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A Newfoundland Journey
Once Around the Bay, Boys

John Cabot first sighted the rocky shores of Newfoundland 500 years ago. On this auspicious anniversary, a Canadian writer reflects on this island of outports and rugged individuality.

BY DAVID MACFARLANE

I was drinking the plum of a pint of Guinness in the justly famous Ship Inn, just off Duckworth Street in the very centre of St. John’s, Newfoundland. It was a quiet time of the afternoon, just before two o’clock. My table was close enough to the Ship Inn’s cheery hearth, my first pint of properly drawn stout close enough to being gone, and my departure to Toronto the next day close enough at hand to put me in a reflective mood.

I was just back from a 10-day drive around the island—from a drive, as St. John’s townsfolk might say, around the bay. If you were not born within sight of Signal Hill, you’re from

St. Paul’s Anglican Church is one of a number of fine buildings in the picturesque outport of Trinity.
"around the bun," a collective term that encompasses, without distinguishing among, the islands many great bases: St. John's, Placentia, Fortune, St. George's, White, Notre Dame, Bonavista, Trinity and Conception.

"Around the bun" can even mean around the island of Newfoundland itself—a dismally lumped together term, so a visitor might think. Except that in St. John's, in my experience, the term is anything but dismissive. Few cities know their hinterland or hold it in such high regard as does St. John's. In the Ship Inn, you can lean over to the next table and ask the easy and close-at-hand questions, "How do you get to Quick's Valley?" "To Cape Spear?" "To Topsail Valley?" and people will be helpful. You can even ask about more faraway and obscure places—"Does anyone know the whereabouts of Lending Tickle or Little Heart's Ease or Blowy Head or Famine Gut or Calcium Nose or Wild Bight?"—and the chances are that someone will pity you, the poor mainlander, and tell you precisely how to get there.

I have always found St. John's an excellent embarking point for a trip. Unlike many cities, with their industrial-park, mall-skirted environs, St. John's family lets you know when you arrive there that you have left some place behind and have landed somewhere else. Some may think this a trivial quality for a traveller to praise. Alas—so it occurred to me as I drowned my sleeve of Guinness—our age has conspired to make the slightest blush on the bloodless face of modern homogeneity a subject worth praising. And so praise it shall.

In earlier ages, the point of travelling was to be somewhere other than where you normally were and to have your brain respond accordingly. Sir Richard Burton did not keep in daily contact with his secretary while making his trip to Mecca. Fuss did not catch up to Dr. Livingstone. Sonnet Maughan did not call in from the South China Sea to check his voice mail. But nowadays—oh, dear—today we are somewhere else—alas, we are everywhere. We can almost always be mentally where we normally are (on a cell phone, watching television, fogged up on the Internet), wherever we geographically happen to be. As time marches on, differences among places diminish—McDonald's around every corner, a piece of fancy chocolate on every pillow. Such are the comforts of modern travel. An airport is an airport wherever it is. A seat is a seat. A hotel is a hotel. And while Newfoundland is not without such standard items, there's quality about the place that sets it apart, a rugged individuality that's apparent in everything from its wave-thundered coastline to the intonation of the residents.

IT WAS 500 YEARS AGO—ON JUN 24, 1497—THAT THE ITALIAN NAVIGATOR JOHN CABOT IS SAID TO HAVE FIRST CLAPPED EYES ON THESE ROCKY SHORES AFTER MORE THAN A MONTH AT SEA.

Located on the east coast of Newfoundland, the rocky shore of Cape Bonavista (above) may have been the spot where John Cabot landed in 1497.

first clapped eyes on these rocky shores after more than a month at sea. With letters patent from Henry VII of England, he had set sail on his ship, Matthew, from the English port of Bristol in early May in search of a western passage to Asia. The rigours of his voyage are apparent in the pensive declaration, "O, barmen virtus" (Oh, happy sight!), which legend has it he made when he arrived at the island.

Cape Bonavista—actually one of several places where Cabot may have first landed—is the site this year of the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of his arrival. But no anniversary celebration is needed to draw me to Newfoundland; its name alone is enough to beckon me to this rocky isle.

Meandering unburdened up the peninsula between Bonavista and Trinity Bays is a fine way to pass a couple of days. On my own recent motor trip, I did just that as I made my way from the Trans-Canada Highway north east up to the cape. As almost all visitors do, I spent a little time at the picturesque outpost of Trinity.

In the opinion of many Newfoundlanders, Trinity is a place too antique and too cute by half—an observation that says less about the pretty and entirely pleasant little coastal town than it does about many Newfoundlanders' healthy distrust of the quaint. Newfoundlanders are an apprehensive and pragmatic crowd and are not very sympathetic to quirkiness. Neither are the island's salt-laden gales, scourching blizzards and howling ice-storms. Never in my other 10-day period of my life have I seen quite so much aluminium siding. Things don't last for long on the coast of Newfoundland, and visitors who come expecting New England gables, wide sidewalks and whale-shaped weather vanes are sometimes disappointed. Newfoundlanders usually point them politely to Maine—or, perhaps, to Trinity.

Still, for many visitors, Trinity—with its whale-watching cruises and its fine old buildings—may be the highlight of a trip to Newfoundland. I liked it well enough, but it was not the high-light of my visit. As it happened, I had done my whale watching a few days before, farther up the coast.

About an hour's drive north of Gander, my observation post was a lonely crog of a road too Twillingate; not far from the light-house at Long Point. I discovered it, I have to admit, because, finding nothing official by the roadside, I designated the spot an unofficial rest area. It is not often that a man can stand, greatly elevated, look up and see a whale. But there it was. And there, at eye level with the circling gulls, belayed at by the foghorn over my shoulder, unworried about where I would go next, I spent an unexpected afternoon watching the glowing backs of a pod of humpback whales follow the schools of small fry out through the galloping white horses of Notre Dame Bay and back towards me.
again. Boys, sure that was something.

The finest old building I saw on my travels to Cape Bonavista was not in Trinity, but in the nearby village of King's Cove. A tiny place on the Bonavista Bay coast, King's Cove has, to my eye, one of the most beautiful homes in Newfoundland. I have no idea who lives there and would prefer not to find out. The place sits, unannounced by the reality of its inhabitants, in the Newfoundland I store up in my imagination: the fine old frame homesteads of John's; the little fishing cove on the northeasterly windswept cliffs of the coast, the lonely, wind-swept retreats on the unexplored, ocean-afforded shore between Joe Bart's Arm and Tilting; the northern coast of Fogo Island — places I visit briefly and dream of someday inhabiting, knowing, of course, that I never shall.

The house in King's Cove is freshly painted white with green trim. Its two frame stores and two brick chimneys sit above a sturdy, Welsh-looking rock foundation. It is big and solid but unassuming, impressive in the way that farmhouses sometimes are. Backed by mist-shrouded hills of steep, green-black space, it looks from its grand, lonely perch out to fishing boats and rocky point and surging ocean. On my way to Cape Bonavista, I stood on a little grassy head of land, looking across the moored dories of the cove to this fine residence. It was a cool, drizzly day, and I thought to myself that it would be bliss to be sitting in that house, watching the changing grey sea; to be sitting in that house with a fire, with a cup of tea, with a slab of fresh white bread and a долlop of Newfoundland's famous plumcake jam would be very heavenly.

The dream went unnoticed, as dreams frequently do. No one saw me yearning there in the rain for a hot cup of Typhoo with a splash of Caram-

ation — evaporated milk in tea bring a definitively Newfoundlandish and oddly comforting experience. No one took pity on me and waved me in to the birch-crackling, calender-heated kitchen for a mug-up and a piece of duncky ginger cake — although that is exactly the kind of thing that can often happen to visitors in Newfoundland. And so I got back in my rented car and continued on my way towards Cape Bonavista.

It is difficult to imagine a more formidable and awe-inspiring shoreline than the slate black cliffs with the cold green surf crashing against them. To the north and west, by some accounts, Cabot's grim and barren landfall. When I stood there on the bluffs — least there actually, for a hard-pressing northeast wind was doing its best to blow me away — the thought came to mind. The first was that I was not sure I had ever seen a more majestic and formidable view. The second was that, however storm-buffeted and tempestuous my foothold on Bonavista's slate black cliffs, I was very pleased that in the geographic scheme of things I was here and the North Atlantic was there. The sea, in an even moderately cranky mood, is nothing to be trifled with, and the closer you get to it, the more apparent this becomes. This was the mighty, heaving Atlantic, and I could not imagine how a boat out there could possibly not end up ripped from stem to keel by the tumult of waves and rock upon which I was safely gazing. And on which, from an altogether different and rather less secure point of view, John Cabot had perhaps zipped 500 years ago.

The town of Bonavista is surprisingly large. It has a grandness to it that I had not expected, a grandness of architecture and of civic boundary that speaks of the wealth of the cape's once thriving sealing, whaling and fishing industries. You can see the same finding grandeur in places like Harbour Grace on Cape Breton Island and St. John's on St. John's.

The good fortune that makes me a slightly privileged tourist here and that mitigates the drawbacks of Newfoundlanders see in a mainland upbringing. Mainlanders don't know a marmalade from a stouter, a tweed from a french, a yawn from a yawn — a knowledge that they can at least begin to address by spending more time with Newfoundlanders while visiting the island. For my part, I always try to drop in on Jill and Ray Guy, a couple possessing the only address that I actually enjoy writing on the envelopes of Christmas cards: The Ridge, Muggahe Harbour, Newfoundland.

When, late in the afternoon, I left my whole lookout near Twillingate, I drove back to Greens Bay and around the loop port, past Fredericton and St. John's and Twillingate Island, and on to Twillingate. I drove back to Greens Bay and around the loop road, past Fredericton and Carmanville and Ladle Cove to Muggahe Harbour, on the stretch of coast that Newfoundlanders call the "Steel Shoe." This is near the desolate bog where the plane carrying St. Frederick Bunting, the codcooker of inns, went down on a flight to England in 1941. Ray Guy is a writer, a local historian and, like many Newfoundlanders, a gifted storyteller. He has published two books of essays and reminiscences. From the Steel Shoe and Memory Is a Fickle Jade. He was born in Doting Cove, now Muggahe Harbour, in 1912. In 1943, Lieutenant R.W.Guy, R.N.V.R., married Miss Gillian Spooner, of St. John's, in Gurnell, England. The couple returned to New-

foundland, living in various spots. Now, 54 years later, the Guys
have retired to the Ridge. For me, no trip to New-
foundland is complete without a visit.

The welcome is always warmly made; the tea is always generously served. "I'm on my way round to Bonavista," I say, "Out to the cape."

Ray sits in his armchair, surrounded by his beloved books. "Are you now?"

"I've never been."

"Now, did you know that the old light in the lighthouse at Bonavista came from the famous Inishkea Rock in England?"

This is the kind of history that Ray enjoys revealing.

"I didn't," I say.

"Yes. Eighteen-eleven it was installed, I believe. And do you know what they say about the statue of John Cabot that stands in the picnic area there? About why it's all green?"

"No, sir, I don't."

"It's a favourite parking spot, you see, in the summertime – a favourite spot with the young people in Bonavista. And people say that poor John Cabot stands there, night after night, watch-
ing all the goings-on in the parked cars, and that over the years he has turned green with envy."

"Another piece of ginger cake?" asks Jill. "More tea?"

Such are late afternoons on the Ridge, on Magazine Harbour. And such are the surprising bits of infor-
mation that Newfoundlanders can provide to their lucky and attentive visitors.

Poor green John Cabot – green, perhaps, as ever I was as a child at the rail of a ship called the William Cunam. On my earliest trips to Newfound-
land for our family summer holidays, we crossed by sea from North Sydney, N.S., and I became well-
acquainted with the lower deck of the Cana-
dian National Railway ferry. While seaweek-
ness usually has little to commend itself, at least it draws the traveller's attention to the fact of travelling.

I have always enjoyed visiting the interior of Newfoundland. The rivers, the woods and the brooks cutting through the bogs of mountains are as much a part of the Newfoundland experience to me as is the coast. And so I have always had a soft spot for Grand Falls and for Gander.

In the days when Gander airport truly was the crossroads of the world – when planes making transatlantic journeys almost always stopped there to refuel – it was a local enthusiasm to go down to the airport when the flights landed. Citizens gazed at sleepy movie stars, rumpled politicians and other bleary-eyed celebrities whose stations in life crossed them to shatter incrementally back and forth between New York's Waldorf-Astoria hotel and the Savoy in London.

St. John's has replaced Gander as the New-
foundland airport that most travellers know today, and it was here that I landed when I arrived for my 10-day drive around the bay. Before setting off, however, I embarked, as I always do, on a brief programme of Newfoundlandisation. The first thing I do, whenever possible, is to stay at the Hotel Newfoundland. It is, in truth, not my favourite hotel. There are a half-dozen infinitely more charming bed-and-break-
fasts in St. John's. I stay at the Hotel Newfoundland for one reason, and one reason only. It is part of my period of adjust-
ment. I want to wake up to the view.

I have found that the view of St. John's harbour is best enjoyed early in the morning, in pyjamas and bathrobe, over a cup of cof-

experience. You might not see it again for days.

The next step in the adjustment process for me is a walk around Signal Hill. This, like the Eiffel Tower or Buckingham Palace, is one of those fix-
tures of a city that tourists often think is somehow overrated because it is so prominent. Indeed, there is nothing in St. John's that is half as promi-

St. John's, with its charming streets of frame houses (above), is the provincial capital and largest city on the island. But it is rural images (left) that really Newfoundland.
time-honoured confusion of private property and public right-of-way, anyone embarking on a walk to Signal Hill follows a trail that leads, at its earliest stages, directly past the front porch of someone's house. The occupant is often sitting there, having a cup of tea. He seems an altogether pleasant fellow, disposed, apparently, to taking a philosophical approach to the critical role his veranda plays in walking tours of St. John's. He is utterly untroubled by the steady tramp of passersby.

"Morning," I say.

"A fine day," he replies.

Such a friendly, rather odd encounter is usually enough to convince people that they are indeed in Newfoundland.Finally, before setting out from St. John's on my drive across the island, I made a point of visiting a downtown music store to pick up a few tapes of real Newfoundland music. Newfoundlanders take great pride in their music—jigs, reels and shanties through to the electrified contemporary sound of Celtic rock—and rightly so. This visit, for me, is always a necessity. I'll sooner head out onto the Trans-Canada without a muffler than embark on a motor trip across Newfoundland without half a dozen good tapes. Many of the local CBC radio shows have suffered drastically from cutbacks in recent years, and so the effect of listening to the CBC while driving in Newfoundland is, by and large, to feel that you are in Canada. Which isn't such a bad thing. It could be much worse, and, as a matter of fact, if you try adjusting the dial of your car radio, you will discover that, for the most part, it is. The effect of listening to Newfoundland's several private stations is to feel that you are absolutely on Main Street— that would be Main Street, U.S.A.

And so, with Fergy Duffy's A Reminiscence and All the Best—Folk Music of St. John's, Newfoundland, as well as several other tapes, on the passenger seat, and with my never-to-be-folded properly again road map wide open on the back seat, I checked my bags into the trunk, bade goodbye to the Hotel Newfoundland's always friendly, always helpful doormen, and, after the usual cold and informative fable starts that, as always, lead me into new and uncharted areas of St. John's suburbs, I headed out onto the highway.

Ten days later, I was back.

The motor trip around the bay, while altogether pleasant and, at times, downright spectacular in the taking, was, I admit, seen in its best upon reflection. You can skip the dull bits. Come are the dreadful cups of highway coffee, the wrong turns, the thin walls of motels, the slow, headstrong stretches of zero visibility, the boot rack behind lumber truck, the lapses of judgment—"I think I'll try the Cajun-style chicken deluxe ranchero, please"—in motor-inn dining rooms. And in their place is an edited travelogue of breathtaking vistas, thunderous seaside walks, wonderful long hours and delightful encounters. In other words, Newfoundland.

People who have no preconception of Newfoundland beyond the scenic jiggery of picturesque whirls and moored domes are inevitably stunned by the island's size. For one thing, it takes a long time—about 12 hours in good weather, an eternity in bad—to drive across it. For another, the Trans-Canada runs from St. John's to Gander to Grand Falls to Deer Lake to Corner Brook and on to Port aux Basques through a landscape that with some frequency demands that you stop the car, get out and take in the entire sweep of what lies before you. The green expanse of endless forests, the dramatic crags of cliff, the distant and enormous grey of the bays, the immensity of sky—these are what will stick in the mind of Newfoundland's highway travellers.

On this visit I had decided I would divide my time between a part of Newfoundland that I know reasonably well (more so as a non-Newfoundland author can claim to know any part of Newfoundland reasonably well) and a part that I had never seen before. The part that I had never seen — the west coast, from Gros Morne National Park up to L'Arme aux Meadows — was a surprise. It is stunningly beautiful, a beauty entirely distinct from the rest of the island: the tidal pools and rocks of the shore, the tablelands and sweeping hills of interior, the great long arms of the sea that, bracketed by high, dramatic cliffs, seem more like fjords than bays. The landscape has a vistas, Wagnerian majesty that seems mythic in quality. The Long Range Mountains rise to the east, and as I hiked through the trails of the Gros Morne park, I happened upon grazing moose and rushing streams and felt, as the valley stretched out before me, that I had stumbled into a wild, vast world.

On the peninsula's northern tip, L'Arme aux Meadows — an eerie and haunted spot where 1,000 years ago the Vikings landed — is even more Wagnerian. Gros Morne looks like a stage setting a director would choose for the Ring cycle. L'Arme aux Meadows — flatter, dullest, more cruel and somehow even more evocative — looks like the real thing, the sort of place a Norse god might choose to actually inhabit, and, for all we know, perhaps did.

I had a few days on the west coast. I could have happily spent weeks. But I had to start my way back — by way of the whales at Twillingate, the Guys at Mussagive Harbour, Trinity and King's Cove and Bonavista. And, at last, by way of a quiet moment at the Ship Inn. Which all in all, I conclude, is not a half-bad way to go.

Photography provided by Canada In Stock Inc.
Working Together for a Better Tomorrow

Society has changed its expectations of business a great deal in recent years. Imperial Oil's chairman discusses these changes and how modern corporations view their responsibility to society.

By Robert Peterson

A couple of months ago I visited the Alberta community of Ledcor. On the outskirts of Edmonton, to join in celebrating the 50th anniversary of Imperial Oil's legendary crude oil discovery there. It was a moving experience to stand on the very spot where the discovery that marked the real birth of the oil industry in Western Canada had been made and to recapture, for a few brief moments, something of the excitement that must have been felt by the crowd that had gathered to watch the Ledcor No. 1 well being brought into production.

What struck me, in reading old newspaper reports of those events of half a century ago, was the immense amount of respect and goodwill the discovery generated for all the individual participants and for Imperial as a company. Members of the Ledcor drilling crew found themselves overnight heroes, not only locally but throughout Alberta, and newspaper editorials praised Imperial for its perseverance in searching for oil in the face of many disappointments and for its role in creating potentially thousands of new jobs.

Reading those old accounts, I could not help reflecting on how times have changed. In some ways, perhaps, those were simpler days, when all that was really expected of business was that it provide steady, secure and preferably well-paying jobs for Canada's growing workforce. Those were the days when, if you had a good job and "kept your nose clean," as the saying went, you could reasonably expect to keep that job - or progressively better ones with the same company - for most of your working life.

How different things are today. For a start, very few business people - let alone companies - are hailed as public heroes any more. And although most Canadians still consider job creation a priority, these days they have come to expect a lot more from business than providing employment. They also look to companies to play a major role in improving the social, cultural and economic expectations of the community at large.

Society's list of wants is a long one. It wants business to do more to safeguard the environment; to provide more protection for the consumer; to increase job satisfaction and enhance the workplace; to eliminate racial and sexual discrimination, ensuring equal opportunity for all; and to improve occupational health and safety. And, of course, it wants business to conduct itself in accordance with the highest ethical standards. In short, society is telling business that it wants it to play its part in upgrading the quality of life in this country.

It may sound as if society is asking a lot of business, and, indeed, it is. But, given the pivotal place that business occupies in the world today, these expectations are not unreasonable. The fact is that during the last half-century, business - the free-enterprise kind we have come to know in this country - has become such a dominant institution in western society that, even if it wanted to, it could not escape a large measure of responsibility to society. There was a time, not that long ago, when such respected economists as Milton Friedman maintained that the only business of business was business and that it should stick to what it was supposed to do, create wealth and generate profit. Today, however, many people would regard that as a narrow and outdated concept.

I think I can appreciate both these points of view. On one hand, as a businessman, I believe my prime responsibility is to ensure the long-term health of the company for which I work. That responsibility includes creating wealth and generating profits. On the other hand, I recognize that business exists with the consent of the society in which it functions.

If a corporation is to survive and prosper, it must meet the contemporary expectations of society. Businesspeople have come to understand that. They recognize that to keep their franchise they have to do a lot of things that fall outside the traditional interpretation of "business" activities, but which, nevertheless, are very much in the interests of the corporation as a whole.

So what precisely is a corporation's responsibility to society? Oh, to put it in more specific terms, what responsibilities does Imperial Oil, as one of the nation's biggest companies, have to Canadians at large? The nature of these responsibilities and how exactly, as a company, we can best meet them are subjects to which Imperial's directors and management have devoted considerable thought. I will offer you a few of my own thoughts on these subjects, with the caveat that I don't pretend for a moment to have all the answers.

It seems to me that a corporation's primary responsibility to society - Imperial's primary responsibility to Canadian society, if you like - is to be successful. If a corporation is not successful, it won't survive in the long run, and if it doesn't survive, it can't generate wealth, provide jobs or contribute to society in any shape or form.
There is a very strong sense of community spirit in Canada and a deeply entrenched desire among Canadians in all walks of life to help their less fortunate neighbours. Community spirit in Canada and a deeply entrenched desire among Canadians in all walks of life to help their less fortunate neighbours community spirit in Canada and a deeply entrenched desire among Canadians in all walks of life to help their less fortunate neighbours. This was certainly the case when I was growing up in small-town Saskatchewan— you took it for granted that you had a responsibility to help your disadvantaged neighbours. Today, that spirit of community and the spirit of helping others is an integral part of Canadian identity, held true to this traditional spirit of caring.

One thing that the corporate sector is insisting on more and more in its philanthropic activities is accountability. There is no reason, in my view, why the value of a contribution a company makes to charity should not be as carefully scrutinized as any other item of corporate expenditure. In fact, a corporation owes it to its shareholders to ensure that it spends its contributions dollars as wisely as it does its own money. This area of accountability is going to assume increasing importance as the pressure on the corporate sector to support various causes mounts over the coming years.

I THINK IT IS GENERALLY AGREED THAT THE CREATION OF WEALTH IS ESSENTIAL TO THE CONTINUOUS GROWTH OF SOCIETY. IN CANADA, AS IN MOST OTHER DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, WE HAVE COME TO REGARD A MARKET-ORIENTED ECONOMY AS THE MOST EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE MEANS OF GENERATING WEALTH AND THE BASIS FOR DECISION-MAKING IN SUCH AREAS AS INVESTMENT, DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION. DESPITE THEIR SHORTCOMINGS, MARKET-FREE MARKETS SEEM TO WORK PRETTY WELL AT TIMES.

Today, the choices of the individual are very much the choices of society. We are very much responsible for those choices and for the way we live our lives. There is no place in society for a business that is not contributing to the betterment of society. We are very much responsible for the way we live our lives. There is no place in society for a business that is not contributing to the betterment of society. We are very much responsible for the way we live our lives. There is no place in society for a business that is not contributing to the betterment of society. We are very much responsible for the way we live our lives. There is no place in society for a business that is not contributing to the betterment of society.
Anny Scoones
Advocate for Orphans

The first orphanage, Anny Scoones remembers was near her childhood home in Saint John, New Brunswick. The year was 1943. The six-year-old daughter of two of Canada’s most renowned war artists was fascinated by the children living in the crumbling brick building. “Imagine, they’re orphans. They have no one,” she recalls thinking. And while her parents, Molly Lamb Bobak and Bruno Bobak, entertained the governor general, who came to their home to buy their art, Anny could often be found either riding her beloved horse, Mow, or building an orphanage in her bedroom for her 12 bug-eyed trolls. Each had its own bed, a box to keep its clothes in, a hairbrush and a pair of shoes.

As she grew older, Anny never lost the urge to nurture. Her mother believes she inherited this compassionate nature from her maternal grandmother, Mary Williams, with whom she spent summers on Galiano, one of British Columbia’s Gulf Islands, and who, over the years, raised more than a dozen lost children, from runaways to youngsters with alcoholic parents. “The two of them were like twins, spiritually and emotionally connected,” says Molly Lamb Bobak.

Anny became a show jumper, attended the University of Victoria, where she earned a teaching degree, and married John Scoones, a road-building contractor. She worked as a substitute teacher at various schools in Victoria, and then, at the age of 34, having separated amicably from her husband, Anny bought a farm in North Saanich, on Vancouver Island, and opened a riding school, the Maple Stump Riding Club.

It was here, in 1994, that Anny met Nona Novik, a translator from Minsk, the capital of Belarus, one of the poorest countries of the former Soviet Union. Just across its southern border with Ukraine lies the city of Chernobyl, the site, in 1986, of the world’s worst nuclear disaster. Experts say Chernobyl and the surrounding region — including parts of Belarus — will be contaminated for the next 100,000 years. The incidence of some types of cancer has risen dramatically. In the Chernobyl region, thyroid cancer in children, for example, increased about 100 times during the eight years following the catastrophe.

Novik, an English teacher at Minsk’s Linguistic University, had come to Canada with a group of orphaned orphans from Belarus. Anny read about the children’s visit in the paper and invited them to her farm. The experience reinforced Anny’s old obsession with orphans. From Novik, she learned that there were 60 orphanages in Belarus, and although not all the children living in them had been orphaned as a result of the Chernobyl disaster, they were all victims of the contamination it left.

In 1995, at Novik’s invitation, Anny travelled to Belarus, where she visited Orphanage Number Seven. The largest orphanage in the country, it is situated in a suburb of Minsk, surrounded by the hollow frames of defunct industrial plants.

“Anny learnt a great deal in one short visit from these children who have no one.” “They share everything, and they are bonded only to one another,” she says. Despite this, however, Anny did form a special bond with a boy called Dima.

When she took a photograph, he kept so that she would be able to recognize him in the picture.

Anny returned to Canada and established the Chika Society, a registered non-profit charity to aid Eastern European orphans. Chika is Russian for seagull, Anny explains. “We scavenge for goods to help the children.” In January 1997, Anny visited Orphanage Number Seven again, this time taking winter clothing, medical essentials, toys, toothpaste and school and art supplies that had been donated by residents in her community. When she asked the children to paint or draw a picture that reflected their lives, most drew the dreary brick front of the orphanage. But there were exceptions, like Vanya, 14, who has an impressive grin and worked all day painting a jar of flowers, and Donna, who hadn’t for-
The Town that Oil Built

The remote subarctic community of Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories grew up around a 1920 oil discovery. Today, oil is still being produced there and the community is thriving.

BY TED BOWER

The isolated community of Norman Wells, a town of about 800 souls located on the north bank of the Mackenzie, Canada's longest river, just below the Arctic Circle and nearly 700 kilometres northwest of Yellowknife, has several claims to fame. It is the site of the most northerly producing oilfield in Canada and was the first settlement in the Northwest Territories to be established entirely as a result of nonrenewable resource development.

Today, from their waterfront homes in Norman Wells, Cecilia Tourangeau and Ed Hodgson, mother and son, look out on the broad Mackenzie where their family barely escaped catastrophe nearly 60 years ago. Hodgson is 65 years old and Métis. He has spent 34 years working for Imperial Oil in a variety of jobs around Norman Wells and is still associated with the company, working as captain of a boat that ferries company employees to and from local work sites during the summer. Tourangeau, now 88, is Slavey (a Dene people) and was born at Fort Good Hope, N.W.T., farther down the river towards the Beaufort Sea. Orphaned as a young child, she was brought up in a convent school in Fort Providence, N.W.T.

At the age of 20, Tourangeau married Herbert Hodgson, a river man who transported freight and geological survey parties on the Mackenzie and Great Bear Rivers. The couple settled near Fort Franklin, N.W.T.

In October 1938, when the Norman Wells chapter of their life began, they had six children. By then, Imperial had been intermittently producing oil at Norman Wells for 18 years—an exploration team headed by a 23-year-old geologist, Ted Link, had made a major discovery there in 1920.

A few kilometres upstream from Norman Wells, at a place called Bluefish, an old wooden drilling rig stood on the site of an abandoned exploration well. Herbert had a contract to dismantle it. In preparation for this task, he loaded his family, winter supplies and six staked dogs on a large wooden boat at Fort Norman, a few kilometres upstream from Bluefish.

At first things went well, but then disaster struck. The shallow, slow-flowing Mackenzie—nearly five kilometres wide at that point—was starting to ice up. As the boat approached Bluefish, its motor froze. Being too big and too heavy to paddle, the craft carrying the eight Hodgsons and their dogs drifted downriver, past Bluefish, eventually coming to rest on some ice.

Days passed. The cold intensified. The family

The Mackenzie (far left) plays a key role in the Norman Wells operation. Ed Hodgson (left), who worked for Imperial for 34 years, currently captains a ferry for employees.
started using their boat for ice transport. Blocks of ice began to bunch up against what remained of the boat. "We prayed we wouldn't drown," Ed remembers. Then, as the ice blocks were freezing together, his father took the dogs and made his way over the ice to shore. He hiked back to Bluefish, got a tent, dog harness and a sled and returned to rescue his family.

The following year, with the rig dismantled, the Hodgson's moved to Norman Wells, living, as most people then did, in a tent. Soon, with a wringer washer in her tent, Cecilia established Norman Wells's first commercial laundry. Her clients were half-dressed Imperial employees. Her tariffs: 10 cents for a pair of socks, 25 cents for a shirt – 50 cents if ironed. Eddie acted as delivery boy. He was, as recalled recently, a life of almost unbelievable remembrance. "We were isolated to a degree that is almost impossible to imagine today. The only way in and out was on the river or, very occasionally, by bush plane. One scarcely ever saw a new face."

But the Second World War was to change all that in a hurry. Fuel shipped to Alaska was vulnerable to Japanese attack, and the U.S. government initiated the Canol project, which would involve building a pipeline from Norman Wells westward over the mountains to a refinery that would be built in Whitehorse. Fortunes of supplies, several thousand civilians and 50,000 U.S. soldiers – some of whom had never seen snow before – began streaming into the tiny settlement in 1942. Imperial was contracted to expand its producing wells from four to 64; the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was in charge of pipeline construction. Conditions were brutal. The project was completed in 1944 at a cost estimated at $135 million.

Only one million barrels of Norman Wells crude oil were shipped to Whitehorse before the project was dropped as quickly as it had started. The war in the Pacific was all but won and therefore the need for fuel supplies had subsided. The soldiers left. Work camps closed. Vehicles and supplies were abandoned on the spot (some survive to this day). The pipeline was declared surplus, and most of Imperial's new wells were shut down.

It seemed that the boom times may have gone for ever. For the next four decades, Norman Wells was to remain a relatively small operation, although an important northern enterprise. But the early 1980s were to bring an expansion that dwarfed even the Canol project. Some $500 million was invested by Imperial in a huge extension of the Norman Wells operation, which saw the drilling of scores of new wells and the construction of six production islands in the Mackenzie. As well, a pipeline was built to Alberta by Interprovincial Pipe Line Inc. Since the expansion, 130 million barrels of top-quality, sweet crude oil have flowed from Norman Wells to southern markets.

In the meantime, fate had dealt a cruel blow to the Hodgson family. Herbert had died in a hunting accident in 1943, leaving his wife with eight children. She had supported them by working as a housekeeper at the nursing station. Ed was going on 12 and couldn't, as he says, spell his own name. After the end of the war, in 1946, his mother married Pan Toungmaaq, who was a woodcutter for the Distributor, a wood-burning paddle wheeler on the Mackenzie. The couple went on to have six children. Later, Par worked at Imperial's barrel plant, where oil was poured into barrels and loaded onto barges.

When Ed was 15 he applied to the manager of the oilfield, Ronald MacKinnon, for a job. A Scot who wore white breeches by day and reportedly purple pyjamas by night, MacKinnon was legendary for making solo doped and snowshoe trips to Edmonton. He would cover the 2,000 kilometres in 45 days and then catch a train to Toronto. MacKinnon hired young Ed as a dishwasher at 50 cents an hour. Two years later Ed was diag- nosed with tuberculosis. There followed two, three-and-a-half-year stints in hospital in Edmonton and
Fort Simpson, N.W.T. Between hospital stays, Ed managed to gain an education and acquire his welding papers. In 1956, after beating the disease, he rejoined Imperial at Norman Wells, where he worked as a toolpush, pipelifter, refinery worker and, finally, a field supervisor, a position he held for 23 years. "I've had a good career with the company," he says as he looks towards the river. "And this has been a good place to live."

In Norman Wells today there stands a pretty white building that once served as the officers' mess at Canol headquarters, just across the river. In 1956, Imperial moved it into town, putting an identical hall next to it. The halls serve as churches, one interdenominational Protestant and the other Roman Catholic. Ed's wife, Minnie, is an active member of the Catholic church and regularly lends services.

Next door is the Norman Wells Historical Centre. It, too, came from Camp Canol, where it had been a warehouse. Moved into town by the Historical Society, the museum also doubles as the local tourist information office. It is managed by Warren Schnurrle, who, like many people in Norman Wells, wears several hats — including those of art gallery owner and justice of the peace.

Nearby are the town's sleek municipal offices, including one occupied by Alec Simpson, who has served as town manager since 1994. Simpson first visited the North as a 19-year-old forklift operator on a Mackenzie paddle wheeler. It would be 28 years before he returned. In the interval he married in Alberta, raised a family and served as administrator of several Alberta municipalities, both rural and urban. Says Simpson: "When I arrived here I was astonished that a community of less than 800 people could support such a range of services. We have a fitness centre, a two-sheet curling rink, an enclosed swimming pool, a library and a first-class school. Our total operating budget this year is $4.5 million, and our general debt is only $645,000." In 1997 Imperial's tax contribution to the town will total $1.25 million.

One of the nice touches to the municipal décor is the fact that the street names and many house numbers are imprinted on silhouettes of the common raven, the ubiquitous bird of the North. The silhouettes, of varying design, are the work of Rick Mayers, a local pilot and craftsman who has also adorned the community with four footbridges, three gazebos, a boardwalk and a covered 15-metre picnic table — all fashioned from salvaged logs.

It's said that if you really want to know what's going on in Norman Wells, you talk to Jerry Loomis, a former Imperial employee who owns six businesses over the last 30 years and is currently serving his second term as chair of the Labour Standards Board of the Northwest Territories government. His wife, Monica, run a local grocery store and is involved with assorted other ventures, including a commercial greenhouse built partly with windows salvaged from old Canol buildings. Summers here are short but sunny and hot (so hot that many homes have air conditioners), and the Loomis greenhouse annually produces around 10,000 kilograms of tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers. The tomatoes sell for $2.50 a kilogram — the air freight alone on tomatoes shipped from Edmonton is $2.30 a kilogram.

Loomis's current pet project is a research project he is undertaking with the assistance of the University of Guelph in Ontario, the University of Alberta in Edmonton and the N.W.T. government that will examine the feasibility of growing food in sealed buildings at high latitudes. Grown under high-pressure sodium lamps in a heavily insulated, gas-heated, windowless building, the plants will be fed and watered by computer-controlled machines. Loomis is convinced that though such technology, vegetables can be grown for much of the year in the North.
Norman Wells is located near the centre of the Suhra region, which comprises a stunningly beautiful landscape of 260,000 square kilometres, more than twice the area of Nova Scotia. New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island combined. Upstream of Norman Wells, at the junction of the Mackenzie and Great Bear Rivers, lies the ancient fur-trading community of Tsihta, formerly Fort Norman. To the east, on a scenic arm of Great Bear Lake, is the community of Deline, formerly Fort Franklin. It was near here that the Acadian explorer Sir John Franklin camped in the 1820s; the remains of his fort can still be seen. Downstream from Norman Wells, past the limestone cliffs of the Ramparts, is Fort Good Hope, the oldest fur-trading post in the lower Mackenzie Valley. At one time, its trade links extended north to Herschel Island in the Beaufort Sea and west to what was at the time Russian Alaska. Established in 1862, Colville Lake, still farther north, is the Suhra’s newest community.

Despite its beauty, the Suhra region is visited by relatively few Canadians—it has been estimated that people from Western Europe and Asia account for up to 70 percent of the region’s tourists. “Industry visitors from all over the world come to our operation here,” says Rick Luckasavitch, Imperial’s technical leader at Norman Wells, and “they are knocked out by the region’s scenery and the wildlife.” In season, big-game hunters from many countries stream through Norman Wells’s handsome new airport, which is just a few hours’ flying time from Edmonton. “Overseas visitors seem far more interested in this frontier than southern Canadians,” says Luckasavitch dejectedly. “I guess they just haven’t heard about the trout in Great Bear Lake.”

Everybody pays attention to spring break-up on the Mackenzie, that welcome moment in May when the warmer waters to the south send ice blocks the size of railcars crashing and churning northward past Norman Wells. Most people play break-up sweepstakes, guessing the date and even the time of the big event. The best guesses can yield a prize as generous as an in-line ticket.

For Imperial, spring break-up is a stringent annual test of the strength of its six production islands in the river. After the break-up, the islands—which serve as sites for the oil wells—undergo rigorous examination; for 12 years, their design has proved equal to the strain. However, the islands do not emerge unscathed. Depending on the severity of break-up, repairs and reinforcement can cost between $100,000 and $1 million each year.

The Norman Wells production team currently manages a total of 313 wells. Continually juggling a variety of interrelated factors to achieve optimum production, the team is always looking for new ways to produce more oil more cheaply. The Norman Wells oilfield today accounts for close to a third of Imperial’s total production of conventional crude oil. Production peaked at 560,000 barrels a day in July of 1992, declining to an average of 290,000 barrels a day in 1996. Both figures are higher than estimates made during the expansion suggested they would be. Luckasavitch expects that by 2020 another 100 million barrels of oil and natural gas liquids will have been recovered from this historic field. The producing zone is an astonishing 110 metres thick and covers 30 square kilometres in area, most of which lies beneath the Mackenzie. (The Crown retains a third of the overall net profits plus five percent of Imperial’s net profits.)

In the drive to maintain production and lower costs, nine new wells were drilled between August 1995 and September 1996 and more are scheduled for 1997. “This could be the busiest year since the expansion,” says area manager Gordon Deets, who has been with Imperial for 28 years. And there’s talk that there will be more seismic work and drilling closer to 2000. Drilling is contracted to Shebran Drilling, a company established by Imperial and the aboriginal community during the expansion of the 1980s. The drilling crew of about 200 people is predominantly aboriginal.

Every barrel of oil produced at Norman Wells now flows south by pipeline to Alberta. The 75-year-old Norman Wells refinery closed last June and is being dismantled. Originally a primitive unit made on the spot from steel tubing and an assortment of pipe fittings, the refinery was upgraded over the years and in recent times processed 3,000 barrels of crude oil a day, providing fuel for almost everything mechanical that moved in the western Arctic. For years, the refinery’s chief customer had been the territorial government, which bought about 60 percent of its output. Last year, however, the government called for alternative proposals and ultimately awarded the contract to Imperial’s Stathcona refinery near Edmonton. It proved more feasible to meet market needs from Edmonton rather than from Norman Wells. “With no other major potential customer, we had no choice but to close down,” says Deets. In all, the closure and cleanup of the refinery could cost up to $10 million. Once cleared, the site will revert to the Crown and be used for other industrial purposes.

This year will be the first full year in which activities at Imperial’s Norman Wells operation have been conducted by a wholly resident workforce. For years, many employees worked long shifts for two weeks at a time, living at an on-site camp, and then returned to their homes in the south for two weeks. Now, however, all employees are permanent residents of the area. “This is much better,” says Deets. “Today employees are actually part of the community, not just the operation.” For example, Darrell Becker, who managed the refinery prior to its closure, is currently a town councillor. Says Deets: “Norman Wells has become a very good place to come to work and raise families.”

Twenty-six percent of Imperial’s Norman Wells workforce is aboriginal, and Deets is determined to see the figure go higher. Under the company’s northern development programme, the workforce includes four to six training positions, which are filled by aboriginal people. They receive on-the-job training for two years, after which they are eligible for permanent full-time jobs. The company also has scholarship programmes for aboriginal students. Deets notes that more and more aboriginal young people are completing high school and postsecondary training that can lead to positions in northern industry.

What of the future? No oilfield lasts for ever, and there must come a time when even the Norman Wells field will run out of crude oil. Imperial’s geologists estimate that could happen around the year 2020. By then the field will have been in production for a century. But who knows? Geology is, at best, an uncertain science, and it is not beyond the realm of possibility that more oil will be found in the area.

And even when the oil does eventually run out, it is unlikely that Norman Wells, the town that was born of an oil discovery, will disappear. In recent years, tourism in the area has developed into a burgeoning industry, and with interest in the North increasing, many predict that the Suhra region could be on the verge of a tourist boom.

And then, of course, there are always Jerry Loomis’s solar vegetables. One way or another, Norman Wells is likely to be around for at least another century.
Healing Place

In 1980, Vancouver Island's Providence Farm is committed to making life better for people with a broad range of mental and physical difficulties.

BY WAYNE SCHMALZ

I am driving along a secondary road on the east coast of Vancouver Island in what is known as the Cowichan Valley. As I take in the splendid beauty of the area, I come across a sign with the name Providence Farm written in bold letters. Beneath is a list of associations and activities. Tsaawounis Innispannoos and the St. Ann's Garden Club and Greenway Therapeutic Work Programme among them.

I decide to investigate. After passing through the gate, I follow a narrow road past a meadow where freshly cut hay lies in bales and an open picnic area that sports a covered stage. Finally, I come to a large building that is more imposing and formal than anything I have seen on a farm before. Behind it, nestled between a high ridge and Mount Tsaawaul, is a complex of smaller buildings: sheds, greenhouses, barns and gardens. Here and there people move with quiet deliberation, carrying potted plants, pushing wheelbarrows or loading horses with young riders building in an unlikely to the scene. Nearby, a dozen or so people are brushing over picking weeds, while in the distance, water sprinklers tap out a gentle, hypnotic tattoo in the warm morning sun.

Providence Farm, it turns out, is unusual in many respects. Comprising more than 100 hectares, it's considerably larger than most farms in this part of British Columbia. And its owners are not traditional farmers, but the Sisters of St. Ann, an order of nuns founded in 1850 in Quebec. Fourteen years later, several of the order moved to Vancouver Island, acquired land and established St. Ann's school. After nearly a century, a local parish opened its own school, St. Ann's, next to the Duncan school, dispossessing the need for St. Ann's school, which closed in 1984. Many of the nuns taught at the Duncan school, and eventually the nuns moved off their property into a house in town. For nearly a decade, the property was vacant, and then in 1980, the Sisters of St. Ann found out they considered the perfect use for it. A number of local professionals in the social service area suggested they buy it together and lease the property, running it as a nonprofit farm dedicated to providing services and programmes to people with disabilities whose needs were not being met elsewhere in the community. And thus the Cowichan Valley Providence Community Association and Providence Farm were born.

The seven programmes the organization operates directly include: one in which adults with severe mental disabilities come to the farm for a few hours on Friday afternoons to work in the garden or fields, do carpentry, or work in the stables; another programme for the St. Ann's Garden Club, where seniors with Alzheimer's disease, depression, or other debilitating conditions work in a garden designed specifically with them in mind. And then there is Greenways, a therapeutic work programme that provides employment in various areas connected with the operation of a garden, from horticulture to horticulture to people with a history of psychiatric problems. As well, the association rents facilities and land to a host of organizations whose objectives are in keeping with Providence Farm's mandates. One such group is the Cowichan Therapeutic Riding Association, which helps people with multiple disabilities improve their balance, coordination and communication skills. Also on the grounds is the Cowichan Valley Alternative School, which was set up to meet the needs of students who have difficulty coping in traditional schools. All in all, about 600 people, including volunteers, come to the farm each week to participate in programmes. Neither the staff nor those taking part in the programmes live at the farm.

Some years later I return to Providence Farm. I want to see how it has progressed to the present day, what it has added, and the principles that have been maintained over the years. I am impressed by the number of people who visit the farm and the positive response they receive. It seems to be a place where people feel welcome and valued.

In conclusion, Providence Farm has shown that by providing a safe and nurturing environment, people with disabilities can achieve meaningful goals and lead fulfilling lives. The farm has become a model for other similar organizations, and it is a testament to the importance of inclusivity and community support.
emphasis on skill training. The programme, she says, is a tool that helps participants gain the skills they need to go on to find opportunities in other areas. They learn how to cope with work and, more importantly, that they can be successful in it. Skill training, however, certainly receives consideration. As much as possible, says Winter, people are given jobs that will help them hone their abilities and provide them with experience and training in areas in which they hope to work.

As we talk, a man called Frank enters her office. One of 32 people currently participating in Greenways, Frank hopes to become a computer programmer, and he spends his time on the computer, designing spreadsheets, signs and journal forms, creating an inventory of the farm's plants and balancing Greenways' books. Like others in the programme, Frank has been referred by the Duncan Mental Health Centre, whose responsibility is to direct people to the programme, and which last year contributed $157,000 towards Providence Farm's overall budget. After

day they put me into a pine box. But when I got here I found, to my amazement, that there was nothing I could possibly be afraid of. This place has given me grounding. I'm more confident around people. I can actually go into a mall occasionally. I never used to be able to do that."

Many for whom the programme was not successful, says Winter, had additional problems such as drug and alcohol addictions, which severely impaired the programme's chances of success.

The idea for Providence Farm began in the 1970s; Sister Frieda, who was a social worker at the time, says that in the years following the closure of St. Ann's school, she tried to establish an alternative school for children who weren't doing well in the traditional school system. But every time she set up the school, local citizens raised objections to it being located in their neighborhood. Jack Hutton, then director of the Duncan Mental Health Centre, was encountering similar difficulties in his attempts to establish services for people with mental illnesses. Whenever the two talked, one question always came up: what was happening at the old school site?

The two then considered the idea of using the space as a potential community association. A registered society with a board of 12 people and 30 employees, the association is obliged by its 1980 leasing agreement to demonstrate solidarity with people in need, to be cooperative rather than competitive in approach and to be ecologically sensitive in its use of the land.

What extent can Providence Farm help them achieve those dreams? There is no hard data on how many Greenways participants achieve their goals, says Paul Charen, director of the Duncan Mental Health Centre. "Anecdotal evidence and reports from relatives, however, suggests that Greenways is an invaluable rehabilitation programme."

The programme conducted during the last 10 years by the Greenways programme supports its own conviction that it is making a marked difference to the lives of those it serves. According to the survey, the programme has been beneficial for two-thirds of the people who have taken part in it. Their coping skills improved, their confidence and self-esteem increased, and their hospital stays were reduced. "Before I came here I was a floor mat," says Terri. "People walked all over me. I couldn't stand up for myself. I used to move every three to six months trying, trying, trying to escape people. I thought the only day I'd stop being nuts was the
Today we'll be transplanting peppers from the 10-centimetre pots in which they were seeded to four-and-a-half-litre pots, where they will grow to full height. Kelly demonstrates what to do, and I give it a try. I put some soil in the bottom of the pot, tip the pepper out of the pot, place it in the pot and then top up the pot with more soil. "Is this right?" I ask Kelly. Kelly folds up her white cane. "Dass it hew," she says. She feels carefully around the plant and gives me instructions on how to do it better next time: "Don't put too much dirt or the water will run out."

When a sufficient number of plants have been transplanted, the plants are loaded onto a trailer and pulled outside, where Virginia waters them. Then Carmen pushes them into the greenhouse and places them in tightly packed rows. They'll thrive in this moist, warm atmosphere, and when they're ready, they'll be sold fresh to the public or dried, bagged and frozen for later sale.

The day ends at noon for several people working in the headboard house, so after lunch I stroll over to St. Ann's Garden. It is enclosed by a high wooden fence to help the elderly people working there feel safe and to keep them from wondering around and giving them an opportunity to come out of their homes for one day a week and engage in some physical work, the St. Ann's Garden Club hopes to stimulate their senses and improve their mental well-being. As I wander along the concrete path that curves its way through raised flower beds, I come upon John and Louis, who are learning the rudiments of weeding from Janis Freuer, coordinator of St. Ann's Garden Club. Sliding their hands through the lush green growth, trying to make sure they're pulling a weed, not a transplant, they reminisce about the glorious songs and entertainers from bygone days. Louis whistles cheerfully, moving his body in rhythm with the tune, and then suddenly the words are there in his mouth, and he launches into a rousing rendition of "Madamoiselle from Armentieres." When the song ends he laughs heartily, seemingly simulations, and makes light of the fact that they worked through most of the morning’s tasks. John and Fort pointed out that the job was a means of making some spending money for school; for them, it meant they'd be able to feed and clothe their families that year.

The summer after high school I worked at the local hospital. I spent the morning and part of the afternoon cleaning hospital rooms and the last part of the day either washing and making up the beds of patients who had left the hospital or, as it was euphemistically termed, "doing the dishes." These dishes – or bedpans, to be blunt – were stacked in a small room with a double sink and lots of hot water, and the person who had the smallest number of beds to deal with would be assigned the task of washing dishes. I received a portion of the wages for summer working on the chronic floor, from which departures were rare – and very sad – event; I passed quite a number of hours in that little room. My father, who had helped me secure this gum of a job, told me it was "character building."

The summer of 1976 I joined the service of the government, working as a customs officer at Toronto International Airport. This was an exciting new world I'd entered, watching out for smugglers and, particularly (because of the Olympics that were being held in Canada that summer), terrorists. We students learned about proper, illegal drugs and health issues in foreign lands. During the two summers I worked for Canada Customs, a small box was being packed, and we had to refer the health department any visitors from the few remaining countries where cases had been reported. By the time I returned with Canada Customs ended, there had been no reported cases for some time, and the disease was considered to have been conquered. I felt I had witnessed history in the making.

Exciting as it often was, the job was also a sad and sometimes difficult one. As customs officers, it was our responsibility to refer people to immigration who might be trying to enter the country illegally. Many such people had spent everything they had and more for the flight to Canada and the chance to make it to the country and build a better life. What right, I wondered, had I to dash that chance?

My next summer experience was with Environment Ontario and involved taking the department's display on sewage treatment to various exhibitions in the province. My two companions and I had to wear spiffy green uniforms and talk eloquently to people about such matters as sewage plants and septic tanks. Despite the subject matter, however, it was an interesting job and was enormously helpful in increasing my awareness of environmental matters.

It was the federal Ministry of the Solicitor General that provided me with my final summer job: a fellow student and I were hired to supervise various projects throughout Ontario. For the most part they involved groups of students working on research and prevention activities. A few projects were based in penitentiaries and involved more senior students, who helped conduct research. There were projects in communities large and small across the province, and the job entailed visiting each one twice during the summer. I flew in small planes to get to places like Atikokan and Fort Frances and got to know my province in a way I never otherwise would have. I walked the halls of Kingston Penitentiary, and my eyes were opened.

It is strange how one's summer jobs linger in the memory. In retrospect, it seems to me that lasting value lies not so much in the skills they teach but in the valuable transition they provide to adulthood. For one embarking on a career in magazine journalism, the opportunity to experience other worlds and meet a cross section of people was, of course, invaluable. But I learn much more about tolerance, about people and what it was that I wanted in life – and that is a very important lesson. Of all... Sarah Landay.