



O Canada

The other day I was having another long Skype video chat with my eldest daughter Himi and my son-in-law loan, when he happened to mention something that he would be doing in a couple of days - going down to a government office to take his Canadian citizenship test. His current status is Landed Immigrant, having moved to Canada from his birth country of Romania some years ago, when he met Himi.

I was curious about this, and asked him what the test would entail. He explained that he would be expected to answer a number of questions on Canadian civics, history and culture. I suppose the idea is to ensure that new citizens have at least a basic knowledge of what it 'means' to be Canadian. He mentioned that he had been preparing for the test by using some pamphlets and booklets that the government prepared for this purpose, and that he felt ready for the exam.

And that is when I made a slight mistake. Two mistakes actually. First is that I told him that although just like him, I myself was originally born outside of Canada - in England - I never had to take any such test to become a citizen. Back in those days (I entered Canada in 1957) people coming from the United Kingdom were considered to be so culturally similar that no such test was thought necessary; citizenship was granted automatically after a certain time had passed. He didn't really think this was fair, as I can understand, but times have changed, and I assume that these days even Brits have to take the same tests as anybody else.

But I then compounded my mistake by asking him to tell me about the content of the test. He started to give me some sample questions:

- who invented the snowmobile?
- who was the third Prime Minister of Canada?

Hold on a minute. Who? What? I have no idea about the proper answer to *either* of those questions. And as I sit here this evening writing this story, up on the bookshelves over my head is a whole row of books about Canadian history - books that I devoured eagerly some decades ago, and which I have kept because I found them so interesting that I was 'sure' I would one day read them again. I'm no dummy here. I'm a well-read, intelligent Canadian.

But I couldn't answer *any* of the questions he fed me. Any of them!

Now part of this I understand. When I first moved to Canada, there was no such thing as a snowmobile. I feel no guilt whatsoever about not knowing who invented it. And as for the third Prime Minister, I can remember the first *two*, but then get tangled in the skeins of history. It seems though, that the test questions must match quite closely the content of the little booklets which the applicants are expected to read, so presumably most people can make a decent showing when they try it.

In my defense, I can emphasize that over and above the 'trivia' aspects of this test, I of course do have a very good understanding of the *important* aspects of Canadian history: how the original group of colonies came together to form the core of the nation, and of its subsequent development across the continent - and having lived for years at a time in widely diverse areas of the country myself, and travelled many tens of thousands

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of miles over all its landscapes, from outports on each ocean right up to the far north, I think I still qualify as a 'Canadian', even though I have not lived there for 25 years.

But loan represents the *future* for Canada of course, with my contributions now pretty much in the past, so it's only fair that the citizenship test matches his experiences rather than mine.

And perhaps ... perhaps I should dust off a couple of the books on that shelf, and dip into them now and again. What if I were to be re-tested next time I visit?

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