

Friday Evening Message – 28 August 2020

Home.

Where is it? Where you are now, somewhere else, or a place in your mind? A memory, perhaps.

We tend to see the past through tinted lenses. Rose, pink, blue – any colour you like. The act of remembering is not always reliable. Places, times and events collide, and over the years merge.

It is only when confronted with a diary entry from long ago, or someone else's version of things, you realise your recollection is not so sure.

But there are moments when something triggers a feeling or image in your mind so sharp and clear that it can truly stop you in your tracks. You are frozen in the moment as the memory comes flooding back.



A memory frozen in time on the Rideau Canal – Ottawa, January 1998.

It may be the way a word is said or pronounced. A treasured object, long lost, later found by chance. Perhaps a long-ago forgotten piece of music. You need only hear the first few notes and you are transported back to the time you first heard it, no matter how long ago.

My paternal grandmother had such a strong, local, rural accent I wish I could hear it again. Decades later, I still listen out for it. Probably in vain. But the memory of it remains, even if I cannot be sure of it, waiting for something to awaken it.

Once, I encountered a smell that brought me right back to my Montreal childhood in my local corner store, now gone. That sweet mixture of pink-coloured Bazooka bubble gum and candies of all kinds laid out in neat rows as high as I could see, when looking up at the cash register on the counter with a few nickels in my hand.

The split second I encountered that identical smell, which reminded me of that specific store, I was five all over again. Over fifty years later, I was there, in my mind. The exact feeling of joy

and excitement came back to me. That very smell triggering the feeling and memory so crisp and vivid I only had to close my eyes and I was there, in the moment.

It is in those rare moments of being there, in the moment, remembering the past, we wonder how things might have been different had we taken a different path. What might have been had someone said something, given a piece of advice, shared their own learned wisdom.



What would you say to your younger self?

Who I am now and who I was then: not quite the same, yet the same, shaped by the same life lived; perhaps it is only a feeling of one not knowing the other. My younger self would never have made time for me.

I have never found it easy to be good to myself. Never wanted to. Never cared. Is it the same for you? Where does that come from?

Even if I could speak to my younger self, I am not sure what I would say. What could I say? And would it have made any difference? It is only through living, making mistakes, having successes, accumulating experiences, laying down memories, moving from retrospection to introspection that brings you closer and closer to finding yourself. And if not finding yourself, then learning to like yourself; and if not that, then at least learning to live with yourself.

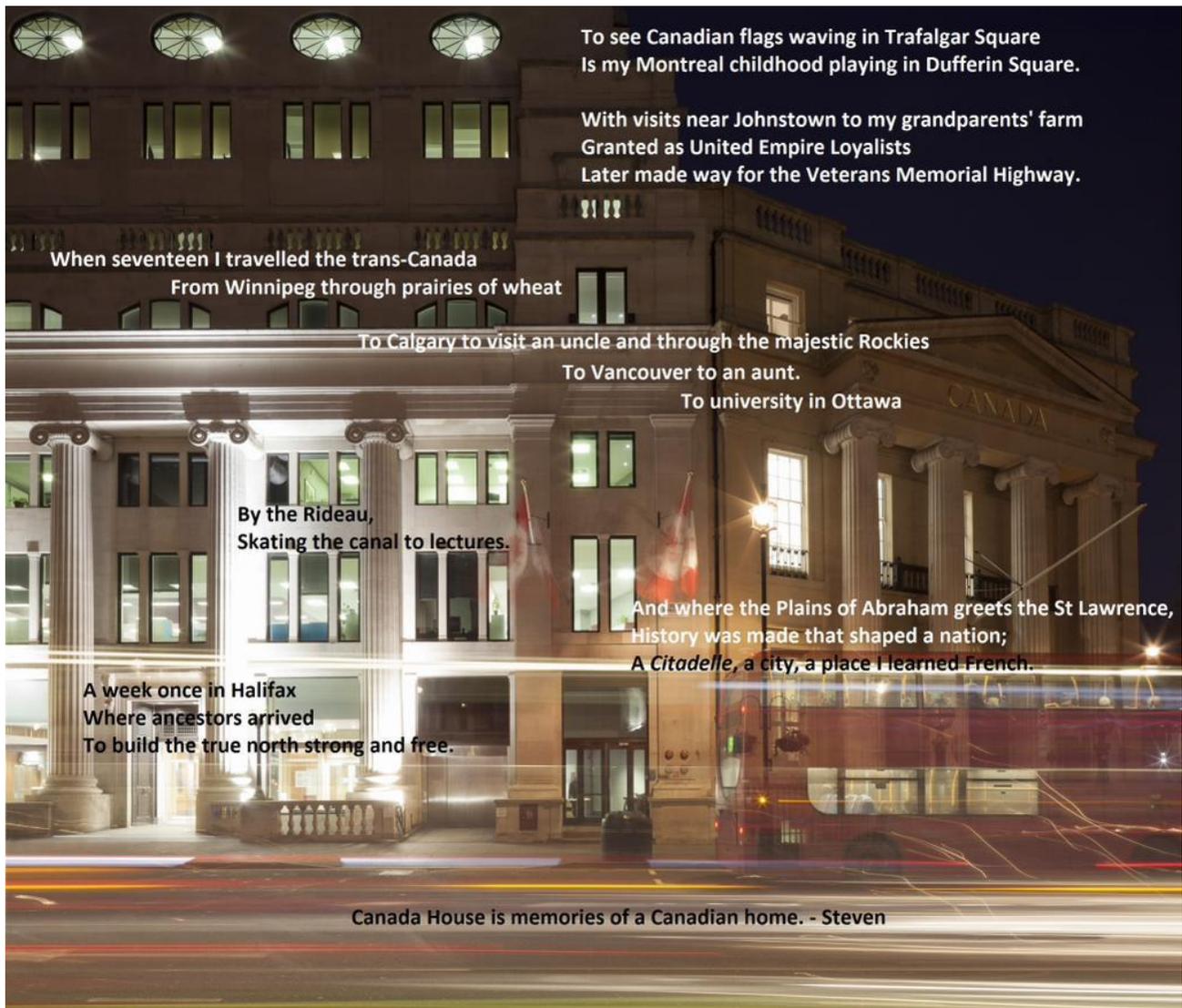
House, *home*. Maison, *accueil*. Hus, *hem*. Haus, *zu Hause*. Casa, *hogar*. Regardless of language, we know house and home are not the same thing. You may have a house, but not a home. You may have a home, but it is not your house. You may live in a house here, but your home is somewhere else.

For some, home is yourself. You are at home with yourself. You are not just living with yourself, but you are comfortable and at peace with yourself, and you look back at your life through memories, at ease. No coloured lens needed.

My mother was placed in a home last year following my father's death, although it is not her home. It is a place to receive care. My youngest brother continues to live in the family home, the only place he has lived for over forty-five years. In contrast, I have made homes in many places, all of them now memories.

I also have friends who have frequently moved houses, or their furniture around their home, and have wondered what it is they are looking for. If it is a home, I hope they find it, just as I hope you have found yours.

Once, walking through London, I was reminded of home, and the words came easily to me.



To see Canadian flags waving in Trafalgar Square
Is my Montreal childhood playing in Dufferin Square.

With visits near Johnstown to my grandparents' farm
Granted as United Empire Loyalists
Later made way for the Veterans Memorial Highway.

When seventeen I travelled the trans-Canada
From Winnipeg through prairies of wheat

To Calgary to visit an uncle and through the majestic Rockies
To Vancouver to an aunt.
To university in Ottawa

By the Rideau,
Skating the canal to lectures.

And where the Plains of Abraham greets the St Lawrence,
History was made that shaped a nation;
A *Citadelle*, a city, a place I learned French.

A week once in Halifax
Where ancestors arrived
To build the true north strong and free.

Canada House is memories of a Canadian home. - Steven

Background photo courtesy of the Canadian High Commission in London.

Have a lovely weekend, wherever you are. Shabbat shalom,

Steven Pruner
Norwich Liberal Jewish Community
norwichljc.org.uk

