

BEING MAD AT EACH OTHER

'Canadians have found their identity'

by DAVID MARGOSHES
for Southam News

CALGARY — A funny thing happened to Canada on its way to finding its identity: Everybody lost interest.

And that, of course, may be the point.

"Without realizing it, we probably found it," says Barbara Frum, the CBC interviewer who's been talking to Canadians nonstop for a dozen years. "It's being mad at Quebec and Alberta. Being mad at each other."

Keith Spicer, the former national language czar who now writes a syndicated column, is blunter: "Canada's identity crisis is its identity."

Some people feel the fuss has been blown way out of proportion.

"We are who we are, that's it," one well-known Canadian writer who's become irritated by the subject says flatly.

"Canadian identity! What bullshit," snorts Mel Hurtig, the nationalist-minded publisher who, as head of the Committee for an Independent Canada during its heyday in the mid-'70s, did much to popularize the elusive quest.

"That's the most boring topic! We matured out of that navel-gazing years ago. I don't even think about it anymore. We know who we are."

Well, who, Mel?

"Ah, you would have to ask me that!"

Hurtig's not the first to be stumped by the question.

The search for identity has been a national preoccupation practically since the nation's birth — which some historians claim was little more than a defensive measure to keep the Americans at bay.

The navel-gazing took on a new urgency in the late '60s, when Canada's 100th anniversary set off a spate of national pride mixed with bewilderment.

"We were happy as hell to be Canadians, but wondering what the hell a Canadian was," recalls a former activist in the CIC, the group which became the focus for Canadian nationalism during the '70s.

Then novelist Margaret Atwood broke the suspense with her startling analysis of Canadian literary trends, called *Survival*, which told Canadians they were a collective bunch of victims, struggling to survive.

No one had put it quite as simply and bluntly before, but the message wasn't really new.

As critic Ronald Sutherland, a Canadian studies specialist says Canada began as a nation of "born losers" — conquered Indians, defeated French, British Loyalists who backed the wrong side in the U.S. revolution and an assortment of Celts and Russians fleeing from famine and persecution.

Since then, he adds, Canadians have been defining (or explaining) themselves in negative terms, especially in terms of Americans.

Canadians, as everybody knows, are:

Less violent than Americans, more polite than Americans, less pushy than Americans, more easygoing than Americans, less individualistic than Americans, more conservative than Americans, less rednecked than Americans, more progressive than Americans, less innovative than Americans and more — well, self-conscious than Americans.

Canadians, explains Stan Roberts, the academic-turned politician who heads the Canada West Foundation, "know what we're not, even if we don't know what we are. We're not Americans, that's for sure. In fact, the determination not to be American is peculiarly Canadian."

But it is not correct to call us non-Americans.

"We can define ourselves in contrast to the British and the French and the Americans," shrugs Max Saltzman, the former New Democratic parliamentarian who now heads the CIC. "We're clearly not any of those. But positive things are always dramatic, and we're not a dramatic people."

We're not dramatic. Another negative. If Canadians have had a tough time figuring out who they are, it's not surprising. There are few roadmaps, and the signs on the road are overwhelmingly American.

As Sutherland says, the "continental culture" that washes over Canada daily — in all the little details of life from cars to houses, movies to sports, clothes to magazines, music to hamburgers and underarm deodorants — bear a distinct "made-in-U.S.A." label.

Even with the rise in Canadian arts and letter in recent years, there have been few mirrors raised for Canadians to see themselves in.

Our music sounds like American music; our television is a pale imitation of theirs; and our movies, lately, have been theirs in all aspects but financing.

Even our newspapers rely on American feature services for advice columns and comic strips (with gags about George Washington in February).

And even our burgeoning fiction, including that of Atwood, has only "bits and pieces" of our national identity in it so far, according to publisher Jack McClelland. "No one has put it all together yet."

It seems that the only place to get a glimpse of what the Canadian life is like is in those beer ads on TV that show us canoeing white water, breaking broncos and getting ready for a hoedown.

So perhaps it's time to turn to the little things. "People are always running

around like chickens without their heads looking for identity, but it's all around us," says Walter Gordon, the former Liberal politician and CIC member. "All they have to do is open their eyes and look."

But even that isn't easy when, after years of conditioning, we tend to see ourselves through American eyes. Small wonder we appear pale, even if we aren't.

Saltzman says that what separates and defines people is their attitude, and suggest that we look to our achievements (like medicare, the CBC, Petrocan and our peacekeeping force abroad) and to our distinct characteristics drawn from the North, as opposed to the American West, our cultural mosaic, as opposed to the melting pot, and bilingualism for our sense of ourselves.

"We're like a wallflower at a party. Maybe our personality isn't sparkling, but that doesn't mean we don't have a personality."

Okay, now we've got our finger on it. We're wallflowers.

Nonsense, says Alan Robertson, a University of Calgary fine arts professor with a special interest in broadcasting. He believes Canadians are only plain because they think they are.

Our television, for example, is a pale imitation of the American kind, he says, not because we lack the money or the talent, but "the zest. We lack that sort of spirit of enterprise."

"And that says something loud and clear about the Canadian identity. We sell ourselves short, we're afraid to take chances."

Barbara Frum, however, thinks we should just accept ourselves as we are.

"A nation is a mental thing,"

she suggests. "When a majority of people think they're a country, they become one."

It's the pride that does it. That and the "awareness of all the interesting things going on in this country."

And, Frum adds with a laugh, "the Americans are looking so bad lately."

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LOW IN B.C.

Quebec cancer rate high

OTTAWA (CP) — The death rate for cancer is higher in Quebec than in other provinces, a special health department report shows.

That information is contained in a unique atlas produced by the department and Statistics Canada. It contains 28 maps of the country shaded in bright colors corresponding with cancer death rates.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in North America after heart disease.

Over-all cancer death rates were highest in the largest urban centres of Montreal followed by Winnipeg and Toronto. Compared with the average national rate of 172.5 deaths per 100,000 population for men and 118.6 for women, the rates for Montreal were 218.8 for men and 141.6 for women; Winnipeg 195.9 and 128.6 and Toronto 190.1 and 120.5.

There were no average figures for provinces since the rates were listed according for both sexes in 259 different census divisions across the country.

Map shading showed the overall cancer rates were low in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan.

The rates were based on population figures collected by Statistics Canada between 1966 and 1976.

More recent and detailed figures on deaths resulting from cancer and all other causes are available from the statistics gathering agency.

Dr. Don Wigle of the bureau of epidemiology, who helped compile the book for the health department, said Thursday no attempt was made to analyze the data.

He said the atlas was designed in part to stimulate medical research in the area.

"The purpose of the atlas is to bring to light the regional distribution of the rates in an obvious way through patterns on a map so researchers can

develop ideas and test those ideas."

Wigle says cigarette smoking is responsible for 80 per cent to 90 per cent of all cancers.

High lung cancer rates among men were noted in the major urban areas of Vancouver (53.9), Montreal (60.1), Toronto (53.9) and Hamilton (58.4) compared with the 45.1 national average.

Lung cancer rates were generally lower for women but significantly high rates were shown in Vancouver (13.3), Regina (14.2) and Montreal (9.4). The national figure was 7.9.

Wigle said a second atlas volume based on death rates for heart disease, suicide and other causes of death not related to infectious diseases will be released later.

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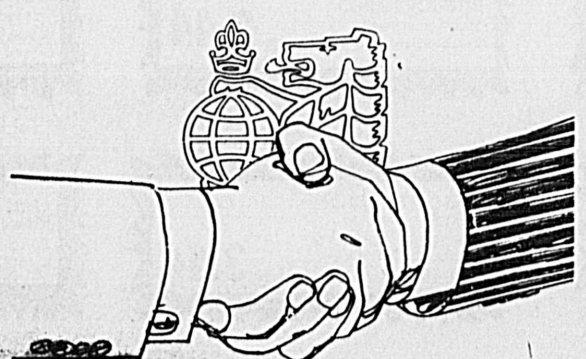
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Lions may die at Florida zoo

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Overcrowding and a shortage of funds at the Markham Park Zoo may force officials to kill Larry the lion, his mate, Kimberly, and their two three-year-old offspring, Mark and Ham.

"Business-wise, we just can't justify them," said Chloe Millin, executive director of the zoo. "It's a tragic situation."

Young male lions require separate living quarters that cost as much as \$7,500 to construct, she said. The lions also gobble four kilograms of beef and chicken parts a day.

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