



### **At One Hundred and Fifty: An Immigrant's Thank You**

Heart thumping with nervousness I neared the border crossing at Fort Frances in 1972 with only a letter offering me employment in Canada to get me into this country as an immigrant. But it worked, and I was in.

And so, I entered Canada for the first time as an Englishman, used to tiny country lanes, manicured gardens, and thirty miles in a car being an adventure. The vastness and wildness of Canada by comparison was staggering. And when the Prairies opened up before me, with no trees and only telephone poles marking where the road went, I felt like I'd arrived on another planet.

It was a line-up for ice cream at Dairy Queen that first winter, when the temperature was still minus ten degrees, that made me decide I would become a crazy Canadian too. I threw myself onto a skating rink having never worn skates in my life - with pillows strapped to my back and front - and immediately went horizontal in midair. I chair lifted to the top of a ski hill having never skied before, and left nearly everything but my underwear scattered on the hill. I drove in the worst conditions, looking through a tiny hole in the ice on the windshield to see where I was going, or down at the ground through my open driver's door as I was driving to see where the road was. Every bit of Canada was exhilarating, a triumphant victory awaiting every challenge. Canada was amazing.

The feeling that England was still home beckoned, however, so we burnt our bridges here in 1990 and went back, but just a brief glimpse of a Canadian scene on TV would set off waves of longing for Canada. So, when four years passed and I was actually offered the chance to come back to Canada, I took it. From Pearson airport in Toronto I drove my family to a quiet back road, stopped the car, got out, raised my arms to the sky and yelled, "I'm back! I'm back!"

It was like that for a Canadian helping in the Congo too; he could withstand a few months in the insanity of that nation because he knew he had Canada to go back to. It made me think that when God placed nations he clearly had a soft spot for Canada, as the place one day in the future when people would need a wild sanctuary to flee to, and appreciate returning to as well, after living and working elsewhere.

So, thank you, great God, that such a place exists on this planet in this day and age that so easily absorbs and softens people from every race and religion. We come here as immigrants with all sorts of religious and patriotic fanaticism filling our heads, but hit us with a Canadian winter and the realization we could die in a stranded car in minus 30 degrees if someone doesn't stop to help us, and we soften. And there's nothing like a Canadian Christmas for softening our differences in the shared challenge of creating warmth and light in the midst of freezing winds and slush.

I've now spent more than a quarter of Canada's history in this country, and I still marvel that Canada only became a country a century and a half ago. As an immigrant, however, I suspect Canada will never really be home, but maybe that's not so bad as we're all pilgrims in this life journeying to something more than a spot we call home in this flawed world.

### ***Jonathan Buck***

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