

Expatriate

Jim Walker

The Hawaiians are surprised that we also had beaches.
In their minds we represent one vast igloo
Filled with people anxious to escape
To winter in Hawaii.

They do not wonder that we rank second only to Koreans
In numbers of illegal aliens here.
They only wonder why Canadians become Canadians
Short of the accident of birth
And to be honest, now that I'm away, I wonder too.

No Empire Loyalists, my grandparents, both sides,
Came up from Utah at the century's turn
As if inheriting the rootlessness of Scottish ancestors.
Called by a prophet,
They wintered in tents in South Alberta
To which I only shudder admiration
After thirty-four Canadian winters.

True, I'm glad I no longer have to shovel out ten times a year
The snow's thick packing-in on Dussault Avenue
Where the elegant illusion of our driveway stretched dramatically.
Nor do I yearn for freezing toes and fingers, ice-slicked streets,
Or storms of summer mosquitoes.

But I do miss the drum rolls of "O Canada,"
The weight of blankets on chill winter nights,
Old friends,
And the thirteen hours from Winnipeg to Lethbridge
Across endless summer prairie.

And my children: will they praise or blame me,
Having led them from tundra to this paradise
Where our bleached faces separate us
Into, yet again, a foreign generation?

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