

This Land is Our Back Yard

Ralph C. Martin

So much of Canadian territory extends into wilderness beyond a few hundred kilometres of the American border. Nevertheless, most of us do not live in the remote regions of Canada. Those who do are mostly First Nations peoples with an ancestral stake in the land. To maintain spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual threads in a web of relationships with respect for seven generations in the past and anticipating the needs of seven generations, in the future, is to maintain relationships. A comprehensive and high relational quotient (RQ) includes relating to land, and the creatures and abiotic components of land.

Frequently when discussions about living conditions in remote communities catch our awareness in the south we may wonder why we have to shell out more money. “Why don’t they just move?” Would you move if you had awareness of spiritual, physical, emotional and intellectual threads, in your home place?

Stan Rowe in his book, *Home Place*, published in 1990, defines ecosystem as “a home system, a physical place surrounding us, to which we belong...Not only are we in the Earth-envelope we are parts of it, participants in it, born from it, sustained and reproduced by it.”

And yet the rub is that we derive our living from Earth. As good ‘living’ pads us, it is tempting to see ‘living’ rather than Earth as our cocoon and sustenance. As creatures of Earth we have a right to live from Earth. It is also our reasonable service to let Earth live.

Sparsely populated land, of remote regions, is our land too. Although far away from the experience of most Canadians, it nevertheless sustains us. It is not just a reservoir of resources. As the interconnectedness of ecosystems becomes more apparent, our society is realizing and responding belatedly to collective and individual responsibilities.

Indigenous people and others who see, hear, smell, taste and move on the land of expansive wilderness, embody a knowing, worthy of attention. With familiarity of specific home places, comes particular wisdom. Prudent decisions about land use, to carry us forward within the context of a healthy Earth-envelope, require perceptive depth.

The chant of ‘not in my back yard’ (nimby) could become ‘relationships in my backyard’ (rimby). To improve our collective RQ, we may want every part of Canada to be someone’s backyard. Yes, extraction businesses may develop more slowly and with higher costs. There are

also costs, albeit usually nudged to the future, of extracting too much, too quickly, with too much collateral damage.

As climate changes and snow and ice retreat, other countries will notice the unfolding resource opportunities in the Canadian Arctic. To reinforce our claims of sovereignty, we need people to live and interact with this land and to know it's characteristics.

It is not in our national and ecological interest for people to abandon livelihoods in remote areas. As our economy shifts, over generations, it may be hard to see how land in any given region can optimally sustain communities. Nevertheless, I wager that it makes sense to offer support from our general treasury to maintain viable, even if small, communities in all regions of Canada.

Stan Rowe, at the end of Home Place, says “we have moments of enlightenment. Collectively and recurrently we show our truer colours, banding together to accomplish worthy goals, freely giving in the interests of a perceived higher good, responding to prophetic visions in times of crisis... What Home Places need from us are more modest furnishings, less extravagance, more tender loving care.”

Perhaps with more people *in situ* among the unique ‘personalities’ of our landscape, more ‘relationships in my backyard’ (rimby) will result in more loving care, to build a future in which our descendants will be grateful for their ancestors.

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