

## Rant and roar, like a true Newfoundlander

Brian L. Deady

There I was, a new intern on the medical ward of the old Halifax Infirmary, the ink barely dry on my medical diploma, not yet acquainted with the city or the hospital (still ignorant of its nickname, the Inferno), and already I had run into a language barrier.

“Doc’er,” the patient said, “I’m feelin’ squamish.”

“You’re what?” I said, embarrassed at having to ask.

“Squamish, doc’er. Right squamish I am.”

Now the only Squamish I knew was a town on the highway to Whistler, BC. I really hadn’t the foggiest notion of what symptom this represented in an older gentleman in Nova Scotia.

But I was on my way to understanding the local use of descriptors employed to give meaning and colour to life. Take the word good, for example. In the Maritimes, something can be good. Or better, right good. Or better still, right some good. Or best of all, right some *bejaysus* good.

“Right squamish, eh? How long have you been feeling this way?”

“Ever since I got me bronichles back,” said he.

“Ah,” I lied, hoping to appear competent, “Your bronichles. Of course.”

And so my education began: squamish sometimes meant nausea, and bronichles described a chest infection elsewhere known as bronchitis, while your’n was the local pronunciation for a certain liquid excretion. Saint John was in New Brunswick, whereas Sin Jahn’s was in Newfoundland. And while the Maritimes included Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, to include Newfoundland was incorrect (if you really had to gather all four provinces under the same umbrella, you had to speak of “Atlantic Canada”).

During our two years down East, my wife and I explored the area and I began to understand the strong attraction of the Atlantic, with its beautiful shores, picturesque lighthouses and friendly, community-oriented people. We camped in its national parks, swam in the warm waters of PEI and NB and stuffed ourselves with lobster and drawn butter.



On our occasional forays into Newfoundland I thought I had died and gone to heaven. The turns of phrase, the words, the accents, the Black Horse beer! To me, a lifelong mimic, the Newfie, ah sorry, the Newfoundland accent was irresistible, though I would discover that it was more accurate to speak of accents, as there were many.

Sharing in the Irish gene pool of many Newfoundlanders, I felt some dim, distant connection, like an atavistic memory. Even now, put in the proper frame of mind with a good feed of fish and chips washed down with a pint or two and my toes a-tapping to the music of Great Big Sea, I feel my link with the Rock.

And so it has been my pleasure to have been thought of as a Maritimer while doing my residency in Ontario and an Eastern bum of some description out here in BC. Imagine my satisfaction when a Newfoundlander who had just joined our group of emergency physicians said to me, “So the nurses tell me you’re from Newfoundland, too.”

“Lard t’underin’ b’y, I ain’t! I’s from the prairies,” I said.

Okay — it lacked subtlety, I know. But I said it with a glint in my eye and with tongue firmly in cheek. After all, as I then explained, “I just likes to pretend and do de accent. I guess you can say I’m a wanna be.”

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