

Thoughts on Being From Gander

It began with a dream.
And like so many dreamers before us
they called us crazy,
paving the great outdoors
for airplanes that might never come.
But with the world suddenly at war, they came.

They came in their thousands
to this secret place of romance and adventure.
Here, with the fate of the free world in our hands,
we did things no one had done before.
There was no impossible, just how and how soon.
We worked day and night
in bitter cold and searing heat
and we made the dream come true.
And when peace returned,
the world was a very different place for our having dreamed.

And in this new world we thrived, a cosmopolitan oasis
in the middle of nowhere and in the middle of everywhere.
We were Hollywood and New York.
We were London and Paris and Little Berlin.
We wore business suits and burkhas, fedoras and turbans.
Mini-skirts were high fashion and (God help us) plaid pants.

A very young Snook once called us
the suburb of a city that doesn't exist.
He understood that our city was out there,
the whole wide world that so few got to see.
But we saw it, lived it, breathed it every day.
It was our job to keep the world turning as it should.

From royalty to refugees, we welcomed the movers and shakers,
the people who defined us and those who would shape our future.
We offered them care and comfort and sent them safely on their way:
the Queen of England, the King of Rock and Roll,
Marilyn and the Chairman of the Board.
America met the Beatles on Ed Sullivan;
but to get there, they had to come here first, like everyone else,
rich and poor, black and white, east and west.

Like Bogart's Casablanca, we asked only
that you park your prejudice on the tarmac.
Don't expect us to hate your enemies;
chances are, they're already our friends.
While others were conjuring up new ways to kill Castro,
our children were chasing him down a hill laughing.
Here alone, the Iron Curtain was drawn back
and the price of fine Vodka was a bottle of Jack.

And when all the planes were forced from the sky,
they lined up to be with us, because they knew that's what we do.
Out there they mourned and cursed and blamed hatred,
while here we rejoiced in new friendships we'd made
because that's who we are, that's why we're here,
to be a shining beacon bringing the world ever closer,
celebrating the things that make us different
and the things that make us the same.

The world knows our name,
shares our dream and savours the fruits of our labour.
We found the Bismarck and flew faster than sound.
We broke records and broke the rules
that said this is how you should do it
because that's how it's always been done.
We reached for the stars and were humbled
to be honoured on Star Trek and Mars.
We built a town where the very streets we walk
tell the stories of those who gave the world wings,
who taught us to fly and to dream of greater things
than our parents had known.

And so it falls to us to dream new dreams of our own,
to teach our children to colour outside the lines
until they move the lines to better places,
to teach them that crazy is okay,
that the future is theirs to create,
that they really can change the world, just as we did,
if only they believe in their dreams.