted to practise a typical lecture—say, on *The Duchess of Malfi*, one of the four tragedies I would be teaching in English 200. Alas, after a few sentences and *ers* and *ums*, I dried up. I couldn’t think of anything to say. I made several discoveries: I would have to write out all my lectures, and read them. And: it took me an hour to compose one page of lecture notes, not counting the preliminary reading. It took six typewritten pages (single spaced) for one lecture. That was six hours of writing.

My office mate, Dr. Elisabeth Orsten, arrived back from Oxford. She smoked a pipe, much to the horror of the President, who told her that it tarnished the image of the University. There were other young women among the faculty. Olga Broomfield, a Newfoundlander, kindly gave me her notes on the Bibliography course, which she had taken as a student from Dr. Story (famous as one of the compilers of the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*). An Albertan, Diane Schlanker, of Ukrainian ancestry—one of the few “Canadians” (i.e., mainlanders) in the English Department—lived a few doors down from me on Queen’s Road, and we soon became friends.

I grew more and more anxious as the beginning of semester approached. The students would soon find out that I knew nothing, and I would be ignominiously fired! I couldn’t sleep, my stomach was in a constant knot. I went to Dr. Kennedy, just a few blocks down on Queen’s Road, and asked him for some tranquillizers. He said he didn’t prescribe tranquillizers. I was distraught—perhaps I cried. Anyway, he relented and wrote me a prescription.
social boondocks, as some of my colleagues did. After all, I was a colonial myself who had been born in South Africa. In fact I encouraged my bibliography students to choose a Newfoundland writer as the subject for their annotated bibliography, if they wished to do so. That was the smartest move I ever made, for it was in this way that I came to know something about Newfoundland literature.

My nemesis was teaching poetry on Saturday mornings to the second year students. My method was I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism: go through the poem line by line. Explication. We had a textbook that gave the poem, and then two critics’ different interpretations of it. This confused most of the students, who thought there was only one interpretation—the teacher’s—for every poem had a “hidden meaning,” and it was your job to tell them what it was so they could write it on the exam. Since I was very bad at remembering names, and more so when I was nervous, I had the whole class sit in alphabetical order, so that I could call on them in turn and knew exactly where they sat. They hated this, as it separated friend from friend. Saturday mornings were poetry torture. I called on each student in turn to give their interpretation of a line or stanza. I didn’t realize that some students were so shy that they never spoke in class. I was traumatizing them by calling out their name and insisting that they answer. In the other classes—Aristotle’s Poetics, followed by four tragedies, I gave lectures. But it seemed to me that poetry was different and needed to be discussed.

Things came to a head with Wordsworth’s “Ode on the Intimations of Immortality.” Several Saturdays had been spent in trying to get through this long poem, line by line. On the third Saturday the students’ patience snapped. I found written in large letters on the board: “NO MORE IMITATIONS OF IMMORTALITY.”

Poor students! How they suffered at the hands of an inexperienced teacher who was obliged to learn by her mistakes. I tried to arouse their interest. I remember asking the question: Why should we be interested in a play—Webster’s The Duchess of Malfi—written four centuries ago? Does it have anything to say to us today? And trying to convince them that it did. It was a damned difficult play, too. At that time, the courses lasted a whole academic year, two semesters. So we were together for a long time. The students were very forgiving. At the last class, much to my surprise, they clapped. Apparently that was the custom at the time: that the students would show their appreciation in the last class. A very nice custom, for a new teacher.

In Newfoundland language holds many traps for the unwary. One of my students said he wanted to come and see me in the evening. I thought he was being fresh, or, as they say in Newfoundland, “saucy.” It was his turn to be confused—for weren’t my office hours 2 to 4? How was I to know that in Newfoundland evening meant afternoon? I’m sure I committed many gaffes out of ignorance.

One linguistic difference I did enjoy was when the students called me “Professor.” “Oh, I’m not a professor,” I assured them, causing them to be confused. In England, Professor was a title given to only the most senior and distinguished academics, heads of departments and those at the top of the academic ladder. Here, anybody who taught at a university was a professor. How it would have annoyed my professors in England to have me, a lowly lecturer, called “professor”!

Come from Away

“Where are you from?” taxi drivers, complete strangers, new acquaintances, ask me. If I’m “round the bay,” I always reply, “St. John’s.” They look puzzled for a moment, and then cunningly say, “But you’re not from here, are you?” “I’ve been here since 1964,” I snap; probably a time before most of my questioners were born. “But where are you from?”

These questions always irritate me. Why should I have to explain to my interrogators the complicated details of my life? Sometimes I
counter a question with a question: “Where are you from?” Newf
foundlanders love exchanging this information, and, if they are
talking to a fellow-Newfoundlander, usually discover that they’re
related, perhaps by marriage, to a distant aunt or cousin, or that
their next-door neighbour is a cousin thrice removed from some-
one in the other’s community. The best seller in Newfoundland is
Dr. Seary’s *Family Names of the Island of Newfoundland*.

I can never escape this question, “Where are you from?” As soon
as I open my mouth, my accent betrays me. Yet if I try to change
the way I speak, I sound phoney, especially to myself. Why can’t I
say past instead of pahrst? Or can’t instead of cahrnt? I cahn’t do it.
Yet when I go to England I sound Canadian. I say candy instead of
sweets, and sidewalk instead of pavement, French fries instead of
chips, and chips instead of crisps. My English friends think I’m try-
ing to sound affectedly American. When I’m tired, I try to quickly
translate from one idiom into another. Where am I? Am I on the
sidewalk or on the pavement? Do I want a bag of crisps or a bag of
chips? It’s confusing. Some people in Canada think me snobbish for
retaining my English accent instead of adopting a more decent
North American one. “You have an accent,” they cry; as if they didn’t.
Others like it. One of my students admiringly said she could listen
to me forever, for my soft voice and English accent lulled her to
sleep.

So here’s the answer to that irritating question: I was born in
Uitenhage (Oiten-hah-ker), Cape Province, South Africa. When I
was ten, my parents, who were themselves immigrants from Scot-
land, decided to move back to England, or “Home” as it was called
in the Colonies. I grew up in London. I went to university in the
Midlands—first Keele, in the “potteries,” and then Birmingham. My
accent is hybrid: a trace of Cape accent (“feh heh” instead of “fair
hair”); Cockney (Bloimey she’s a loimey!); Oxford, from my profes-
sors at university; a touch of Birmingham; and a bit of Scottish
from my parents. (“It’s a braw bricht moonlicht nicht tonicht.”) To the

scorn of Glaswegians (Glasgow was my parents’ native town) I pro-
nounce my name the sassenach way—Bewcanon. In Glasgow they
say Buhcanon, with the emphasis on the second syllable.

“Will you move back to England now?” people asked me when I re-
tired. No way! I’m a Canadian citizen, and proud of it. And I never
fell out of love with Newfoundland.
They Left Their Homes with Nothing, and Made a New Life with Hard Work

Dana Borcea

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the start of the arrival in Canada of refugees the world came to know as the “boat people.” In the years following the fall of Saigon, more than 60,000 Vietnamese refugees came to Canada. With help from the government and local groups, 6,000 settled in Edmonton. Here are some of their stories.

Sitting on the back porch of their north Edmonton home, Carol and Alan Kwok are sipping green tea and remembering a past they would rather forget. The couple are not usually mindful of anniversaries, but the weight of this one is too heavy to ignore. Twenty-five years ago, the Kwoks said goodbye to Saigon. Under the cover of darkness they climbed into a small crowded boat with their four children and a bag of clothes. So began their long search for a new home, a search that ended in Edmonton.

The journey across the South China Sea to a Malaysian refugee camp was supposed to last two days. Engine problems and poor navigation turned the voyage into a nine-day nightmare. “They told us we would have everything we needed on the boat,” Alan Kwok said. He remembered his shock at seeing the boat he had risked everything to buy passage on. The Kwoks shared the 15-metre vessel with more than 150 people, desperate to flee South Vietnam’s new Communist regime. They were among more than one million people from Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos who fled the region from 1975 to the early 1990s. Tens of thousands died. Many more braved harrowing journeys across rough waters to seek temporary
refuge in camps inside Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Hong Kong, and Japan. They became the “boat people” and were known around the world.

“There was no space to lie down and everyone had to squeeze in close,” Carol Kwok said, bringing her legs up to her chest to demonstrate. There was little food and they soon ran out of water. Carol could do nothing when her children tugged at her sleeve and told her they were hungry. When it rained, they held a tarp above their heads and tried to wash themselves with the water. The stench in the boat was unbearable. Many boats got lost at sea and floated aimlessly for weeks, even months. In some cases, people who didn't starve or drown fell prey to pirates. In the overcrowded Malaysian refugee camp, the Kwoks suffered from stifling heat and boredom.

“I was thinking about the future,” she says. “I didn't have any control in that life. I was always worried. Even at night when I slept, I worried.”

When Canadian officials arrived in the camp a few months later, Carol began to hope. With a distant cousin studying in Saskatoon, she and her family were chosen to come to Canada as government-sponsored refugees.

When they arrived in Saskatchewan in May 1979, there was still snow on the ground. The children had never seen snow before, and loved it. Carol got a job in a factory and cleaned offices at night. Her husband found work in construction. They raised their children and studied English. Thirteen years ago, they moved to Edmonton and opened a convenience store downtown. Carol often worked 16 hours a day, seven days a week, but has since cut back a little. She works hard because she can. She likes the money and the security it brings her family. “If you want to come to a free country, you should do the right thing,” she says. “Work, save money, be honest.”

That work ethic was common among the boat people who settled in Canada, says Alice Colak, director of immigration and settlement services at Edmonton’s Catholic Social Services. She was a front-line settlement worker during the late 1970s and early 1980s, when most boat people arrived in Canada.

“The research shows that the people who came in that period have contributed overwhelmingly to Canada, both economically as well as culturally,” she says. “They have not been a burden on this society.”

At the time, Colak heard complaints from people concerned about the large influx of refugees. “People were worried about the cost of allowing this many people to come,” she says. “They worried about there not being enough jobs.”

But many more welcomed the refugees warmly. Diane Bessai was one of them. As a young, widowed mother of four, Bessai opened her home to a family of four Vietnamese refugees. Members of her church, St. George’s Anglican, pooled their resources to sponsor the Lai family, who arrived in 1980.

The Lais were among the tens of thousands of Indochinese refugees sponsored under the Immigration Act’s new private sponsorship program. Under the new rules, any organization or group of five or more people could sponsor refugees by committing to their financial and personal support. Churches, ethnic associations, even bowling leagues across the country stepped forward in huge numbers. During this period, Canada accepted more Indochinese refugees per capita than any other country.

In her 30 years as a settlement worker, Colak has helped welcome waves of sponsored refugees from countries in Eastern Europe and Central America, and more recently from political hot spots such as Kosovo, Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Sudan. The numbers coming out of Vietnam were the largest she has seen. “To this day, there has been nothing like it,” she says.

Like many other Canadians, Bessai remembers reacting strongly
Hunched over a sewing machine in her cluttered dress shop, Tina Tong hemmed a pink taffeta bridesmaid’s dress and remembered her escape from Vietnam 15 years ago. “We wanted to find freedom,” Tong says—a frightened teenager when she and her brother said goodbye to her family to board a boat bound for Malaysia. “We wanted something good for the future and we didn’t see anything good there.”

Despite studying hard, Tong knew that with no money or government connections she would never be able to attend university in Vietnam. The night she left marked her third attempt. Her brother had already spent a year in prison for an earlier escape bid. After idling in a refugee camp for nearly a year, Tong and her brother were selected by Canadian officials to come to Edmonton, making them among the last of the boat people to settle in Canada as government-sponsored refugees.

They arrived in September, just in time to watch the leaves change colour. “All the trees were yellow and orange and I thought it was so beautiful,” Tong says. “I liked the weather then, too. It was just a little bit cold.”

The government provided Tong with a two-bedroom apartment downtown and free English classes. She soon felt lonely and estranged. “It was a sad time and a big life change,” Tong says. Her lack of English proved to be her biggest hurdle. “You don’t know how to write, how to talk or how to listen.” Her first job, baking desserts in a mall bakery, forced her to learn. “It was my first job and very exciting. It was hard to understand my boss at first but he never got mad, even when I made mistakes. The customers were also very nice. It made me want to learn (English) faster.” Over the next decade, she worked various jobs and had four children. Her English improved.

Just over a year ago, Tong realized her dream of owning a business when she bought a dress shop on the corner of 105th Avenue and 97th Street. A Beautiful Angel Fashion is full of bright, modern fashions and traditional Asian dresses. Although she is still losing money on the store, Tong has always wanted to be an entrepreneur. In Vietnam, that wasn’t possible. “What’s yours is yours here,” she said. “You don’t have to worry about a knock on the door.” Tong often works late, doing alterations while her children play in the back of the shop. Many nights the phone rings constantly. Most of the calls are for her nine-year-old daughter. But Tong doesn’t seem to mind. She says she’s here for her children. “They can do anything they want now,” she says, handing her daughter the phone.
No Return

Tchitala Kamba

(Translated from the French by Susan Ouriou)

Nakozonga mboka éééééé
Nakozonga mboka aaaaa
Nakeyi ééééé
Naza na nga, nalikambo na moto tééé!
Nakeyi ééé
Mobembo ézali liwa téééé.

They came by the thousands, the TV anchor says
Made their way through the Strait of Gibraltar
Penniless, paperless, each and every one
Half-starved and exhausted from the journey
Nothing but a dream—a dream—to urge them on
The West they thought
And a better world
Strait of Gibraltar
Through your port they made
Their way from the black continent
On to their dream of the West
Europe, the U.S. of A., Canada
Braving seas, then oceans
Won’t you tell me though
Have you seen my father?
Have you seen my brother?
Have you seen my sister?
Have you seen my children passing through?
Sole mute witness, unmoving, unmoved
Your indifference spurs me to revolt
Speak to me, whisper the words you’ve kept secret
Have you seen my loved ones passing through?

Among their ranks were the best we had
Executives, engineers, physicians, teachers
And many, many more
Such a crying shame
The men in power close their eyes
Block their ears, scratch their skulls.

Strait of Gibraltar
Do you know they left their homes
One drought-filled morning, hearts soaring
Softly singing
Nakozonga mboka, mobembo ézali liwa téééé
But now, their hopes are gone
Their bodies unknowable
Washed ashore with the tide
Or floating to the rhythm of the waves
Disfigured or petrified
Could these be the bodies of my loved ones
In piles on the wharves of Gibraltar
Like fish caught forever in a net?

There lie the bodies of the many
Executives, engineers, physicians, teachers
All our own
Such a crying shame
The men in power close their eyes
Block their ears, scratch their skulls.

Strait of Gibraltar
I beg you. My father
My brother
My sister
My loved ones
Give them back
You were wrong
Your friends all gone
Once we loved you
Praised your bounty
Dreamed of travels through you
And of journeys in return
To our motherland
It was the picture of that little boy. Swept from his father’s hands and washed overboard, destroyed in an act of desperation and courage few could comprehend. I still can’t look at it for more than a few seconds. I was driving back to Calgary from my parents’ place in rural Alberta listening to Cross Country Checkup and the outpouring of compassion for Alan Kurdi and all those he came to represent, and as I peeked at my own three kids sleeping in their car seats—my youngest, the same age as the boy—something crystallized. Maybe I was taken in by spin, or just caught up in the worldwide wail of grief. Or maybe I was purple with rage at my government’s dismantling of my country’s international presence and plain goodness. Either way, I knew, with a sense of calm, that I needed to do something. If my Prime Minister was misrepresenting me, then I would go all Margaret Mead on him: Never doubt that a group of committed citizens, etc. etc. I worked up the courage to talk to my husband and found he had been thinking along the same lines. We lived privileged lives in a wealthy country and would find a way to sponsor a refugee family.

Refugee sponsorship is long and dull and sometimes Kafka-esque. Much of the how-to story has been revealed as thousands
over the last year have spoken publicly about their own journeys—the catalyzing moments, the delays, the loopholes. We joined a Group of Five¹ and decided to work with the Mennonite Central Committee—none of us is Mennonite, but they have a track record working with refugees—and on a Sunday night in October we pored over a stack of descriptions of travel-ready families from conflict areas around the world. It read like a list of the damned. Having the power to choose another’s fate so arbitrarily weighed heavy on our group, though all of us are accustomed in our personal and professional lives to heavy responsibility. No one should be able to choose like that, and yet there we were.

The file that caught our eye was a family of seven (a couple with five children, ranging in age from four to sixteen), originally from Congo, and living in a camp in Tanzania. There were few other details: their main languages, the basis of their refugee claim. We told the MCC that’s who we wanted, and a few days later we were told we had been matched to them. Then came the fundraising, finding them a place to live and the stuff to fill it, the impossible work of trying to predict and prepare for their needs. Garth made a website; Mark handled the accounting; Jenny and Jess worked their connections with aid societies in Calgary; Cat, Aaron and Joe kept us on track legally and wrangled in-kind donations; Steve and I considered their medical needs; Amy figured out everything we needed to do and held it all together.

We had no way to reach our family in the camp, so we couldn’t ask them basic questions about their literacy or even their shoe sizes. We spoke to other sponsor groups, we watched documentaries about Congo, we stayed up far too late watching YouTube videos posted from the Nyarugusu camp to get an idea of what their lives had been like; four of the children had been born in the camp and had known nothing else.

On February 15, Family Day in Alberta, we got word that they were coming in two weeks; six months after coming together as a group, this had become an old refrain. We’d had an apartment rented and fully furnished for three months already, based on the promise that they were coming any day now. But this time there was a flight number and an arrival time at the Calgary airport. Those of us who could booked time off work, and started putting together last minute details.

II

Back up almost a year to the day.

It’s a Wednesday morning, and I’m driving to a clinic on the Siksika Nation east of Calgary. It takes about an hour to get there, and the road is long and empty. The radio is good company. I listen to the CBC as the sun comes up, following fence posts as I used to do on my long bus rides to high school about two hours north of here. On this particular morning there is a documentary about the artistic collaboration of Guillermo Galindo and Richard Misrach. Galindo is a sound artist and composer, Mexican by origin. Misrach is an American photographer concerned with life along the US/Mexico border. He documents the small things left behind by illegal migrants from Mexico—toys, backpacks, shoes, fragments of letters. Some things he collects and sends to Galindo, who turns them into musical instruments. What he makes from them is nothing short of elegiac.

As an old radio person, I too collect wild sound. I listen for the soundtrack behind the burble of life and write poems about it. It grounds me. Listening to Galindo’s haunting soundscapes while driving through all the open prairie to work in a place so estranged from the mainstream privilege I represent, guts me. I write to Galindo to tell him so. He graciously responds, and invites me to a show in San Francisco he and Misrach are working on for February 25, 2016. I tell him I’ll try to make it.
Then comes our call. Our family will be arriving on February 25. I will not be going to California. Instead, I will be at the airport, waiting for seven displaced souls to walk through a set of sliding glass doors and into a new life.

Each time I drive to Siksika, I think of Galindo and all of those small things left behind in the sand.

### III.

**February 20th**: Steve and Garth go over to the apartment and set up the second bunk bed—there will be two sets in the children’s room—and make sure the washing machine is working. They find a dryer on Kijiji and go to pick it up. Turns out the owner’s parents were refugees from Vietnam. They are only too happy to let us have it for free.

Our babysitter comes over to watch our collective five children while Jenny and I go shopping, first to an African food store where we find fufu and cassava flour and maize, and then to a supermarket to pick up peanut butter, salt, maple syrup. Toiletries and cleaning supplies have already been donated. By the time we get to the apartment with a carload of groceries, it is time for our babysitter to go home, so Steve leaves to spell her off and make pizza with the kids while Jenny, Garth and I set up the kitchen, organize the furniture and dress the beds. The littlest girl will sleep in her parents’ room, and the other four will sleep in the room across the hall. The little bed has a green duvet cover with stencils of animals; it’s the most beautiful thing in the apartment.

I become unspeakably sad putting sheets on the bed, and the few clothes we have for them in the closet.

When we are finished, we three walk the garbage around to the dumpster at the back of the apartment building. The sun is setting, casting an amber light over the downtown skyline and Nose Hill.
All day, I’ve been bursting to tell people. We’ve compared these last minute preparations to having a baby, to Christmas Eve, and to the night before your wedding. They will be here tomorrow and I cannot sleep with nervous energy.

IV.

When we were at our most discouraged about finding a family of seven an affordable place to live in one of the most expensive cities in Canada; after more than two dozen places had fallen through; after a guy told us we ought to contact the health department because it was probably illegal to have “so many people” living in a circa 1905 bungalow that had probably seen a whole lot more in its day, I took my kids to a birthday party. There was a woman there I recognized; our kids go to the same school. She didn’t seem to know many people, so I wandered over to chat with her. I asked her if she worked outside the home. “Property management,” she said. I stopped, dropped all pretence of small talk, and asked point blank whether she had anything for rent. Two units, she told me. I spat out our story as quickly as I could, before she might recoil and start to explain why her apartments would not work for our needs. Instead she said: “I would love to be part of that.” I went weak in the knees with gratitude.

Her parents-in-law, who own the apartment, came to Canada as refugees. She rents it to us for half of what the market would normally demand.

V.

I could tell you about all of the last minute messages about early flight arrivals and van rentals and stocking the apartment that morning with yet more groceries. I could tell you about their faces when they finally came through the doors, and about the goose bumps and tears when it was finally true. I could tell you about our fifteen children, who shyly circled each other until the smiles came. I could tell you about showing them to their new apartment, then going home and staring over a beer into middle distance, emotionally and physically spent. But all of that is better left to your imagination. I will not tell you the details of their lives as we are coming to understand them, or talk about the potholes we hit as the family grows accustomed to life in Calgary; that is their story to tell, if they ever choose to. I hope what they’ve arrived to find is better than what they’ve left behind. I hope they are happy, though I cannot say for sure.

Now that this chapter is over, I think of Galindo and his music of small things, how it is a kind of witness to the largest of all human stories: that of finding a place in the world. We began with a small step and collected a mountain of things. Our family is here now and what will happen to them is anyone’s guess, but my hope is that the music we made will continue to softly play.

Notes

1. One of the three main ways refugees may be settled in Canada is by being sponsored through the Blended Visa Office Referral Program. Sponsors form a “Group of [at least] Five” Canadian citizens and work with a Sponsorship Agreement Holder, often a church, that helps to provides settlement support. The Group of Five raises enough money to support the refugee(s) for twelve months and agrees to help with language, education, vocational training, with a goal to helping the refugee(s) achieve independence within one year.
Being Here
I'm as surely and as firmly part of Canada as any of you. I made it my home from the moment I arrived in 1951. Indeed, the world of my childhood quickly became so alien to me that it seemed to belong to another life, and I dated it BC, Before Canada. My immigration here was, in a profound sense, a rebirth for me, and measuring my age from the year of arrival was more than vicarious rejuvenation. English became my mother tongue—though my mother didn't speak it—and I acquired a new self.

And yet I'm an outsider. Like it or not, we are each the sum total of our experiences, even though we all have some that we would prefer at least to forget, if not to undo. There can be no sanity without the acknowledgement and integration of every aspect and phase of our lives. For years I wanted to forget my childhood, but my childhood would not forget me. Night after night I woke up in a sweat from nightmares filled with the horrors of war.

You see, much of my childhood was spent in air raid shelters, praying that the bombs would miss our house, watching the city of my first birth—Cologne, Germany—slowly turn into a heap of rubble under which thousands of people, some of them friends and family, were buried, crushed or burnt to death. Most of those who
were not killed fled the horrors of continuous aerial bombardment. Of Cologne’s original population of 800,000 in 1939, there were 40,000 left at the end of the war, most of them living like rats in underground shelters and smouldering ruins, pounded day and night by British and American bombers. I still cannot hear certain alarm sirens without my nervous system going into mild shock along the scars of my war memories.

There was also the shock and shame of coming to consciousness in 1945 with the realization that I was born to a civilized nation that had committed the atrocities of Auschwitz and Belsen. I felt those who were charged with my education had betrayed me, and I wanted to get away from them, indeed from all things German; to put as much distance as possible between such incomprehensible cruelty and myself. Because I worked for the American and British Occupation Forces, I managed to get to London (UK) on a student visa. There, I met a Canadian student who persuaded me to abandon my plan to emigrate to Bolivia and come to Canada instead. He probably saved my life because, given my romantic revolutionary spirit, I would have joined Che Guevara’s ragtag rebels and perished with them.

What I needed was a place to escape to, a space in which to reconstruct myself. Europe seemed doomed, and I wanted a future. Canada was just the place for me. In its calm social and political waters my wounds healed, and my childhood has become an integral part of myself. The process of reconciliation was painful, but it has provided an optic that has made some hidden patterns of history visible.

I have indulged in these personal remarks not in order to inflict on you my biography, but because I regard my own case as archetypal of the Canadian immigrant. Change the names and faces, substitute dates and places—and you have the portrait of millions of people who have come here, and are still coming here, to escape escape harsh economic conditions, intolerable social restrictions, political terror and persecution, or just a soulless existence without hope. To them, to us, Canada is the land of opportunity—the opportunity to live creatively, in freedom, with dignity, and to shape a future for our children.

You might ask: “Who in the world needs Canada for that?” Well, there are millions around the world who need a country that keeps its doors open to those determined to escape inhuman conditions. Today more than ever. Ours is a time of unprecedented barbarities. The planet is rife with genocide. Persecution on grounds of race and religion, to say nothing of political ideologies, is the norm rather than the exception in many parts of the world now.

As for the war to end all wars, there is no such thing. In the past four decades of peace, there have been over 150 wars around the world in which more than fifty million people have been killed. Add to this, famine in parts of Africa and India, natural and man-made catastrophes, and you understand why this is the age of mass migration on a global scale. Everywhere there are overcrowded refugee camps where millions of men, women and children, desperate and homeless, subsist on handouts in a world that no longer wants them. As the song says, tears are not enough. What they need is a country with a large enough spirit and geography to offer them the opportunity of a new life. They need Canada, as I did—a country with a generous immigration policy.

In return for the luxury of freedom and economic security, our immigrants contribute something to this country that the world needs at least as badly as an open door. It grows from seeds packed away inside them. They all carry it—that invisible package marked P-A-S-T, filled with, among other things, the pains and sufferings that drove them from their homes and homelands. It’s been part of the meagre belongings with which every settler has arrived on the shores of this land. By coming here they broke with their past, and many tried to forget it in exchange for a commitment to the future. But the past won’t let go of you until its lessons become part of
your life, and the lessons of suffering are compassion, tolerance and humility.

It could not be otherwise but that this gigantic legacy of suffering should have had a share in forging our national character. For we are a nation of immigrants. They ... we ... have imported the experience and knowledge of man’s inhumanity to man to this country for three or four centuries now, slipped it unnoticed past immigration and customs officials, and deposited it in the collective unconscious along with the determination to temper the cruel and destructive impulses in the human heart and create a more peaceful and more just society than the one left behind. The shared pain and despair that brought our immigrants here is the soil in which those softening agents grow, without which it is impossible for people of different temperaments and talents, different persuasions and pursuits, different languages and lifestyles, different races and religions, to live together harmoniously and productively—as they do in Canada.

If, then, it is in the very nature of immigration to act as a selective process that assures the birth of a pluralist society, is what I’ve claimed for Canada equally true of that other great immigrant nation in our hemisphere—the United States? The answer is Yes and No. Of course, the United States constitutes a pluralist society in which all the creeds and colours mingle, as in Canada. But there is a difference, and I regard it as fundamental. It surfaces in many ways. It’s commonplace, for example, to say that as a social entity the United States is a ‘melting-pot’ and we are a ‘salad-bowl.’ Leaving aside whether or not the metaphors are correct, it is significant that so many embrace them. A ‘melting-pot’ is an image of homogeneity; it reflects the desire for conformity. And that, in turn, is a manifestation of what one might call ideological singularity—the idea that there is, or the wish that there be, a single social scenario superior to all others and therefore morally binding on all people. Alas, idealism always turns into dogmatism. It is no accident that the McCarthy witch-hunt of yesteryear, which dramatically demonstrated the narrow limits of political tolerance south of our borders, was, unlike a lot of other things, unable to spread northward into Canada whose ‘salad-bowl’ image implies a greater tolerance for divergences of viewpoints and lifestyles.

Every immigrant brings along hopes, aspirations and expectations. It is, in fact, the belief in the possibility of a better world that prompts people to immigrate in the first place. This belief can take two basic forms. One is the conviction that, with effort and understanding, human suffering can be reduced, and the quality of life improved. The other is the belief in a paradise on earth—the belief that with enough intelligence and application everything is possible and that history is the slow path of humanity towards an ultimate state of absolute justice, freedom and equality. This romantic idealism is the loom on which the social fabric of the United States is spun. It’s the source of its splendour and its strength—the ebullient spirit of enterprise and optimism, the creative vitality and energy as well as the magnanimity of its moral commitments—all qualities that have made the U.S.A. the great nation that it is. But it’s also the source of its weaknesses and failures—the bigotry of fundamentalists, the naïve ruthlessness of its economy, its superman complex, its messianic delusions and its military prowess. Although such weaknesses and strengths are not unknown in Canada, they are alien to our national character.

The reason is that immigrants to Canada generally arrived with more modest expectations and ambitions. They were not looking to recover a lost paradise, but were content to live in the freedom of open spaces, earn a living wage, enjoy a decent standard of living and know that they were working for themselves and their children, who, in turn, could be expected to have a brighter future. The selective process that sent the immigrant with utopian baggage south of the 49th parallel, and led the ameliorist to Canada, is rooted in the history of the settlement of the two nations: the one
propelled by the Pilgrim Fathers syndrome, that made colonization a struggle of the forces of goodness against the forces of evil, at the end of which lay the promise of the City of God which, for less pious minds, became a city of gold; the other laboriously following the retreat of the beaver, in the service of distant kings, whose pragmatic and mundane objectives militated against grandiose schemes and called for men willing or forced to serve in the winds of shifting loyalties and betrayals at English or French courts.

But there has to be another factor to account for the difference in mentality between Americans and Canadians; otherwise it would be impossible to understand why we, unlike our neighbour, never shook off the colonial yoke. We outgrew it, perhaps; or it became too troublesome for the masters to maintain and they took it off us, but we never revolted and conquered our freedom. The reason is our climate. There is a tendency to underrate the effect of the climate on the character of a people. I'm convinced that Canadians are what they are substantially because of our winters, and that, if the United States as a whole experienced the same winters as ours, they wouldn't have gone to Vietnam, they wouldn't be financing the overthrow of the government of Nicaragua, and they wouldn't be preparing for the Armageddon of Star Wars.

For about six months of every year, nature in most of Canada is, to all intents and purposes, dead. Frozen rigid or buried under half a continent of snow, it stares at us with bleak, expressionless eyes. The animals have gone south or underground into hibernation. The human animal falls back on survival strategies that tax its capacities to the limit, and sometimes beyond. For more than half of our lives we are obliged to confront daily the fragility of life, our own perishability, the merciless indifference of nature, and the futility of grandiose ambitions in the face of the eternal return of the same seasonal cycle of birth and death. Not even to the wildest imagination can our winter wasteland resemble paradise, or sustain the hope that it might ever be turned into one. Isolated in a cocoon of fur—boots, hats, coats, mittens, ear-muffs and nose bags—we are left alone with our mortality to contemplate the vanity of all things.

Thus the annual and visceral experience of the Canadian winter reinforces the very traits in our character that the immigrant smuggles into the country under cover of the painful memories he wants to forget. Winter makes Canadians more compassionate, more tolerant and more humble. By the same token, the more amiable climate between Florida and California encourages the hubris of a superpower and its peoples’ Cinderella dreams. The movement of American thought is linear and progressive. It sees time as an ascent to some ultimate ecstasy or apotheosis dreams. Canadians, as a whole, don’t share such delusions. For us, the mythic pattern of our experience is the Homeric circle: life is a journey that returns to its beginnings. There are things to be righted on the way, as Odysseus did when he returned to Ithaca, but there is no place for utopias here. Or as I put it in my Cantos North:

This is no country for a master race. Here rivers run immemorial with the explosive energy of glaciers, dwarf us even in our dreams and sweep away the vain. Niagaras of sunlight have pounded this rock into a shield to crush pride by sheer weight and volume.

Here the joys of life are in the living; the journey is what matters, not the destination.

The traumas of the immigrant’s life BC (Before Canada), reinforced by our severe winters, are the source of our weakness: they make us conservative, often un-enterprising, over-cautious and under-confident, passive, perhaps cynical at times, and even dull. But our traumas are also the source of our strengths: we don’t consider ourselves superior to anyone, individual or nation; we distrust
evangelists, be they of the religious, the political or the commercial kind. We lack the sense of messianic mission that continues to delude many nations, and always leads to bloodshed. We don't have any truth we consider binding for all, no Canadian way of life to export, no designs on anyone's economy or territory. Experience teaches us that there are many different and valid ways of looking at the world, that one must be sceptical of absolutes and generous with compromises, that survival calls for mutual assistance and cooperation, and that we must respect and cherish the differences between us because they constitute our true human wealth. In other words, we are temperamentally and ideologically committed to pluralism. We practise it at home and abroad, at least collectively, though we may sometimes be found wanting individually. And, I submit, this spirit of tolerance, compassion and cooperation is what the world needs more than anything else today. Given the lunacy of our nuclear arms race, it may offer the only hope for our species to survive.

You will not have missed the irony of my standing here, a Canadian voice, holding up for emulation by the whole world the virtue of humility. A very un-Canadian posture, I grant, and I should apologize profusely for the contradiction. But I'm unrepentant. After all, I'm not suggesting that our country is a model of perfection. I'm not naïve enough to think that there is no racism or discrimination here. I have experienced some of it myself. Our native people, and people with easily identifiable racial differences, know how discriminatory we can be. But the treatment of our First Nations people is now acknowledged for the shocking and shameful disgrace that it was, and every effort is made to redress their suffering. Such racist conduct is uncharacteristic of the nation today, and unequivocally condemned both by the courts and by the general public.

For all our shortcomings, Canada can be an example to the world. From coast to coast, people of every imaginable race and religion, colour and custom, ethnic and national origin, language and loyalty, live side by side as friends and neighbours. In the Franco-Scottish setting of my Glengarry (Ontario) abode, my pharmacist is a Pakistani married to a Greek; my doctor is from Trinidad and his wife from the U.K.; my neighbour in one direction is a Dutch painter, next door to a Hungarian couple; in the other direction, across the concession road, lives a German with a wife from Quebec; next to them an extraordinary couple, the husband of Italian/Welsh origin, who have adopted some 19 children from as far away as India, Korea and Malaysia, making my rural route a miniature United Nations. That's what Canada is: a United Nations in action, a concave mirror of the Human Family on its best behaviour. And we mean to keep it that way.

We may be the only nation in the world with a Ministry of Multiculturalism, whose function it is to foster the various cultures of which our country is composed. That's a far cry from the homogeneity of a melting-pot. Ours is the only nationalism that may still be justifiable in the emerging new world order—because it is really a commitment to internationalism. Nothing is more badly needed today than the lesson that, like the individuals in a society, the nations of the world can coexist and survive only on the basis of compassion, tolerance and humility. Perhaps we should start exporting the Canadian winter.

—(Dunvegan, Ontario, 1985)

Postscript

Thirty years have passed since I delivered the above (slightly edited) essay under the title “Canadian Pluralism: The View of an Outsider Inside” to the Couchiching Conference in 1985. The world has changed dramatically since then, and these changes cannot but influence my views on immigration to Canada.
Friday, Oct. 31st

I'm seeing the immigration doctor—it's the final step, after almost a year of moving and other preparations that will allow me to live in Canada with my Canadian husband and children.

The doctor is not particularly friendly. The forms I've been sent by the immigration department, and have arrived with, are not the forms she was expecting. She waves one of her forms at me, demanding to know if I have it. She says the forms the government sends her are numerous and confusing, and now the immigration department has brought out a second form with the same number as one already in existence.

I make sympathetic noises; I imagine processing innumerable faceless strangers must be unrewarding work, but I don't much like being treated like a faceless stranger myself.

I answer her questions about my medical history rather curtly. All at once, I feel resentful of my husband for wanting to come home, thereby forcing me to undergo this indignity. He didn't have to go through this to live in England. He has spent the last eight years in England simply by virtue of being my husband. He has been free to come and go and use the U.K. health service as he pleased.
When the doctor ticks the box for permanent resident my heart sinks, even though I long ago agreed to move to Canada for the sake of our children’s future.

“How long have you had this lump?” the doctor asks five minutes later as she conducts a breast examination. I am shocked and a little embarrassed, because I hadn’t even known I had a lump. I have never had a lump. I feel my breast. She is right. The lump is hard and bouncy and about a centimetre across in the inner/upper section of my right breast.

“Don’t worry,” she says. “It’s probably nothing, but you’d better get it checked.”

She tells me to go for my immigration chest x-ray, and says that I’ll have to return to the same clinic in about three weeks’ time for a mammogram. She asks if my husband is with me, and I say no and feel a stab of self-pity. Now, I’ll have to make my way across a strange town knowing I have a lump in my breast.

Outside, it’s a beautiful day, and I manage not to panic as I find my way to the hospital on the map, and then navigate the long corridors in the basement depths of the building to pay for my chest x-ray.

I have a gloomy few minutes in the waiting room looking at the anxious faces of women waiting for mammograms. But the chest x-ray is soon over and I stumble back to where I think I left the car. It’s still a glorious day and the streets are packed with students. Halifax is a beautiful city. I wonder if my own children, aged ten and six, will ever be students here, and then I wonder if I will be alive to see them as young adults.

I find the car and my way out of the city and onto the road that leads to our new home by the Atlantic Ocean. Thirty minutes later I’m picking up the kids from their new school with a sense of accomplishment—I didn’t once take a wrong turn or inadvertently move onto the left side of the road. I’m childishly pleased with myself. I’ve never enjoyed driving but I’m doing pretty well, and I haven’t even taken my Canadian test yet.

Back at the new house the children go out to play with their new friends, and I make dinner alone, thinking how much I miss having them in the house. In England they were usually at home because the streets were too congested and their friends too busy with after-school activities for them to be anywhere else. Here, they are free. Nova Scotia is a kids’ own Garden of Eden, but I miss them.

Later, the kids go trick-or-treating with their new friends. I sit by the fire, missing the English friends with whom we always went trick-or-treating. When tiny children knock on the door, I give them candy with a heavy heart. Now, I’m really wondering what is going on in my breast.

At bedtime the wind gets up and hurls itself off the ocean and onto our house. It’s so noisy I’m unable to sleep. When I finally lose consciousness, I dream of a small house on an urban street with thick curtains that pull around the windows like a womb.

**Saturday, Nov. 1st**

Shopping: but first we have to drive for 30 minutes along lengthy highways. The driving is easy, there’s not much traffic, but I’m intimidated by the endless kilometres of pine trees. This land is so vast and empty. I don’t tell my husband how his native landscape horrifies me, for I’m ashamed of the feeling; I have often said how much I love travel and what fun it would be to live quietly in the country.

The mall is enormous and the wind howls through it. There are no beautiful and interesting old buildings to soften the look of bleak modern stores. I feel a surge of homesickness so strong I feel sick. As my husband drives us home, I weep behind my sunglasses.

My father calls, from Ontario, where he is visiting his Canadian girlfriend. “Perhaps you have a mild case of agoraphobia,” he suggests and I laugh, slightly insulted. Later, I acknowledge he is right. I even have agoraphobia in the house.
Monday, Nov. 3rd

Jane, an English neighbour and long-time resident of North America, bangs on the door. I am embarrassed to find that a friendly English face and accent make me weep. I tell Jane about my breast lump and sob on her shoulder and then Jane takes charge. She makes an appointment for me to see her doctor, just to make sure there are no delays in getting the mammogram, and then she brings me books on breasts and a tin full of freshly baked cookies. Jane tells me that, if it is cancer and I stay in Canada for treatment, she will hold my hand.

Tuesday, Nov. 4th

Ploughing through Jane’s books on breasts, I discover the five-year survival rate for a 1-cm lump is only 75-80 per cent, which doesn’t seem too good. I find I can’t look at the line drawing of a full mastectomy. I refuse to think about the kids. I go for a long walk and get chased by unfriendly dogs wandering on their own. I resolve to get a stick to take on future walks. I must walk or I will go mad.

I go to a nearby corner store for milk. There is a strong smell of kimchi, a Korean dish of fermented garlic and cabbage, and I realize the owners must be Korean.

“I lived in Seoul for a year,” I tell the man behind the counter. He looks startled and his eyes mist. “It’s a wonderful city,” I say, lying. He nods.

“How do you like Canada?” He shrugs. It’s all right, he means, but it’s not home.

I leave the shop. Seeing him has reminded me that I have often lived abroad. So, why should I be so homesick now? It seems being an expatriate is not the same as being an immigrant. Expatriates always go home. I wonder why I hadn’t realized this obvious difference before. Perhaps I hadn’t wanted to anticipate problems. After all, the reasons for moving were so valid. Southern England no longer offers much quality of life—neither does Seoul for that matter. The Korean storekeeper and I are both here for our children.

I drive into Halifax and go to a bookshop. I see a book on being an immigrant and almost buy it, but the face on the cover is so miserable I resist and decide to muddle through on my own.

That evening, we watch a documentary about British archeological sites. My eyes drink in the pictures of Britain. In bed, I dream about England. I am stretched out in my mother’s garden. My arms are hugging the earth and my cheek is pressed flat against the green grass.

Wednesday, Nov. 5th

Jane brings round more cookies. We discuss the vicious fast-growing cancer her friend has recently beaten. “The doctor dismissed it, but after just a month the bugger was growing,” Jane says. “She had a terrible time, but she’s all right now.”

I read that some breast lumps can be massaged away and attack mine with determined fingers but it keeps bouncing back like a rubber ball on the surface of the sea.

Thursday, Nov. 6th

I get irritated bumbling around the local supermarket because I can’t find the things I want, and I’m baffled by many of the vegetables, particularly the extraordinary variety of brightly-coloured knobbly squashes. I can’t find caster sugar. It’s just fine sugar, my mother-in-law tells me later from her home in Halifax, just look for very fine sugar.

In the parking lot, there is an instant when I think I recognize a blonde woman with twins. Then I remember that the family I know are in England, and I don’t know this particular blonde woman or
her twins, and my eyes fog up and I resolve to get out of the house
more now I have almost conquered my fear of the roads.

Later, my husband gets a movie to distract us from my breast, and
brings home About Schmidt. I find the dead wife episode depressing.
"Sorry," says my husband, "I didn’t know the wife dies in this one."

**Friday, Nov. 7th**

I consider flying home for the mammogram, but the cost is pro-
hibitive. My mother, on the phone from England, sounds almost
hysterical with worry, and my mother-in-law in Halifax sounds
worse. I resolve to be resolutely upbeat and not to talk to them
about breasts anymore.

“The children have lost their English accents,” my mother says
reproachfully. I agree.

“So soon,” she laments.

I agree again. It is startling how quickly children adapt.

“They’ll probably end up with those Mid-Atlantic accents,” I say
and there is an empty silence on the end of the line.

My husband has to go to Boston for the weekend. I read more
books on breasts and tell all my female neighbours about my lump.
This garners me sympathy, and gets dinner invitations for the kids
and me. We spend the next three evenings in our neighbours’
houses, and I feel more at home as a result.

**Sunday, Nov. 9th**

I go to the Korean store. The owner’s six-year-old daughter is prac-
tising the violin behind the counter. She is producing a nice sound
and her father is pink with pride.

My husband comes home with a movie for distraction. The Life
of David Gale is a very depressing movie and has a woman dying of
leukaemia. Sorry, says my husband.

My husband and I go to the hospital for my mammograms and
ultrasound. We cough up $440 and hope the insurance company
will pay later. The doctor says my lump is probably a cyst that has
bled in on itself, but he will do a biopsy to make sure. Reassured,
we return to find the kids at Jane’s, high on sugar.

Later, I drive the children to basketball practice. First, I drop off
my husband and son. My husband is coaching, which our son finds
very exciting, as in England my husband was a weekend-only dad,
thanks to a long commute into London. Now he works at home
and is always available for fun.

Next, I take my daughter to basketball and drive back for hus-
band and son. Altogether, it is two hours on the road in the dark
and the rain. Driving along, I yearn for our former easy urban
existence in England. I feel bereft.

I feel that I have lost my country and my role at the centre of
the family. Now, my husband is the main parent, the fun one who
knows the good places to go and the entertaining things to do. I
feel diminished by moving to his country. I wonder if stress really
can cause cancer. If so, this is my Canadian cancer, the manifesta-
tion of my conflicting and repressed emotions over the last year.

In bed, I dream about taking off on my own with a rucksack on
my back, leaving home again at forty-two-and-a-half to see what I
can achieve. I’m sure that now they are in Canada my husband and
kids could manage perfectly well without me.

**Monday, Nov. 10th**

Due to my husband’s work, I have to go for my biopsy alone, but
the staff members are very friendly. The lump is close to my chest
so I have to squeeze my head, neck and shoulders into unnatural
and cramped positions to enable the puncturing machine to do its
job and remove five tiny cell samples. I feel like the plump, pink, apple-shaped pincushion my mother had when I was a child. My breast looks vulnerable lying on the cold metal slab and I am surprised by how much it bleeds.

The doctor says that, after all, the lump is solid. This increases my alarm, as Jane's books have taught me that cancer is solid. The nurse reads my face.

“Probably a fibroadenoma,” she says.

“But I thought only young women get those? I’m 42.”

“I got one last year,” she says. “And I’m 41 and my sitter has one, too.”

I go home and wait. My mother calls from England; she still sounds desperate. I decide to ignore what the books say about alcohol being a risk factor for breast cancer, and pour myself a very large glass of wine.

“What will we do if it is cancer?” I ask my husband. “I’m not even eligible for treatment in the Canadian health system.”

“We’ll all move back to England,” he says, as if it would be the easiest thing in the world.

“But the children love it here,” I say. “Perhaps it would be better if I went home alone and stayed at my mother’s.”

“No,” he says. “We’d want to be together.”

I feel a stab of self-pity—he would have been treated in the English health service, no questions asked. It seems it should work the same the other way round.

“Perhaps the Canadian system would pay,” I suggest. “After all, no one has actually said no.”

This does not seem very likely; after all, the immigration medical is presumably held to weed out people with expensive diseases. I try to call the immigration department to find out but cannot get through. This is the fifth time we’ve tried to call immigration and have not been able to establish contact.

I wonder if we were badly advised by all the people who said it is easier to apply for immigration status inside Canada than from without. If this is easy, I cannot imagine what it is like to apply from abroad. I decide to wait and hope for the best. It is probably not cancer anyway.

The wind howls again at night and I have trouble sleeping. I resolve to get some sleeping pills after my daughter comments on my exhausted appearance.

“Mum,” she says. “You look so old I’m afraid you might die soon, and I’m only ten.”

Tuesday, Nov. 18th

It snows and I have to drive the family to basketball. I’ve never driven in snow and ice before and I’m nervous at the wheel. My husband offers to drive. I decline. “Seeing as we are now in Canada,” I say coldly, “I think I should learn to drive in the snow, don’t you?”

Later, my daughter is worried. “Mummy, you shouldn’t snap at dad. I’m worried you might get divorced,” she says, her voice emerging quiet and reproving from the darkness of the back seat of the car.

The next day, I have to ask my husband how to write a cheque—again. I wonder if he has noticed how stupid I’m being about learning to write a cheque in Canada. In England I managed our finances, so my new incompetence must strike him. I am doing it deliberately, of course. I resent having to learn even the simplest things all over again. I am being very childish.

Friday, Nov. 21st

We still haven’t heard about the biopsy, even though the doctor at the hospital said it would only be a three-day wait. I call the local
surgery to inquire. The receptionist says she will find out. She calls back to say the laboratory has lost my sample. An hour later, she calls to say the tests are not completed. At 9 pm, a doctor calls to offer words of encouragement. I realize she is calling just because I have to get through the weekend, and I’m struck by her kindness.

Saturday, Nov. 22nd

I visit Pier 21 in Halifax, the former landing point for immigrants to Canada, and now a national museum. The place is wonderful. When I watch the movie about immigrants, I cry.

When the narrator intones: “Can you imagine what it is like to pack up all your belongings, to say goodbye to your family and leave your native land...?” I start to sob, although I try not to, because I am sitting among a group of teenagers who are far more interested in flirting with each other than in the movie. “It’s true,” I want to tell them. “It’s very difficult, and I didn’t even know how hard it would be.”

Afterwards, I congratulate the staff on the video and, when I realize Pier 21 runs on voluntary help, I offer my services. Then, I start to cry again. Embarrassed and appalled, I promise not to cry every time I come to work.

“Don’t worry,” the young manager jokes. “It’ll make it a more authentic experience for our visitors.”

I return to the bookstore and look for the book I saw on immigration, but can’t find it. I’m not even sure I’m in the right store.

My mother-in-law takes me to her hair salon. I opt for a new short cut. I haven’t had short hair since I was a child. I am not sure if the cut is a sign of regressing or accepting—both my fear of cancer and the need to make a new life.

Monday, Nov. 24th

Still no word on the biopsy. The receptionist at the surgery promises to chase it up. I try to be patient.

Friday, Nov. 28th

Lesley, another neighbour, lends me the novel, *I Don’t Know How She Does It*, by Helen Reddy. Lesley has tried hard to make me feel at home; she has lived abroad herself, and I am grateful for the support. But the book depresses me—it’s about mothers struggling and giving things up for their kids. I wonder if I have given up too much. I try to continue with the novel I started writing in England, but the words are flat and uninspired.

Saturday, Nov. 29th

I collect my mother from the airport. Alone in England, her nerves consumed her, and she has decided to come to see us.

“You look well,” she says, tearfully hugging me, and I feel a guilty irritation that I suppress. Look, I’m plodding along okay, I want to tell her, please don’t weep all over me.

Sunday, Nov. 30th

The temperature has plummeted. I have never been so cold, and I’m fascinated by the extraordinary weather. I go out to look at the seawater in the bay. It’s frozen a glassy aqua green, and mist is billowing thickly over the surface. I realize that the bay has been different every day since we arrived. Urban streets, with all their residents and visitors, don’t change as much.
I watch our Russian neighbours tobogganing down the hill near their house. They don’t speak much English but they have already told me why they came here. “Peace,” they said. Later, my kids shriek with disbelief when they see people walking on a lake.

*Monday, Dec. 1st*

Mum and I go into the surgery and suggest to the receptionist that we would like to know now. The receptionist calls the laboratory and, a few minutes later, the same doctor who called me at the weekend, shows us into her office.

“Good news!” she says, as warmly as if she were treating her own sister. “It seems to be a fibroadenoma. Totally benign and nothing, absolutely nothing, you have done has caused it.”

I remember what Jane’s book said: 40 percent of women with breast cancer think they have caused it themselves. I’ve noticed how many you-have-caused-your-cancer-with-negative-thinking articles there are in the newspapers. So many women must be suffering terrible self-recrimination.

“What did cause it then?” my mother asks.

The doctor shrugs. “Could be caffeine, could be hormones. Some lumps are even caused by knocking the breast.”

My mother gasps. “Do you remember? You whacked yourself when you were moving out of your old house.”

I grin, slightly embarrassed. I do remember now; it hurt like hell. How could I have forgotten?

*Wednesday, Dec. 17th*

The immigration doctor calls to say all my tests have checked out and she has sent the papers off to immigration. “How nice of her to call,” my mother says warmly.

I join the Halifax Newcomers’ Club—apparently there are Brits among their members. I would like to meet some other Brits. I think of the Pakistani women I taught English to in England. I’d been frustrated when I realized that the women were more interested in just being together in class than learning English. It used to annoy me; I was not running a coffee morning after all. But now I understand their need to be together. They were women living with the grief of losing their villages and families. Many of them were depressed. Now, I know I don’t want to be like them. I don’t want to be one of those permanently wounded women.

*Tuesday, Dec. 23rd*

We’ve been unable to contact immigration or access their web site to see how my application is progressing, and my health insurance will run out soon. I feel trapped. When will I be able to work? I volunteer at the local hospital.

We go to watch our daughter play basketball, and I find I am now just as enthusiastic about the game as the other parents. I like basketball; it’s so much faster than the English equivalent, netball.

I talk to one of the other mothers about my need to get out of the house, and she asks if I want to come to her running club with her. I flush with gratitude and am embarrassed that the emotion shows on my face.

I listen to the CBC while making dinner. I’m becoming irritated by their politically correct agenda about the importance of multiculturalism and diversity in Canada. It’s not so easy to actually be diverse here. It’s not so easy to be the one diverse element in an otherwise Canadian family.

*Tuesday, Jan. 20th*

The kids are off school because of a snowstorm, and it’s too cold to go out. My daughter says that, if I can’t settle in Canada, she too will return to England, although she would rather not.

My husband says he will return to England also, but I have seen
the way he watches the landscape when we’re in the car. He looks lovingly at the lakes and trees as we pass them, and I feel the same when we’re in Britain. He’s so happy to be home. The truth is that he wants to live in Canada with his Canadian children and I want to live in Britain with my British children.

I decide that I must stay, at least for a few years. I look out of the window at the bay and realize that I have made progress; I am fascinated by the bay and am no longer intimidated by the landscape. The children are happy, my mother-in-law loves having us nearby, and my mother loves visiting. This is an adventure, as my son remarked last week.

_Wednesday, Feb. 3rd_

I start volunteering at Pier 21. The staff members are fun and it’s interesting work. The place makes me realize what an emotionally complex issue immigration is. Later, I hear my daughter talking to the boy who used to live in our house. They sold to us, and he now lives over the hill.

“I miss my old house,” he says.

“You can come round anytime,” my daughter says.

“Do you remember when you first arrived you said it was _your_ house now?” he asks.

“That’s because you told me it was _your_ house,” she replies.

“Anyway, that was a long time ago. That was then, this is now.”

_Tuesday, April 6th_

I keep an appointment to see a surgeon in Halifax. He says he will remove my lump if I want. I say, let’s not bother, it’s not causing any more trouble, and he nods. “Come back if you change your mind.”

As I leave his office, I feel impressed with the Canadian health system. My sister in England has had a breast lump for years. No one knows what it is. Her doctor has told her not to worry unless it grows. She has not had to go through worrying tests, but I think, on balance, I’d rather know what is growing in my breast.

Later, it snows heavily and the children leap with excitement. They build igloos in the garden. “I used to build igloos and snow forts with my father,” my husband says, happily joining them.

_Thursday, May 23rd_

My documents have finally been returned by the immigration department. Soon, I’ll be able to apply for a permanent resident’s card. All these months of invisibility, during which I’ve been neither able to leave Canada nor exist properly within it, are nearly over. My breast lump has shrivelled although a new lump, created by the trauma of the biopsy, has emerged and remains obstinately buoyant. I hope that, after the summer, I’ll be able to lead a normal life here. And one day, who knows, maybe I’ll feel equally at home in England and Canada.
Henry Beissel’s “The View of an Outsider Inside” is from Canadian Pluralism: The View of an Outsider Inside, an address delivered to the Couchiching Conference on August 11th, 1985 on the topic Who Needs Canada?.

Dana Borcea’s “They Left Their Homes with Nothing, and Made a New Life with Hard Work” appeared in The Edmonton Journal, page A1, on Tuesday Sept. 7th, 2004 and is reproduced here with permission.

Roberta Buchanan’s “Come from Away” won a prize in the Newfoundland/Labrador Government Arts and Letters Competition.

Ursula Delfs’ “A Simple Wedding” is an extract from her published work, To a Brighter Future (Trafford, 2005), which chronicles the story of the Pankow family in Canada from 1928 on.

Vid Ingelevics’ “Attention Mr. Ingelwick” first appeared in Descant, # 124, Vol. 35, Number 1, in Spring 2004, and appears here with permission from the author.
Biographical Notes


Romeo Kaseram’s “Watchful for The Parallels and Overlaps” is reproduced with the permission of Indo-Caribbean World, Toronto.

Myrna Kostash’s “How I Lost My Tongue” first appeared in *Eating Apples: Knowing Women’s Lives*, edited by Caterina Edwards and published by NeWest, Edmonton, Alberta. It is published here with the author’s permission.

Carrie-Ann Smith’s “Land of Milk and Corn Flakes” is published here with the acknowledgement and permission of the author and the Pier 21 Society.

Ken Victor’s “A Dozen Reasons this Canadian is Celebrating Canada Day” first appeared in the *Calgary Herald*, and is reproduced with permission.

Henry Beissel, poet, playwright, translator and editor, lives in Ottawa. He taught English and Creative Writing at Concordia University, Montreal, becoming Distinguished Emeritus Professor in 1996. His poetry publications and plays are too numerous to mention, and his work has been translated into many languages. He has produced translations of Bauer, Huchel, Ibsen, Mrozek and Dorst; a book on Canada; two anthologies of plays for high schools, and the literary journal *Edge* (1963-1969). He won the first Walter-Bauer Literaturpreis in Germany in 1994.

Dana Borcea, who lives in Toronto, is a newspaper journalist who has reported for the *Toronto Star*, the *National Post* and the *Edmonton Journal*. She currently works the police and crime beat at the *Hamilton Spectator*. At six years of age she immigrated to Canada from Israel with her Romanian-born parents. She is sensitive to the rewards and challenges of the settlement experience and has always been drawn to the stories of immigrants, both through her writing and her volunteer work with settlement agencies.
**Roberta Buchanan** was born in South Africa, educated in England (B.A. Hons., Keele University; PhD Shakespeare Institute, Birmingham University), and immigrated to Canada in 1964 to teach English literature at Memorial University. She helped to establish Women’s Studies at Memorial, later becoming Coordinator of the programme. Her interests are in the area of editing, and autobiographical texts, and she is a poet, memoirist, and active in the local literary and feminist scenes. Her publications include an edition of an Elizabethan satire, *Ulpian Fulwell’s Ars Adulandi, or The Art of Flattery* (Universität Salzburg); *The Woman Who Mapped Labrador: The Life and Expedition Diary of Mina Hubbard*, with Anne Hart and Bryan Greene (McGill-Queen’s University Press; short-listed for the Winterset Award for Excellence in Newfoundland and Labrador Writing); *A Charm against the Pain: 29 Voices from Newfoundland*, co-edited with Georgina Oliviere Queller and Geraldine Chafe Rubia (Flanker Press); and a book of poetry, *I Moved All My Women Upstairs* (Breakwater Press). Her historical research into women’s autobiography has been extensive. Her latest publication is on the Inuit diary of Abraham Ulrikab, recruited with his family to be exhibited in a Berlin zoo. She has been an editor, founder of and an official in various Newfoundland writers’ and women’s groups, and was an initiator of the MUN Pensioners memoir group in 2003. She acquired Professor Emerita status at MUN in 2005.

**Anton Capri** was born in Czernowitz, Romania but has long been a Canadian citizen. He is a theoretical physicist with a B.Sc. from Toronto and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Princeton. He has been Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta, and Adjunct Professor of Physics, Athabasca University, since 1998. He has been a research physicist for Kimberley-Clark, Senior Research Fellow at the Max Planck Institute in Munich, and has been visiting professor at universities in Austria, Italy, India, Germany, and Japan. He has authored 73 research papers, three book-chapters, four books, and has co-edited one other book. He has an interest in creative writing, and published a book in 2006 which dealt with physics for the layperson.

**Laurent Chabin** was born in France and has lived in Calgary for the last 11 years. He has published over 50 young adult and children’s books as well as novels and short stories for adults, including *La conspiration du siècle, L’assassin impossible, and Misère de chien*. Several of his books have been translated into other languages.

**Chung Won Cho** is Professor Emeritus of Physics, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Born in Seoul, Korea in 1931, he is a graduate of Seoul National University. He immigrated to Toronto in 1953, eventually earning an M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Toronto. His first faculty appointment was at MUN in 1958, where he taught until retirement in 1996. He was Chairman of Physics from 1976 to 1982. Visiting faculty posts: Penn State University (1966–68); Institute of Space and Astronautical Sciences, Tokyo, Japan (1984). He has been President of the Federation of Korean-Canadian Associations (1989-91), Executive Committee Member, Canadian Ethnocultural Council (1990-2000), and Asian Cultural Advisor to the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador (1994). His wife Joyce is a Japanese Canadian, and they have two daughters, Carolyn and Rosalyne.

**Joan Clayton** received her Ph.D. at Western University, and is a Clinical Psychologist and Trauma Expert who has been in Private Practice for thirty years. She came to writing at the age of 48, and is primarily a poet and playwright. Her historical story presented here has appeared onstage twice: in *Perhaps English Isn’t Your First Language*, which premiered at the McManus Studio Theatre, London, Ontario, in December 2009; and in *Displaced*...

**Vid Ingelevics** is a Toronto artist, independent curator, occasional writer and a teacher at the Ontario College of Art and Design. His artwork and curated projects have been seen across Canada and Europe. His reviews and essays have appeared in numerous magazines and academic journals, including *Canadian Art, C Magazine, Blackflash, the Journal of Material Culture* and *Descant*. He was a founding member of a preservation group that won a 2003 Community Heritage Award for their work to save the Wychwood Car-barns. He has participated in talks and panel discussions on many occasions in Canada, the U.S., Latvia, Sweden, Switzerland and Denmark. He has taught at The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Sheridan College, and Ryerson, and is currently an Associate Professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto.

**Barbara D. Janusz**, a University of Alberta graduate, has degrees in both the arts and in law, and has published poetry, short stories, essays, book reviews and editorials in numerous literary journals, newspapers and anthologies across Canada. A contributing writer for *Alternatives Journal, Canada’s Environmental Voice*, Barbara has given readings at various literary happenings, and has appeared on CBC’s *Newsworld*. She has instructed in law at Mount Royal College and The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in Calgary, and in technical English at the Universidad Catolica, La Paz, B.C.S., Mexico. In 2001 she was a runner up in the John Whyte Memorial Essay Contest, and in 1999 and 2005 won awards from *Synchronicity Magazine*. She is author of the novel, *Mirrored in Caves*, and her home is in the Crownsnest Pass, Alberta.

**Mark Anthony Jarman** was born in Edmonton, Alberta. He is the author of three short story collections—*Dancing Nightly in the tavern, New Orleans Is Sinking* and *19 Knives*; a poetry collection, *Killing the Swan*; the travel book *Ireland’s Eye*, and the hockey novel *Salvage King Ya*, which is on Amazon.ca’s list of 50 Essential Canadian Books. He edited *An Ounce of Cure*, an anthology of alcohol-related stories and has been published in *Best Canadian Stories, The Journey Prize Anthology*, and many literary journals. He has won a Gold National Magazine Award in nonfiction and his stories have been nominated in the U.S. for the Pushcart Prize and the O. Henry Award. He attended the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, has taught at the University of Victoria and the Banff Centre for the Arts, and presently teaches at the University of New Brunswick. He is the current fiction editor of *The Fiddlehead*. His latest publication is *Knife Party at the Hotel Europa* (Goose Lane Editions, 2015).

**Iris Jones (Mulcahy)** is from Pentrechwyth, near Swansea, Wales and is the wife of Don Mulcahy. They married before migrating to Canada in 1955. She is a retired dental assistant-cum-technician, an avid reader, a world-class knitter and crocheter, a proud mother of two daughters, and grandmother to three exceptional grandchildren. *Letters from Ceinwen* is her sole publication, to date.

**Tchitala Nyota Kamba** is from the Congo. She is founder of Apapi Film & Theatre, and her first collection of poems, *L’exil*, is currently with a Canadian Publisher.

**Ken Victor**, originally from Boston, Mass., lives in the Gatineau Hills of Quebec with his wife and three children where, most nights, around the dinner table, you can find him pretending to understand French. When not being dad or husband, he moonlights as a poet (for which he has received a National Magazine Award) and as a consultant in leadership and organizational development. In August of 2003 he finally became a Canadian citizen.

**Meguido Zola** is Director of Professional Programs, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University. He is a storyteller and an award-winning writer for children and young adults. Apart from scholarly writings, he has compiled anthologies of Canadian writings for children and has edited a language arts series for schools, a young adult novel series, a writing process series and a poetry series, as well as children’s newspaper and magazine columns. His own writings for children encompass picture books, novels, poetry and biography.