

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Not perfect, but pretty good

Now that we're smack into the happiest time of the year, it may be time to actually say something happy.

A reality check, so to speak.

There's an old saw in journalism that if 1,000 airplanes land safely, it's not a story. If one doesn't, it is.

The reasons for this are obvious. If one doesn't land safely it means instant death for a lot of people. And so the media ? and many other areas of society ? are constantly focussed on what is bad, what went wrong, who did what to whom, etc.

The fact is, nearly 100,000 airplanes land safely every single day in the world. Over the last five years in the U.S., for example, the odds of dying in a plane crash are one in 45 million, much better odds than you enjoy say, putting up your Christmas lights or crossing the street.

In the Canadian context, hardly a day passes ? I can't remember a recent one ? where the news isn't spilling over with hand-wringing tales of political, economic, social or academic misdeeds of various severity. If all you did was rely on the media for your information, you'd think Canada was a terrible place to live.

It's not perfect, but if you can find a safer, nicer, more civil society in the world ? yes, even counting our nasty weather ? I'd like to know where it is.

This occurred to me late last week when I chanced upon a double-page spread in, of all places, The Globe and Mail, featuring full colour pictures of 13 people, all of whom were among the 50 new Canadians from 34 countries who were sworn in as citizens by Governor-General David Johnston at a special Rideau Hall ceremony.

The Globe asked them all three questions: what does Canada mean to you? What makes you feel at home in Canada? What does it mean for you to be here today?

Their answers to these questions should make us all consider how fortunate we really are as Canadians, something we (me included) tend to forget in the day-to-day passing of our lives.

Venezuelan Karina Redneris, 34, a financial institution manager, said that for her, ?Canada means an open door to do and dream whatever you want to do. It's a country where anything is possible if you set your mind to it.?

Asked what makes her feel at home here, she said, ?My fellow co-workers and the kindness of people we meet.?

Algerian Sihem Benali, 35, says that for her ?Canada means opportunity.?. Asked what makes her feel at home here, she said, ?Tim Hortons??

Zhanna Ter-stepanyan, 43, with her children, Mariya, 10, and Yuriy, 6, who arrived from Russia via Ecuador, said the ?warmth that people share with each other? makes her feel at home in Canada. Asked what it meant to be at Rideau Hall, she said, ?This is a special day for our family. We feel that we became the part of the Great Family of Canadians.?

Forty-year-old Moroccan Kamal Benmoussa, said that to him, Canada means ?A life project of freedom, opportunity and commitment. Relief makes me feel at home in Canada. Today is a very special day, proud.?

Rowland Gordon, 33, of Jamaica, called Canada ?a welcoming nation? and said it ?means a country of endless opportunities where cultures embroil to create great communities.?

Two women from Bangladesh also expressed similar sentiments. Selina Rahman, 50, said, ?We feel welcomed here. We feel accepted, the diversity creating unity.?. And Nabila Fairuze Rahman, 26, said, ?I feel at home in Canada because even though there's a diverse culture here, people are understanding and tolerant, which is very nice.?

And so it goes, the view from people from various parts of the globe, people who have the advantage of looking at Canada when compared to the society they came from, people who are proud and happy and yes, honored, to now call themselves Canadian.

Or, as the governor-general put it, ?Canadian citizenship is valued the world over, and with good reason. This is a society that values equality of opportunity and excellence, and that sees diversity as a virtue rather than a weakness. In Canada, inclusiveness is a key value, which means every Canadian citizen should have the opportunity to help shape this country for the better, regardless of background or ethnicity.?

As we said, it ain't perfect, but it's pretty good, something it wouldn't hurt for all Canadians to keep in mind as they celebrate Christmas ? or whatever else ? over the next few weeks.

