

Happy Belated

by SHERALYN ROMAN

It wasn't a milestone birthday but nonetheless, given our political climate and the particular actions and behaviours of a pushy, overbearing southern neighbour, it was a birthday worth celebrating. Happy 159th Birthday Canada, even if I'm a day late, I'm grateful every day to live, work and play in this great nation. Like most countries, there are to use 'corporate speak,' some 'opportunities for improvement,' but as democracies go, we're doing pretty well.

Nation-building is hard work and compared to much of the world, we are still in our infancy. We've done the initial job of linking the country by rail, cobbling together a disparate set of provinces over the course of a century with some joining the Dominion of Canada at its outset and others, as late as 1949. More recently, we've only just begun the less physical, but infinitely harder work of acknowledging the First Nations people here long before the likes of Sir John A. MacDonald declared us a nation. Nunavut, 'the newest, largest and northernmost territory of Canada' was officially created on April 1, 1999, creating a country that now truly extends from sea, to sea to sea. Still more recently, the Truth and Reconciliation commission's 94 Calls to Action were implemented in 2015 aiming to address the cultural genocide of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and create the conditions and foundation for healing. Perhaps it sounds glib to say this, especially as an immigrant myself, but while only 15 of the Calls to Action are considered fully implemented to date, we should be encouraged that the work is being done in the first place.

I've heard people describe Canada as a nation that defines itself by what it is not. That we are 'nicer than?', 'more welcoming?' or 'not as?', but I would suggest instead we drop the comparative aspect of such conversations and instead state proudly (and without saying 'sorry') what we are. We are a nation that IS welcoming and inclusive. A country that recognizes - through our socio-economic structures - the importance of caring for every member of our society. A country which is governed as a parliamentary democracy and which gives every citizen of legal age the right to vote.

Courtesy of Tommy Douglas we are a country that provides universal health care and we are a country that believes public education is a fundamental right and created systems to ensure that all citizens have access to a free public education up to Grade 12, not just the wealthy.

Canada might still be working out the kinks and it certainly still needs some fine-tuning, but a nation that recognizes a healthy, educated populace provides a solid foundation from which to prosper and thrive, one that recognizes the citizen's right to have a voice in their system of government, and one which strives to ensure the well-being of every citizen, is a country that can stand proudly on its own merits.

'Elbows Up' Canada, we are who we are, without apology or comparison, to any other country.

As a nation too, we offer something for everyone. Vast swaths of open blue sky, majestic mountains, crystal clear lakes, streams and rivers in abundance, places to ski or places to park a beach umbrella, rocky coastlines and stunning vistas, heritage, walled cities and snow-capped tundras that sparkle under a midnight sun.

In BC you might ski and swim on the same day, in New Brunswick you might walk on the ocean floor and kayak to that exact same location all within a 12-hour period. We have wine regions peppered throughout the country and, of course, we have maple syrup.

May I remind you that Indigenous peoples created lacrosse, we are the inventors of basketball and the telephone, discovered insulin and it is the Canadarm that powers much of what happens on the International Space Station.

Canadian troops played absolutely pivotal roles in every major world conflict and, oh yeah, we also founded the United Nations Peacekeeping Force.

I could go on and on. I hope you stood proudly yesterday, at some point during the day, and sang O Canada. Maybe you hung a flag outside, or always have a flag proudly displayed. I hope if you are lucky enough to travel, you proudly pin a maple leaf somewhere on your bag, knapsack or luggage tag. Most of all, I hope when asked what makes Canada so special, that you define Canada not by how we compare to some other country, but by who and what we proudly are, and stand for, as a nation.

Happy Belated Birthday Canada.