



# Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada

## Sense of Place: Loss and the Newfoundland and Labrador Spirit

By:  
G.C. Blackmore

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The views expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada.

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*There is for each of us  
a particular place on earth  
Where the earth reveals its mysteries*

*(Francois Mauriac)*

# Introduction

The historical geographer J. D. Rogers (1911) captured in the most lyrical of words the sense of this place:

*Newfoundland from within reveals only a fraction of its nature. Its heart is on the outside; there its pulse beats, and whatever is alive inside its exoskeleton is alive by accident. The sea clothes the island as with a garment, and that garment contains the vital principle and soul of the national life of Newfoundland.*

Newfoundland and Labrador has always been challenged by history and the unpredictability of the sea. There was a perversity to the first settlement here. While colonists to Canada and North America were invited, encouraged and cajoled to come, we were refused any permanent entrance. Loyalists would be granted parcels of land to build and settle; farmers to the west were enticed with grants. Those who stayed here in the first two centuries of founding were not just discouraged from staying, they were forbidden to build near the sea where they worked; so adamant against settlement was England that the people sent to fish here were but faceless and nameless chattel enumerated for return voyages to England and Ireland. So those who founded this place began their life here under threat and risk – from courts and climate. As historian Shannon Ryan (1984) put it: “Newfoundland had always been a fishery based around an island; it would become a colony based on a fishery.” The history of 500 years would see a people who began with an act of defiance end the second millennium too often in a state of reliance.

Yet the strength with which the people of this place would cling to its shores would engender a fierce spirit of attachment. The love of place would manifest itself in the words and actions of people in every bay and cove and inlet – from St. John’s to the furthest tip of the peninsulas where they sought refuge and life. Despite servitude to distant rulers they would stay to build a country. Sir Robert Bond, perhaps Newfoundland’s greatest political leader, put it most eloquently:

*This island, which some of us love so dearly... may henceforth be hailed not only as our native land, but our own land, freed from every foreign claim, and the blasting influence of foreign oppression – ours in entirety – solely ours. (1904)*

It was Bond who had fought to reclaim Newfoundland’s control over its fishery resources and restored to Newfoundland the fishing rights that had been so cavalierly granted to France and the United States.

Seventy-five years later Dr. Michael Staveley (1982) would write:

*In any Canadian province... prosperity is largely a function of natural resource endowment over which the provinces have, by constitution, sole ownership and control. Fisheries, however, because they are mobile and a common property resource, are an exception to this rule. By entering Confederation, it was Newfoundland’s misfortune to lose ultimate control of its most important resource industry... in the 1950’s, benign neglect by*

*Ottawa and internal structural problems arising from divided jurisdiction insured the fisheries would slip further into decay.*

During the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Newfoundland would attempt to diversify. Pulp and paper mills were built in the central and western part of the island. Mining enterprises were developed in Bell Island and Buchans. But there was little or no return to the Dominion. The British and American companies negotiated contracts which had them pay almost nothing in taxes. The deals were shameful and the negotiators were shameless. The Gross Domestic Product of Newfoundland from 1915 to 1930 was impressive, surpassing the Canadian Maritimes, but it meant little to our financial security. (It would take nearly 60 years before a native Newfoundland would direct any of the companies which operated so freely here.) The policies of enticement and appeasement developed in the 20s continued sadly into the 60s and 70s. As the century lengthened, Newfoundland grew more surely into a peripheral region of the world, and the so-called outports (a name used to distinguish the coastal communities from St. John's and, hence, hierarchical in nature) became peripheral to the government.

In 2002, after more than 50 years of Confederation, Newfoundland and Labrador has chosen to examine its relationship with Canada and to discern ways to strengthen and renew its place here and in the country. Jim Lotz (1971) of the *Institute of Social and Economic Research* had earlier written that “there is a tendency in central governments to the assumption that the problem is ‘out there’ ... in the new vertical villages in the capitals and cities lie many of the sources of the problems of isolated areas.”

We are in the process of searching for the source of our problems as well as for solutions that come from within – from our own reservoir of accumulated knowledge and talent: the experienced, the professionals, the researchers, the people. The information, data, and insights that are gathered will be sifted, mixed and moulded into a form that allows for meaning and understanding. If, as F.L. Jackson (1984) says, “Five centuries of the plundering of Newfoundland’s resources on the part of outsiders traditionally unconcerned with the advancement of the local people, has left historical bruises that are still clearly visible,” then the time has come, finally, to assess what has been lost and to reclaim our place.

# This Place

*What is this place  
which holds fast our hearts  
and claims each of us for its own?*

This place, Newfoundland and Labrador, extending over 230,000 sq. km. with the island portion accounting for one-third of the land mass, accommodates a population in excess of 500,000 which has been decreasing significantly over the last 20 years.

Along with the remarkable and ancient geography and geophysical structures of Newfoundland and Labrador, the peoples who came to live here also account for the extraordinary diversity of this place. The Aboriginals, comprising the Inuit, Innu, Mi'kmaq and Metis, date us back to a paleolithic age and a saga of glaciers and pilgrimages across ice. The Europeans, coming primarily from the west counties of England, the southeast counties of Ireland, resisted the rules of their royals and the early unlettered governors; those who came from France waged war for the right to settle and to claim ownership of this place.

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# Our Sense of Place

*What is this place  
that keeps us in thrall  
to ocean, to spindrift, to storm?*

When we speak of a people's *sense of place*, we begin by describing how people respond to the community or place where they live, or once lived, and which they call "home." That *sense of place* includes what people know and understand about their community, how they respond emotionally to it, and how "the place where they live" helps determine their view of themselves as individuals or as a community. That sense empowers them to act.

## What Sense of Place Encompasses

The place we hold dear provides for us an *emotional comfort* and puts us at ease. The *physical space*, the *contours of the place*, its proximity to and dependence on the elements – all immediately identify the place for us. We enjoy a *bond with the people around us*. In the place and out of the place we are joined with them. We carry the feel of the place and the look of the people within us. We have *formed community* with them.

The *stories, songs and music of the place are ours* and we are stirred by them. If our place is challenged, by word or deed, it is our *pride of place* which is challenged, and *we rise to defend it*. Our sense of belonging here is remarkably described by the *language of our place* – its *idioms, meanings, rhythms and cadences*. And all of us in the extended place of the province who share these physical, emotional, linguistic and social responses experience a *sense of connectedness to each other* and a *shared identity*. And this larger community becomes a geographical and spiritual harbour which provides us with haven just as readily as it launches us on new voyages.

That place where we live and from which we draw our beliefs, our convictions, our commitment, and our story, is a human and historical reservoir we effectively call "culture." And that culture, that sense of place, profoundly affects how we as individuals or as a community of people think of ourselves.

The core of our geographical and cultural sense of place has been passed down to us and affects what we do and what we think we can do. Examining it allows us to glimpse the origins of our strengths and our weaknesses. Hence, we can truly say that we are shaped by - and we help shape - our heritage. In 1915, shortly before he died in the Great War, the British Poet, Rupert Brooke, captured the truth that the land and the person are one:

*If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed:  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware.*

This understanding of our sense of place helps inform our very identity as a people, a community, a province. It mattered not to our people whether they were here or afar at work and war because they carried a wonderful Newfoundland proverb: *You can take the man out of the bay, but you can't take the bay out of the man*. And it is the level of comfort with our identity that will help propel us to - or inhibit us from – a whole host of personal and communal achievements both at home and away.

# How We Came to Our Sense of Place

*We are the peoples of sea and of land  
Born of water and earth  
Forged by the winds and the tides of this place  
Proud in the land of our birth*

## The Natural Setting

Our rootedness in Newfoundland and Labrador has its physical origins in an ocean fruitful and terrible; in soil demanding and flinty; in rivers powerful and unpredictable. This sense of one's place comes from several types of experience in the given place:

- **Physical Tenure of the Place:** To be born in the same place as your forebears for several generations and to have parents and grandparents reinforce in you their own sense of belonging in that landscape and community, with shared family names and familiar townspeople – a network that is strong enough to give each person in the community a sense of having a “right” to be there because they have earned that right through tenure.
- **The Length of time** you spend in a place as an integrated member of its social fabric is an integral part of one's sense of belonging; in Newfoundland and Labrador, many people can still trace relatives through two-and-three hundred years of settlement on this same land.
- **Psychological/Spiritual/Social Belonging:** Growing up with stories of ancestors who have fought the on-going harsh climate and historically limited options (compared to gentler parts with more economic opportunity) instils a kind of loyalty toward those who have gone before. Many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians feel that leaving this physical space is a kind of betrayal: we should stay and fight for this place.

We are not an agrarian people “living on fenced-in land and encircled by a prairie horizon,” nor a people of steel and glass pillars. We settle now, as we did then, amid the vast silence, rivers and forests of ancient Labrador; we learned long years ago that if we revered the land, it respected us with its fruits and yielded to our traplines. And some of us still cling to the coastlines where the cold and forbidding North Atlantic rules. It is “the imprint of this wild, windswept ocean and the life that was built around the harvesting of its hidden treasure, that has sunk deepest into our soul and marked us for life.”

*It took the sea an hour one night,  
An hour of storm to place  
The sculpture of these granite seams  
Upon a woman's face.*

Rex Murphy writes: “Everything that has been of consequence or joy or sorrow to this place inevitably centres on the necessity which grafted us to a salt water trade. Our speech, our songs, our common memories, that disposition and temper we recognize as characteristically Newfoundland, flows almost genetically from the ocean and its life.”

We have come to an unspoken understanding of our sea with its riches and its perils - a sea that served us (and which we served) from the very day we began coming here five centuries ago, a sea that in all that time has been exacting great human tariffs, a sea that prowls at our doorstep, filling our eyes, our ears, our nostrils. Consequently, we have difficulty in understanding how that ocean could come to be the domain and reserve of people thousands of miles away, people whose faces and minds are free of salt and scars, whose hands never dip into the North Atlantic, and who each spring recite to us their carefully measured regulation stories of the sea that they learned from afar, and then inform us in antiseptic letters just how long we can stay out there on that water, and when we must come in before the last, dark night falls.

## Ancestral History

Our sense of our place - who we are, what we can do – has been and continues to be influenced by the peoples from whom we sprang. We have been affected as well as by the struggles, defeats and victories experienced in settling this place. Their roots – Aboriginal, English, Irish, French – and their own hereditary and cultural traits, commingled with and altered by their extraordinary experiences here, comprise the ancestral history handed down to us from generation to generation, from century to century, up to the present. And this ancestral tradition of people and story is transmuted into a distinct Newfoundland and Labrador sense of place, a culture, and, yes, a “spirit” which, while not physically tangible or defined, is no less real. This spirit (or “Newfoundland soul,” which, Dr. Cyril Poole writes, we are constantly searching for) has, in varying degrees of intensity throughout our history, animated and sustained our people.

If, as commentators say, people are their culture; and if culture starts with the place where people find themselves; then, our people’s sense of their place can be inferred from those words and terms which describe and identify the character and spirit of our people:

- **Strength and Resilience:** Our people generated a life on vast stretches of forbidding land in Labrador. We settled and fished in the teeth of the North Atlantic, on unpredictable seas. Wherever in this place we lived, we often did so without direction, assistance or encouragement. We developed under our own Darwinian imperative.

*Your average Newfoundlander is waterproof, dustproof, shock-resistant and anti-magnetic. Just as racehorses have been bred for legs and wind, he has*

*been bred, over four hundred years, for durability... Acts of God and Royal Warrants weeded out five or six of every ten born into the world alive. This fortuitous distillation has left us an exceedingly durable race.*

(Ray Guy)

- **Defiance, Persistence, Pride:** In the face of prohibitions, rules and regulations, under threat of punishment, pain, and loss, all during the first 200 years of our existence here, our people persisted. In 1832 Newfoundland was granted Representative Government. People who lived and worked here might actually have a say in how the place functioned. Then in 1855 we achieved Responsible Government. Newfoundland was now “our place.” For the first time since Caboto peered out into the mists of Bonavista, we were able to identify ourselves: we began calling ourselves “Newfoundlanders.” And that term, one of respect, had currency here and across the ocean. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ***we were a country*** and a thriving society, and we proclaimed ourselves as such to the world beyond us.

*Newfoundland settlement, at origin, was an act of defiance. Defiance against imperial law. Newfoundland community was a continuous defiance against the unrelenting inhospitalities of climate and fortune. That defiance is being tried yet once more. The too familiar crisis of our present time, the potential disappearance of our tenacious and celebrated way of life, is the deepest challenge of all our 500 years. But then, challenge has always been the breakfast meal of choice of the people who live here.*

(Rex Murphy)

- **Self-reliance, Tolerance, Loyalty:** Our people learned very early that, apart from an abiding faith in God, they had to rely mainly on themselves if they were to survive. They learned acceptance of their lot – not as servile acquiescence but as a means of not being conquered by outside forces. If the solutions to matters were completely beyond them, they learned “it’s as well to laugh as to cry.” The places they developed and the people who emerged – all were remarkable. A strong sense of community developed: people supported each other. They were fiercely loyal to each other - and to the motherland: the courage and commitment of our people in the Great Wars was disproportionate to the size of our place.

*The simple foibles and dignities of family life, the valour and competence displayed in the daily contest with the sea and land, the religious celebration of a life closely bound to the vicissitudes of an unforgiving nature: these have been the materials of traditional cultural expression. A stern way of life coping with a merciless sea and even more merciless masters, has yielded a whole dictionary of unique expressions: a humour, a manner and a philosophy that is peculiar to these parts. A poetry of uncomplaining acceptance, relieved by a renowned capacity for drollness, has become second nature. Newfoundlanders have affirmed the measure of their humanity in a native personality attuned, not to cold bourgeois values of*

*material progress and efficiency, but to the task of living life with courage, faith, charm, resourcefulness and wit under often near-barbaric conditions.*

(F.L. Jackson)

- **Adaptability.** They lived in the hinterland of Labrador, which shaped and modulated their existence and their activities. They would not only survive; they would be one with the land and waters. Along the coastline the resource was fish, so they became fishers. There were boats and ships needed for the fishery, so they built them, just as they constructed their houses and dug cellars. When they could not fish, they became loggers for the pulp and paper industry. Because there were no practical means of transportation and communication for the access of either materials and agencies, they became improvisers. If they didn't have something, they replaced or reinvented it. When the need for employment dictated they should leave this place, they did so. First, in the 1890s, then in the new century, and again in the "Thirties." To the Boston States, to Canada – wherever there was work. Our people became sailors and fishers under American skippers. They became first-class riggers of steel, oil field workers, miners, road-and home builders. Wherever competent and dependable workers were called for, our people went. They had learned well how to adapt.

*A kind of core of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Newfoundland fisherman could be found on the Northeast coast of the province. There was along this shore a complex of persons involved in a unique complex of fishing activities: inshore fishery, Labrador fishery, sealing, saw-milling and lumbering. They were people who were capable of successfully undertaking almost anything.*

(Dr. Michael Staveley)

- **Creativity, Distinctiveness:** This place bred people who "cast a special eye" on the land, water and people around them; they interpreted the events that brought all three together. "Gifts of survival, the art of hanging on, the grace of making do, the deep music of a continuously difficult existence, hard, hard times – all having their genesis and growth in the accumulated heritage of ocean and man" helped establish an environment, a need, a compulsion, perhaps, for the dissemination of our own distinct story – in word, in song, in picture. No other place established under the aegis of the British Commonwealth has produced a larger and more impressive collection of its own music and song.

The talents for artistic invention - on a per capita basis - are nowhere more provident than in this windswept and frozen land of Newfoundland and Labrador. And yet, how could they not create? The stories, songs and poetry grew out of the isolation and the shared struggles against often demanding circumstances. Through their creations they could laugh at, grieve over, heap contempt on or retaliate against the "difficulties and the divils." And, more importantly, they were also chronicling the lives and events of their communities and, through oral tradition, passing down the story. Our own language and rhythms had emerged. In the continent stretching away to the west, there was no place quite like this place. There were no people quite like our people.

*It is the purpose of the **Dictionary of Newfoundland English** to present the regional lexicon of one of the oldest overseas communities of the English-speaking world: the lexicon of Newfoundland and coastal Labrador as it is displayed in the sources drawn upon in compiling the work... Our guiding principles in collecting have been to look for words which appear to have entered the language in Newfoundland or to have been recorded first, or solely, in books about Newfoundland; words which are characteristically Newfoundland by having continued in use here after they died out or declined elsewhere.*

(G.M. Story)

- **Passivity:** There are traits that leave us open to personal and communal submission. For passivity is handmaiden to benign “acceptance” - the tendency of our people during the poverty-and-privation periods of history to despair of finding solutions and to respond, “Well, that’s all you can do; it’s out of our hands.” Too often in the coastal communities pessimism was “just around the point” from optimism. Resolve weakened and our people placed little confidence or energy in political or social agencies. Even as their hopes soared and wealth grew in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain was still handing over our coastal waters and lands to foreign countries. The United States was granted fishing rights, and up until 1904, a valuable and extensive section of our coastline was ceded to France as the “French Shore.” We were being told where and how we could fish. Neither the people nor their leaders did much, and the one was not accountable to the other. Nearly a century later we are still being told...

*One of the striking traits of Newfoundlanders is fatalism. It's in our songs and stories and sermons, its resides in our literature and newspapers and broadcasts. It derives from our centuries of dependence on the North Atlantic. He who would survive must learn to be part of the wind and water; rock and soil. Yet this deep, unlike the earth of the farmer, is never subdued and never mastered.*

(Cyril Poole)

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# What has Our Sense of Place Become?

Our grasp of “our sense of place,” our growing identity, our national self-confidence has always been tenuous. Just when we began to feel comfortable with “who we are,” something beyond our control happened: the fishery failed, or the government fell, or war intervened, or national and global disasters like the Great Depression brought us down.

Perhaps we still feared the fates and the ocean. Our governance always appeared short of the mark, our leaders too often bound in shallows. Anchors never seemed to hold, not just in storms but even in petty squalls. Leaders, in times of tribulation, forgot too easily what we had become and were prepared just as quickly to barter that hard-earned sense of place for what we might, in the future, become.

## The '30s and '40s

Historical commentators have suggested that even with the impact of the post-World War I fisheries collapse, the Great Depression and the attendant crisis in our government’s finances, nothing prepared our people for the social, psychological and, yes, moral impact of the suspension of Responsible Government.

*“The collapse of statehood in 1934 produced a dividedness in the Newfoundland soul. On the one side is our sense of possessing a proud heritage of national independence and a cultural golden age all our own. On the other side is the contrary feelings of failure and impotence, a sense of being an inconsequential problem-people.”*

(F.L. Jackson)

Perhaps we were neither able nor fit to govern ourselves. The belief grew that we were dependent on others. Our confidence was shaken to its very core. And our people were angry, but they were not sure who they should blame – the government or themselves.

*We had a country, a pearl in the sea  
Worn rich by toil and pain  
And the pride that welled within our hearts  
Shall never rise again.  
  
We had a country we let slip away  
Like a ship at early dawn  
And the songs and glory that was ours  
Will be silent now and gone.*

*(from New Founde Lande: The Musical)*

## **Confederation and Aftermath**

Then, in 1948, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, by a marginal vote and influenced by political decisions and forces they did not then know, chose to relinquish Responsible Government, put aside their own national status, and become a province of Canada. And now, 53 years later, the people of the province, at the behest of their government, are seeking to discover what that choice has meant for, among many things, their understanding of their identity as a distinctive people. They are asking what that sense of place has become, and how they might reclaim it.

In the first 25 years of Confederation, the fishery was discredited and the people who prosecuted it demeaned. The fishery was the vocation of last recourse, the repository of Newfoundland poverty humour (in 1970 fishermen were receiving less than three cents a pound for the majestic cod!), and our most recognizable stereotype. Meanwhile, that fishery was now directed by people who might indeed be described as, at best, “indifferent” to a way of life that helped define our people and this place.

Observers have suggested that a new, less enduring sense of place has emerged. To the sturdy and comforting Newfoundland character traits that evolved over time might now be added another array of descriptive words and terms, unfolding through, or on account of, the history and events of our last 60 years:

- Loss of self-confidence.
- Dependence on public monies and government initiatives.
- Powerlessness - over our natural resources and our ability to change things.
- Feelings of being a “kept” people.
- Fading memory of our “story.”
- Reduction of our place in Canada to caricature.
- Absence of Newfoundland & Labrador history as part of the pre-history of the Canadian state.
- Forgetting our sense of our own place.

Some observers of the last 50 years have suggested we have settled into a state of “cultural ambiguity.” We have forfeited political and economic autonomy and, hence, psychological independence. Others, in a more impassioned and startling description, have said we have undergone a form of “cultural genocide.” Such estimations demand our attention.

## **The Exiles**

It is important to remind ourselves that the exodus of people from Newfoundland and Labrador is not primarily a function of Confederation or what has followed. People have been leaving this place since the 1890s. The leaving always began with the hope of returning. The reasons were economic: we shall go away to work, send back money, come back home when things get better. But as in all of life, “way leads on to way,” and other roads are always taken.

Yet, the exigencies of our economics have created thousands of genuine exiles – people whose bodies are away but whose hearts have been left behind – in the coves, harbours and communities of family and friends. The times have urged our young, whether or not they are the “best and brightest,” to build their futures in provinces, states and countries that need them and are prepared to provide fiscal (whatever about “cultural”) security.

Fittingly, David Jacobson refers to those who leave as people *out of place*. “The sentiment of *exile* is the corollary of being rooted in native soil. The ache, aimlessness, and despair of exile, to be outside one’s country, to be banished to the wilderness, is a deep and lengthy literary theme in human history. Weeping on the riverbanks and yearning for homeland has a powerful resonance in Jewish and Christian history... as well as in the touching stories of native peoples.”

In the case of our own native daughters and sons who were forced to leave, the poignancy of their “living away” is captured in the song created by one of our performing groups, *Buddy Wasisname and the Other Fellers*. This group, like some latter-day cultural pilgrims, have travelled the country, entertaining and maintaining the lifeline to home. The singer speaks about the Newfoundlanders up in Sudbury coming to the concert and wanting to talk with them afterwards:

*And I know how some of them came to meet  
On one warm, clear April day  
To see our show and to see us all go  
And how we left and they stayed  
And I know the tears in big Johnny’s eyes  
When our visit came to an end  
And when Ray played one last familiar tune  
I know how they waltzed once again.  
So I’m not saying, “It’s wrong to leave”  
I’m not saying “It’s right to stay”  
All I know is, of all those who left  
They talk of leaving again.*

This out-migration, this “leaving home,” seems inexorable. The expansion of our exile-community is reaching a point whereby the very sustenance of this place is being called to examination. Yet, does the going away have to be a sign of our “passing away?” Does the biblical *diaspora* of our people to other places have necessarily to be interpreted as the weakening of our culture?

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# Renewing Our Sense of Place

It is not the bones of our history that must be raised up; they merely point to a life now past, honourable and otherwise. We do not seek to launch again stately schooners to chase the fish under mythically courageous captains; we have learned to harvest our resource with science and wise technology. It is not relics we look to preserve or to sell to artless visitors and tourists; it is the people, pulse and history of our communities and these are not for sale for they are given freely. It is not ghosts we are searching for; it is the spirit which once animated the fierce and indomitable people who trod mud paths, set wise traps, fired hearths, scoured skies and seas for hope, and who fell and rose, again and again.

*The real essence of a people's culture or sense of place is their spiritual and ethical idealism. It includes their spiritual as well as their material aspirations, their living morality, their responsibility for family and society, their will to community, and their relation to God.*

(F.L. Jackson)

Renewing our sense of place, then, is not to go back; it is to launch out anew. We must reclaim the independent spirit which sustained us over our first 400 years. The traits of our people and our place are still there, ingrained now in our character, part of our spiritual bloodline. We may not have understood that. We may well have forgotten. We may even say we do not care. It does not matter; it is there; it is who we are. What we have to do is reclaim that heritage, that sense of place. Then we can begin renewing ourselves and our country.

From the minds of committed academics and citizens at Commission hearings; from research papers, journal essays, and newspaper editorials; the message comes:

*"It is, rather, a question of how this profoundly inbred way of life, that fully possesses and is the Newfoundland and Labradorian, can fare in the context of Confederation."*

*"As for our young people... where they go, what they do... the problem is, no one is articulating the dream for them."*

*"Canadians don't understand us. How could they? Who tells them? And we are sitting back and saying, 'We wish you knew.'"*

What the voices are saying is straightforward: teach them the history; let them, and all of us, own the story. And the "them" is ourselves, the people of the province; it is our children, our students; it is the people across the country, our fellow-Canadians.

- Our sense of place must be renewed and strengthened by ensuring that our ancestral story continues to be proclaimed, taught, and celebrated.
- The story of our self-reliance, our achievements, our contributions – and the people from whom and by whom they sprang and were accomplished - must be carefully articulated and providentially shared.

- Our provincial government through its departments of culture and education must renew its commitment to the promulgation of the heritage of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- We must insist on the inclusion of the history of Newfoundland and Labrador into the pre-history of the Canadian State.
- We must undertake a renewal and strengthening of the artistic and cultural community, both professional and volunteer, to allow for a new flowering of “Newfoundland and Labrador creativity.”

## **The Anniversary of the Other Commission**

It was on the recommendations of the 1933 Royal Commission chaired by Lord Amulree that the Government of Newfoundland voted to lay aside its power to govern its people and transfer almost untrammelled authority to a six-person Commission. Now in 2003, 70 years later, another Royal Commission is preparing recommendations for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. The appointments of both commissions were made at critical junctures in the life of Newfoundland and Labrador. We know the lasting effect of the first one. The impact of the present Commission must now be even more profound and influential.

For we are not now the same people who, shaken by the events of the winters of our discontent, waited like children for instructions as to how we should proceed – directions that were based not on the opinions and hopes of the people of the Dominion but derived from an already-determined agenda. Not so today. We are a stronger, healthier, surer people, better-informed, more thoroughly educated, and certainly less timid and compliant.

What is prepared for and presented to our people and the country must not be thin gruel. And the reason is clear: What we think of this place, its future, and who we are as a people may well depend on the distillation of the voices the Commission hears, the actions it recommends, and the vision it offers.

## **A Place of Hope**

When we begin to understand who we are, where we come from, what is our story, the questions of where we go and how we manage will not appear so daunting or dispiriting. While we as a province wish to retain as many of our people, young and old, as we can, it is in the natural progression of things that people will seek further borders and wider horizons; they will be challenged by personal and national goals; they will be intrigued by the search for Heaven, Xanadu, Nirvana... or life's perfect trap berth.

If we can assist present and future generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to understand their history and their culture; if our people can feel confident about their identity and their sense of place; if, truly, they can “own” their story, we who stay will not be incapacitated by their leaving.

The parents who raised them and encouraged them can feel comfortable that their offspring are bringing their gifts and their talents to another place; their children are sharing their abilities as well as their story and their heritage with others who will be more fortunate for knowing

them. We will not have lost them or their riches; we are spreading them across the continent, seeing them grow and contribute; and we – parents, educators, leaders and, indeed, Canada itself - bask in a kind of reflected glory.

But they must know their story and the place which gives it life.

And for those of us who still remain, “the tides ebb, and here they flow.” Our resources will be more carefully harvested, obstacles surmounted, and storms weathered because they must be. Our history continues, our sense of our place feels more secure, our children learn a story even richer than we knew.

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## The Impact of Loss

The reality of loss is, or will be, part of every person's life. Most of us have experienced the death of a loved one – parent, family member, spouse, friend. The first human response to the loss of someone or something dear is grief. Rando (1984) writes that "grief is the psychological, social and somatic reaction to the perception of loss." Psychologists and sociologists have noted, however, that the grief-response must not be limited to the fact of physical death; hence, the broader reference to "loss." The Grief Foundation applies the simple, working definition of grief as "the total response of the organism to the process of change."

What we have been experiencing in the province in a more dramatic way over the last 10 years is not merely a product of that decade. Rather, the effects of the last 70 years on the body-politic and the body-communal have taken their toll. Yet we have never carefully examined the profound impact that the events, decisions and outcomes have had on individuals, communities and the province itself. Much has been gained through Confederation; we even celebrated – more reflexively rather than reflectively - the union and its benefits, just three years ago. However, the task the Commission now faces requires a more thorough and sensitive analysis. For it will become increasingly evident that unless we dare to undertake a process of "grieving" for what we have lost, there can be no resolution or progress, either individually or collectively.

## The Past is Prologue

The native Pueblo writer, Leslie Marmon Silko writes in the book *Ceremony* (1974):

*I will tell you something about stories  
They aren't just entertainment  
Don't be fooled.  
They are all we have, you see,  
All we have to fight off  
Illness and death  
You do not have anything  
If you do not have stories*

A thorough assessment of our past is critical. To suggest that we consign the past and its personal and collective wounds to some dustbin of history and attempt to "move on" might indeed appeal to the clinically detached who have no sense of connectedness to this place, its history or its people. But such a facile, business-model approach to genuine community and human difficulties is not only intellectually, socially and morally naive, it would leave us and this province, in effect, stalled yet again in the search for effective solutions – solutions which will be derived from a thorough understanding of what has happened. Comparable to the experience our province often faces from officialdom is the historically dismissive attitude displayed by government and institutional officials concerning the impact on communities of past scars and endured losses. Such attitudes prevented for countless years the advancement of and reconciliation with native peoples, the Black community, women and other struggling

minorities. Socrates was correct over two millennia ago: The unexamined life is not worth living.

# **Our History of Loss**

The reality of loss is not new to this place; loss is there in our history, our stories, our songs, our art. We settled and worked in perilous times and circumstances. We founded ourselves upon a provident but unforgiving sea. Coastal communities have long been familiar with fishermen lost at sea: schooners and their entire crews going down; doryloads of men and fish never returning; hosts of sealers perishing on the ice. Small communities were bereft of fathers, siblings and husbands. And yet, families and communities shouldered the burden, stolidly faced the sorrow and carried on. Living from the sea was what we did and, in a sense, who we were. Providence would sustain us, people in the community would support and condole with us, a new season would come, we would fish and work again. The loss of a loved one was personal and our people would respond to their grief, however inarticulately, and carry on.

## **The New Grief**

Grieving the loss of loved ones was a process individuals and communities could undertake however imperfectly. But the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly our coastal communities, were not prepared for the sense of loss that began in the late 1920s and continued to the end of the last century. The components comprise a range of historical, economic, and natural events: (a) The demise of the European fisheries markets in the 1920s, (b) the Great Depression, (c) the financial and moral collapse of the Bond government, (d) the suspension of Responsible Government and appointment of a Commission of Government, (e) the ceding of Dominion status for Confederation with Canada, (f) the handing over of direct control of sea and land resources, (g) the diminution of the place of the fishery in the economic and social life of the province, (h) the disappearance of communities, (i) the inexorable and incessant outmigration of our people, (j) the groundfish moratorium.

What resulted was the unstated and unexamined sense of loss felt by individuals and communities. Our hard-won ability to fend for ourselves and the seasoned determination to make our own living were gone or constantly under threat. The largesse promised and delivered from outside us, while greeted initially with enthusiasm and gratitude, has unwittingly and gradually eroded an extraordinary spirit of self-reliance, and has by slow degrees initiated in many of our people a culture of dependence. And the two singular events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Newfoundland and Labrador – the suspension of Responsible Government and the Groundfish Moratorium - were never effectively confronted, examined and resolved. (The shutting down of the codfishery and its impact on inshore fishery communities has served almost as a seal on the century and our fate.)

Once as a Dominion, then as a province, as communities, and, too often, as individuals we have never properly grieved what was lost. It is extremely important to understand that our disengagement from an effective grieving process helps account for our inability or refusal to confront our present social and economic conditions in a realistic, practical, and humane manner.

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# **Loss and the Grieving Process**

Some psychologists suggest a helpful equation to answer the question, What is grief and what produces it? Change = Loss = Grief.

1. A change of circumstances of almost any kind produces a loss which in turn will produce a grief reaction.
2. The intensity of the grief response is a function of how the loss is viewed. If the loss is perceived as great, the feelings of grief will be profound in equal measure.
3. Significant grief responses which go unresolved can lead to physical and sociological problems that contribute to community dysfunction across generations.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying* (1969) originally referred to the grieving process as the Five Stages of Receiving Catastrophic News, terminology which was mutated by practitioners into the Five Stages of Grief. There need be no myths about the five Stages; they are not immutable nor need a defined order, but understanding them and the process can be of enormous value in understanding responses that are common to us all as individuals or as members of a body or community.

## **The Five Stages**

What happens when we encounter loss? What can be the resultant trauma that is produced? With respect to what has happened with the loss of the fishery, a way of life, and the consequent impact on communities, it is instructive to consider the five stages of human response:

1. **Denial** “This not really true; scientists and government are mistaken. It is only a matter of time before we get back what has been temporarily taken away.”
2. **Anger** “I could see this coming. I should have got out long before this. The people in charge are responsible for this. I knew they could not be trusted. I am not taking this lying down.”
3. **Bargaining** “If we can make some changes, things can be like they were and our livelihood will return. We have to hold meetings and see what can be done.”
4. **Depression** “What are we going to do? That’s the end of it now. I always knew this was going to happen. Don’t know what we’re going to do.”
5. **Acceptance** “That’s it. We’re not going to be able to do what we used to. We are out of the news; people have stopped calling. Life goes on. And we have to get on with it. We have to sit down and talk about it, meet with people and decide what we do next.”

The above is not a frivolous example. In fact, all of us in a myriad of ways constantly go through a similar process. Any serious change of circumstances in our lives causes us to react. The sequence of stages is not necessarily important; sometimes the stages occur simultaneously, and time phases differ in individual cases. Intensity and duration of stages depend on the significance of the event and how that change is perceived.

## **Grief Work**

What is of greater importance is to realize when the grieving process actually occurs: only after coming to the stage of acceptance. The story has died, friends have stopped calling and condoling with you, and some form of closure has been initiated. That is when the so-called grief work begins, requiring the person confronting the loss to undertake the following:

- A. To accept the reality** of the loss.
- B. To experience the pain** of the loss.
- C. To adjust to the new environment** without the lost activity, person or object.
- D. To reinvest** in the new reality.

Therapists have suggested that the first stage of grieving is *Acceptance*, the last of the five stages of loss. More emphasis must be placed at this point if we are to understand our loss and come to some form of resolution.

# The Effects of Loss on Community

It is worthwhile to note that many of the losses we experience in life are what Viorst (1986) refers to as natural losses. Harvey and Miller (1998) have suggested that major losses and the accumulation up of such losses are the events that most tax the body and the spirit, resulting in negative responses from individuals and communities. Ironically, though, it is these same losses that can help explain the positive reactions by these groups and, properly understood and resolved, can lead to growth.

## The Negative

People affected by loss who are not assisted in understanding and coping with the resultant trauma tend to adopt unproductive attitudes or modes of action:

- **Immobility** They cannot apprehend what has happened. They “freeze.” They refuse to listen, examine or discuss what has occurred or is happening.
- **Anger** They invest their energies in striking back at the perceived perpetrator; they become verbally and/or physically aggressive, and the anger, private or stated, inhibits any productive value.
- **Blame** Those affected by loss often exhibit two types of blame-reactions: (a) They seek to focus their anger – and hence, the blame – against those who, in the hierarchy of their existence, are “above” them – those in positions of authority and power who should have done something to prevent what has happened; or (b) they place the blame inward, faulting themselves for their state, further eroding self-confidence, self-reliance, undermining their own worth and identity.

## The Culture of Blame

The “blame response” deserves a more detailed examination, for in many ways, what has happened in Newfoundland and Labrador over the last decade, and the 50 years before that, may help explain why many in our province have allowed themselves to become part of a culture of blame – a culture that can deaden the spirit and suppress the resolve to action.

- A. **Blaming Others** Because of the confusion over our perceived losses and the fixation at the stages of Denial and Anger, many of us, as individuals, communities and a province, have never come to *Acceptance*. Our sense of belonging to this place and way of life have been shaken to its roots and somebody has to be held responsible. Principally it has been governments, federal and provincial, heads of organizations, business leaders. The venting of anger and the casting of aspersions allows for “release,” both physical and psychic, and brings a concomitant sense of satisfaction that “we let them know.” Expressions of blame exhibit themselves in fierce diatribes, invective at

public meetings, demonstrations, calls to open-lines, and in acts of passive-aggression such as withdrawal from public debate, saying nothing, pulling out of groups, and leaving the community – all with the anger still intact. All these reactions are perfectly understandable but fundamentally unproductive, and, in the words of the Bard, “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

- B. Blaming Ourselves** “We were never equal to the task. We somehow didn’t do things right. We lack perception and the tough intelligence that is required to survive. We understand why people consider us inferior.” This state is worse than one that blames others for it does not even afford the small satisfaction of having vented anger. We create or become part of a pathology of depression.

The tragedy in being absorbed in a *Culture of Blame* is that it pushes us ever deeper into a state of dependence; it saps the spirit of self- and community-reliance; it condemns us to the restoration of an ineffective past; and it deprives us of the will to take charge of our personal and communal lives.

## **The Positive Effects of Loss**

Trauma, properly resolved, has the power to challenge individuals and communities to reclaim their lives and channel them in new and productive directions (*Janoff-Bullman, 1997*). The positive side of loss can include the following:

- Examining and valuing individual and communal strengths and understanding that we are capable of overcoming obstacles.
- Realizing that we have the ability to undertake new beginnings and create our own meaning.
- Coming to a deeper appreciation of the value of the ordinary and the true worth of one’s personal life and that of the place in which one lives.
- Reassessing one’s life and contributions and not taking good things for granted.
- Coming to a greater appreciation of others and what they bring to your life and community.

## **Understanding the Importance of Loss**

In summary, to understand clearly how and why Newfoundland and Labrador has been profoundly affected and, in some ways, altered not only through actual loss but through its people’s sense of loss, it is imperative that we come to accept the fact that as a people and a province we have not come to terms with loss. And unless and until we do, we shall never be able to deal effectively with the decisions and tasks facing us.

# **Honouring and Celebrating the Spirit**

“Spirit” is the animating principle of living beings; it comprises the emotional attitudes and set of characteristics which distinguish people and groups, fostered and made vital over time and place. At its root, spirit means to “breathe life into.” The spirit of this place has indeed been shaped by our history; our reclaiming of it has the force to infuse new life into our communities.

## **Animating Characteristics**

The will to survive, to overcome storms (natural, social and economic), the ability to carve out life, to adapt to unfamiliar events and circumstances – all these became the stuff of our spirit. So, too, grew our intimacy with the sea and land, our sense of belonging here, our relationship with those in the place where we lived and where we had our ready identification with others who claimed Newfoundland and Labrador as home. And because, from our earliest days, capitulation to circumstances was never considered a choice, our people could do no other than develop a strong sense of independence and self-reliance, one that became ours as if by birthright.

That connection to our heritage is bred in the bone and, like our link to our history, has been passed on to us, whether we realize it or not, whether we care about it or not. It is part of who we are, part of what might be termed our collective DNA. It may be shaken but it is still there. That spirit of Newfoundland and Labrador is our common line, forged over thousands of years through our First Peoples and engendered over 300 years of European settlement. That sense of place and belonging is, above all, a gift. Just as some of us, by virtue of our parentage, are blessed with natural intellectual, artistic and athletic gifts – gifts not of our own creation – so too are we all endowed of this place.

## **The Fighting Newfoundlander**

The wholehearted, if heartbreaking, participation by our people in World War I (and later in World War II) bespoke a loyalty to and a valued historical association with Mother England. No odds were too great, no distance too far, no enemy too powerful. Those sentiments and the unquestioned bravery in battle gave rise to the expression, the “Fighting Newfoundlander,” an epithet that was appropriated by our people – and those outside us – to define a spirit that characterized how we, in less militaristic settings, faced and overcame obstacles. Observers readily agree that our involvement in, contribution to, and losses from the war effort were greatly disproportionate to our size and numbers as a country.

## A Tradition of Benevolence

Through the centuries here, our people lived and shared midst a wonderful paradox: though clime and circumstance created a hardy independence in all of us, it also encouraged compassion, and so we believed that neighbours and strangers who faced difficult times depended on our kindness and assistance to make it through. Hospitality and openness became watchwords for this place. That particular facet of our spirit, too, became something that we took for granted. Others never have. A recent event, while dramatic in size and impact, is instructive.

A little over a year ago, with the horror of September 11, thousands of travellers were set down on our shores. They fled the skies and terror, and here in this province – on the east coast, in the central region, on the west coast, and in Labrador - they found a safe haven. People who perhaps might never have chosen to come to this place were suddenly among us. And what happened in that small period of time - in our lives and theirs – provides much for us to think about. The question those of us who are seeking to define our spirit might ask ourselves is not What did they learn about us? but rather, *What have we forgotten about ourselves?*

What became most striking about the event was how many of those accidental tourists, in their spoken and written comments, said they were amazed to discover a place that greeted them so warmly, treated them so generously, and made them such a part of their homes and communities.

They discovered us by chance, and, if you listened carefully to what they were saying, they seemed to be telling us and others that they will never be the same again.

And yet, we here, in so many valuable ways, still remain the same. For what we did and how we responded were natural to us, without calculation, almost inbred. Our instincts were to trust, to help, to share. Almost none of the visitors spoke of the climate or the sun or the industry or the clever and ingenious things they saw around them. So what was it that moved them, in so many cases, to such an outpouring? We who are of this place think we know.

What touched them were the faces, the voices, the turns of phrase, the open doors and open arms; it was the stories, the music, the cherished culture, and it was all there in this remarkable place of land and rock and forest, shaped and informed by the sea. Those travellers seeking refuge landed in a place forged by survivors. (Yes, *survivors*: read our history; listen to our songs). And so, when they came frightened and uncertain among us, we made no distinction about their language or their customs or their place of origin. Why would we? They were people who needed to be welcomed and we took them in from the storm. They came as visitors; they left as friends.

There is a tendency on the part of some of us not to recognize the event for what it was – singular and revelatory. This gentle openness of heart is a manifestation of the Newfoundland spirit nurtured over time and insinuated into our character, and we often forget it is that spirit which fires our sense of belonging. James Defede, *The Miami Herald* columnist, certainly captures that sentiment in his book, *The Day the World Came To Town* (2002).

We must constantly remind ourselves that the most valuable tourism commodity we have here in this distinctive place called Newfoundland and Labrador is our culture and our spirit. Those are freely given and freely shared. And they are not for sale.

## **Expatriates on the National Stage**

Equally disproportionate, in comparison with other provinces, is the number of people from Newfoundland and Labrador who have made extraordinary impacts on the national and world scene across a variety of professions. Perhaps the wellspring of creativity that has sustained our people was historically fed by the need and the will of our people to survive in insular surroundings, wild tracts of land, isolated outports, and all with little or no means of communication, not only with a vaster outside world but with communities only kilometres away. The people in these communities recorded their tragedies and small triumphs in narrative and song. They searched for and created their own unique images. They found their proper voice and shared it with others. The irritants of unpredictable seas and the winds ever so slowly produced pearls of creativity. The fickleness of climate and insecurity of harvest gave birth to a wit of resignation. Gifted leaders and artists emerged. And as such Protean talents developed, a far bigger landscape was required to stretch our people's gifts. And so they moved from here. The contributions they made, and continue to make, enrich the country and honours the place that brought them to birth and fostered their gifts.

- Across this Dominion and the world their distinction shines: In academe they serve as University Presidents, Deans, Department Heads and Professors; in medicine and science they are cutting-edge practitioners and researchers; they rule on provincial Supreme Courts; they provide inspiration in schools of theology and Divinity and direction in ecclesiastical congregations; they command at the highest level of our military; they are major forces and innovators in the business world; they map new paths to development and learning; in government they have influenced national policy, articulated innovative legislation and lived to write about it; they build roads and construct buildings with ingenuity and courage. And they have come from this place.
- In the more public arenas of arts, communications and media their profile and their work is of the first rank: They write the nation's stories and commentary through poetry, novel and essay. Their art compels viewers to a new vision of their place. They perform the tragedy and comedy of a nation's life. They produce the music, design the dance, sing the songs, perform the works which stir a sympathetic resonance in audiences of diverse and cosmopolitan tastes. And their craft was cultivated here.

Citing even a partial and random list of the names from past to present is a roll-call of excellence: E.J. Pratt, Gen. Terence Hearn, Gordon Pinsent, Donna Morrissey, Dr. George Ivany, Dr. William McGrath, Lisa Moore, Harold Russell, John Crosbie, Justice Gerard Hawco, Rex Murphy, Gwynne Dyer, Mary Walsh, William Carew, Great Big Sea, Patricia Murphy, Brian Tobin, David Blackwood, Wayne Johnston, Cathy Jones, Christopher Pratt, Bob Cole...

In a host of enterprises and initiatives which fuel the social, economic and industrial engines of Canada are a legion of young, bright, dynamic and competent expatriates from Newfoundland and Labrador.

All those who have chosen or felt compelled to leave this place have the grace of distance and the advantage of perspective. And make no mistake about it: they are still inextricably bound to this place. They are emotional about their connections to home and their sense of belonging. They remain fierce in this province's defence and are passionate about its future.

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# **Creating a Context**

*There is no content without context;  
There is no meaning without the mediation of one's story*

The Royal Commission mandate states, in part: *We want to envisage what a prosperous and self-reliant Newfoundland and Labrador would look like in the next decade and beyond...* It is almost axiomatic that before one can help construct a rewarding future, an understanding of the past and the events which shaped that story is essential. And no past can be described without a thorough comprehension of the people of that land. That is why coming to grips with our people's sense of place, their sense of belonging is so critical in determining why, as the Commission consultation document says, there is so serious a gap between what we expected from Confederation and what we have achieved, and in a more combative setting, between the satisfaction of the Canada-first faction and the criticism of the new nationalists.

Therefore, as the Royal Commission prepares its blueprint for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador, it must do so by establishing a *context* for what they shall ultimately present. Our people's history, their love of place, their sense of belonging, their immense creativity, their fierce and distinctive spirit – these are the context for the findings of the Commission's research, the consultations with our people and groups at home and away, and the studied deliberations. The central issues of where we are now as a province, where we hope to go, what we recommend as a path to follow – those observations will gather their own credibility, integrity and force only to the degree that they are *grounded* not only in the data of sound research but also in the history and soul of this place. Only then will those to whom the Report is directed come to truly and fully understand how we emerged as a people, what were the events that altered our economic and social life and shaped our collective character.

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# **Reclaiming the Spirit**

## **Remembering Our Story**

We, the people of this province, must also come to realize that we shall renew and strengthen our place here and in Canada only insofar as we understand the fierce and distinctive spirit that is our heritage, what it was, whence it came, what it has accomplished and the value it can afford us in our future. We must remind ourselves again of our story, the indefatigable spirit that is ours, the contributions that this province has brought and still brings to the country and the world. We must honour and celebrate this place.

## **Sharing Our Story**

Our Canadian sisters and brothers and our federal government must likewise know who we are and why at this time we are making such enormous efforts to reflect on and examine our relationship with them, all with the goal of renewing and strengthening our place with them. And while there is a measure of resentment on our part against the often insensitive depiction of this place and its people, we must also remind ourselves of this reality: They view us as they do because they do not know us. And they shall never genuinely know us unless we tell them and show them; unless, as the Pauline Letter says, “We preach our message to them, in season and out.” And having learned, Canada will, we believe, also come to honour and celebrate this place.

## **Coming to Terms with Loss**

And yet, we must still come to terms with what we have lost: the control of our resources, our sense of independence and self-reliance, as well as the exodus of great numbers of our people and a diminution of our spirit and will. Then, and only then, can we as a province – we the people and those who govern, direct and serve us - begin the work of reclaiming that spirit. The task of coming to terms is one which can also be shared with our fellow Canadians.

The people of Newfoundland did not process the forfeiture of their status of a self-governing Dominion in 1934. Nor did we personally or collectively confront the loss involved in the laying aside of our country in 1949. And when we were faced with the closure of our groundfishery in 1992, we failed again – to our detriment - to reflect on the consequences of loss.

These three events were, in social terms, cataclysmic upheavals – each involving deep loss. These occurrences were what psychologists term major change-events which, by definition, should require informed and sympathetic direction. There was none. At each critical juncture of our history we were deflected from confronting the issue before us. To be sure, the type of social awareness we take for granted today did not prevail to any great degree 70 years

ago. In 1934 our people and our government leaders were overwhelmed by a dire financial situation and a crippling poverty; we had neither the foresight nor the resources to reflect together, and there was then a serious disconnect between government and people. At the time of Confederation, whatever were the divisions between the contesting factions, there was at least the prospect, however fleeting, of federal monies, pensions and baby bonus. And in 1992, when the impact of the cod moratorium slowly dawned, those most personally affected were diverted once more by the receipt of financial programs of assistance and the faint hope that the groundfishery would reopen again in two years.

## **The Time for Resolution Has Come**

Perhaps with the steady decline of the fishery, the dwindling of our communities and the out-migration of so many, we had reached a state of emotional exhaustion. It matters not the reasons for our avoidance. The truth is, we have never effectively grieved; we have never *bargained*. There has been only muted and unresolved anger. We have never undertaken any process that might move us to a state of acceptance. Apart from ill-considered post-moratorium training programs hastily prepared by the federal government, no group or organization - government, university, church, union or social agency - took the initiative to lead us through the crises to a form of resolution. Now the time has come. The Royal Commission can be the instrument that finally provides us with the authority and motivation. If we do not seize the opportunity to act now, we do so at our peril.

# The Royal Commission and Transformation

Transforming how we view our situation and how we act involves first of all an understanding of ourselves and where we live and the mind-set under which we function (O’Sullivan, 1999). At the Commission consultation in Toronto, one of the expatriate participants spoke of the absolute need to “shift the habitual perceptions” of our people through a process of transformative education (Peddigrew, 2003). This approach is precisely what the Royal Commission has been effecting since it began its work last year. What has so far occurred through the activities of the Commission, and the initiatives that will continue to be undertaken, are acts which are, at their most fundamental, transformative:

- Research into and careful examination of our political, economic and social status – past and present and projected.
- Public consultations and the receipt of private presentations from people of every region of the province so as to provide them the opportunity to speak of their concerns and fears – to give our people a voice.
- Roundtables and forums with particular interest groups to ensure that accurate assessments of our situation are made and compelling needs are met.
- *The Dialogue on the Future Direction for Newfoundland and Labrador* - a daunting, courageous and necessary effort to learn in a more realistic manner how we take charge of our future.

This latter initiative, the *Dialogue*, is both commendable and significant for it takes the work of the Commission to a deeper and more demanding level. The process is not just about facts, opinions, observations, suggestions, complaints; it is the next stage, one which allows for the channelling of thought and theory into coherent and defensible action. The Dialogue is a microcosm and example of the process that will have to be repeated in some form throughout Newfoundland and Labrador long after the Royal Commission has issued its final report. The procedures and the personnel of such future dialogues may well be different and less formidable, but the process of resolving and accommodating will be even more valuable and necessary because they will happen where our people live.

Perhaps a recommendation of the Commission may be to establish a procedure and process whereby the Commission Report becomes the reference point and catalyst for continuing community and organizational dialogue and action across the province. Consideration might be given to the following:

- The Final Report of the Royal Commission must be shared with the largest possible audience.
- The people of the province must come to a sense of ownership of the Report.
- The Report must be made accessible and attractive.
- To ensure the widest possible readership there might be a Summary Form of the Final Report, comparable to the *Consultation Document* and *What We Heard* as well as effective use of the website, appropriate links and other ancillary materials.

- The Final Report should be disseminated, through some convenient and effective form, to the largest possible audience within the country.
- The Royal Commission Final Report must be celebratory.

*[As an act of divergent thinking, consider for a moment how this province could become a place to which people from across the country and the world migrate: (a) This is a place of relative peace and serenity, attractive not only to international students but to all immigrant peoples: (b) we are a land which offers respite from “environmental torments”; (c) we have pure waters for aquaculture, a venture we have never seriously undertaken; (d) we have lands for the building of arboretums; (e) Newfoundland and Labrador can become, quite legitimately, a world heritage and environment centre.]*

## An Event of Celebration

The celebratory nature of the Report will be authentic because it will represent the first stage of this province's forthright endeavour to rediscover itself and to reassess its position in Canada with a view to renewing itself and the country. It has taken us 53 years to get to this point, and what we have begun will be a demanding labour. But the Report is also an opportunity to celebrate and honour this place, its people, heritage, achievements and its considerable contributions to Confederation. The work of the Commission has the potential power to be transformative to the degree that it is an instrument that is used to help change minds and hearts here and abroad.

The release of the final document must not only be celebratory in nature but also in form. Any event, no matter how small, has the power to move and to change. So, too, the presentation of the Commission's Report. But first it must be treated as an event and then appropriately prepared, utilizing people, resources, and techniques to underscore the importance of the event. The work begun by the Royal Commission must be a revelation and celebration of the spirit that has, in varying degrees of force, animated us over 500 years; it is a call-to-arms for all of us in Newfoundland and Labrador to take responsibility for our future; it is a reminder of a history and a spirit whose light we have allowed to dim.

## The Final Document

The preparation and presentation of the Commission Report will complete, the process of informing and explaining; it will not be first a document of request and redress, though it will be offered without equivocation and apology. The Report will serve the purpose of mediation between and among the people of this province and our fellow-Canadians. Ultimately, the Report will be a sharing of truth about ourselves and this place, and, as we have been so often reminded, the truth will set all of us – those who speak and those who listen - free.

The root meaning of the word “redeem” is “to buy back, to bargain again for.” The work of the Royal Commission is about the redemption of our place and our spirit. Perhaps, finally,

after two centuries of being Newfoundlanders & Labradorians and over a half-century as Canadians we have come to the time where we ourselves, once again, take charge of reclaiming our spirit, our self-reliance and our pride.

*It is only a matter of a few more paltry weeks and we shall see the steam rising from the ponds and from the damp ground behind the plow; we shall see the grandmother sitting out by the doorstep for a few minutes watching the cat; we shall see the small boats a' bustle, piled high with lobster pots in the bow, and the days melting further and further into the night.*

*Winter is over now.*

*Praise God and all honour to our forefathers through generations who did never forsake this dear and fine country.*

*(Spina Sanctus, Ray Guy)*

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[This book] “explores the efforts of the many Canadians and Newfoundlanders who tried to make Confederation work...By beginning with 1949...and by thoroughly documenting areas of agreement, contention, and neglect, Blake writes a solid, contemporary history of Newfoundland’s integration into Canada. [His] treatment... offers much basic information...not [easily available earlier].

**De Visser, John.** *Newfoundland Souvenir.* Boston Mills Press (1997)

For a photographer, Newfoundland has everything: mountains, lakes, rivers, icebergs, a coastline with dramatic ocean views, picturesque outports, historic places, abundant wildlife, weather of all possible – and sometimes impossible – kinds, and everywhere, the greatest people you could ever wish to meet.

**Guy, Ray.** *You may know them as Sea Urchins, Ma’am.* Breakwater (1985)

Winner of the Stephen Leacock Award for Humour on its publication, this collection is a superb selection by Eric Norman who notes that “In many ways Guy can be one’s conscience.” In the 1970s and ‘80s, Guy was at his best as a commentator-satirist on Newfoundland’s social and political foibles.

**Finkel, Conrad, Strong-Boag,** *History of the Canadian Peoples,* Copp Clark Pittman, 1993

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**Hiller, James and Peter Neary,** eds. *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Essays in Interpretation.* Toronto (1980)

The note on the companion text below indicates the importance of both these texts by editors Hiller and Neary.

**Hiller, James and Peter Neary,** eds. *Twentieth-Century Newfoundland: Explorations.* Volume 7, “Newfoundland History Series”(Breakwater 1993)

Ten essays build on the editors’ early volume (Toronto 1980 above) and, like it, cover a broad range of topics. Like the earlier text, this collection also succeeds in [helping] “to fill sine important gaps in existing knowledge. Our aim is to be informative rather than definitive.” This book closes with an extremely useful bibliography which “should be useful to a wide variety of readers.” It is.

**Jacobson, David,** *Place and Belonging in America.* Johns Hopkins University Press (2002)

An excellent new release on sense of place. It discusses, among others, several pertinent questions for the present discussion, including: How does a community come to be identified with a certain territory, and how does a territory “define” a people? Why are a people so intricately associated, in the morally felt sense of *Rightfully* belonging, with

a certain place, such as the Americans with the United States, the Jews with Israel, or the French with France? And, just as important, what happens, as is now happening, when peoples and their lands become uncoupled, that is to say, when communities increasingly live outside their imputed homelands, in diasporas? What does such an uncoupling bode for the boundaries of communities and the shape of its politics? ... It is difficult...to understand the multilayered nature of place: its geographic, social, moral and economic qualities; its promise of order, functional and metaphysical ("to know one's place"); and its designation of not only a location but also a state of being.... Home is a refuge and a point of departure from, and orientation to the world. Home is essentially where one is secure.

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This is a revised and extended version of "Newfoundland in Canada" published in 1984, half of which is altogether new. This is a seminal text for any reader interested in Newfoundland's "Cultural Identity." For some this may be a controversial text because its language is forceful and uncompromising. It is all the more vital for these and many other reasons which emerge during reading.

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This is a collection of selections from *A Woman's Almanac* for which research began in 1986 and evolved into an annual agenda book featuring 12 women, in each year, "a tangible recognition of women's achievements...a celebration of women's accomplishments."

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Among other thing, this examines urban environments as "place."