

# Where the silence roars

Last week I received a call from the editor of a large New York newspaper who wanted a story from me about Canada. "What's going on up there?" he asked.

Fast as a black mamba, I replied, "ah . . . er . . . ah . . . well . . . umm" as I desperately tried to recall something really newsworthy that would interest American readers.

Major Canadian stories flashed through my mind. Mila Mulroneu getting saluted by the RCMP. Ontario's riveting leadership race. Hubble bubble in the Parti Quebecois. Funding for Catholic schools. All beyond boring.

Then, in a glorious revelation, it came. "Tuna!" I announced triumphantly. "Tuna?" echoed the perplexed New York editor. So I started to explain Brian Mulroneu's fishing in troubled waters but was cut short with a terse "is that the biggest news in Canada?"

I suppose that from Babylon on Hudson our Tuna-gate doesn't look all that dramatic. "I'll call you next week," I promised and hung up with relief.

Which reminds me of when I lived in Jamaica. At a cocktail party in Kingston, a waiter offered an English woman a canape. "Tuna?" she asked, unsure of what the canape was. "No, ma'am," replied the waiter, misunderstanding. "Take tree nah, dey small." (Take three now, they are small.)

But I digress. My original point is that there is virtually no news at all in Canada. Other nations have water or food shortages — they have no money or no government. Here in Canada, we have a news famine. I thank my lucky stars each day that I don't have to cover domestic events.

In fact, Canadian news is the most monumentally boring news this side of Tasmania. Other countries have civil wars, car bombings, coups d'etat, revolutions, earthquakes, floods and poison gas clouds. We have Joe Clark, Stephen Lewis and Canada Post.

Any country that has nothing better on its plate than smelly tuna fish has got to have acute, perhaps terminal, news anorexia. Maybe what we need is a new government agency, News Canada: It will create news just as Ottawa now manufactures Canadian culture. Reporters could even get grants to go out and dig up or invent stories. This, I suspect I darkly, may already be going on.

For now, we just have to face the hard truth that in terms of news, Canada is a 1. But look at the bright side. Most news is bad news. How often do

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we read stories like "Money Falls From Sky in India," or "PLO Buys Israel Bonds," or "Cossacks to Replace Soviet Missiles." Disasters, catastrophes, crises and doom are our usual breakfast fare. Even the SUNshine Girls don't completely make up for the steady flow of ill tidings.

The less news we have here, the less bad news. Not much may happen up in the white north, but at least we are spared most of the evils that affect the rest of suffering mankind (excuse me, ladies, I should say, *personkind*). In fact, no news is great news.

We may formalize this observation by proposing the rule that a nation's attractiveness as a place to live varies inversely with its ability to generate news. Let's call it the Third Law of Media Dynamics. The proof is self-evident: No-news Switzerland versus Lebanon. Don't ask about no-news places like North Korea or Albania: They are irritating exceptions to this rule.

Many, many times when abroad on assignment, I mention to people that I'm from Canada. "Ah, Canada!" they say, rolling their eyes upward, a tone of deep reverence in their voices. "I would love to live in Canada." To much of the rest of the world, Canada is a remote, pure, peaceful paradise, a sort of Shangri-La just around the corner from Buffalo.

We have lakes and forests, telephones that work, food that while blah won't poison you, friendly girls, cleanliness everywhere, good roads, safe airplanes, and some of the world's kindest people. We do not have famines, earthquakes, civil wars, revolutions, locusts or secret police. For people living in full-of-news Beirut, shabby Lima or awful Calcutta, even for those living in Chicago or Leeds, Canada looks like the last stop before Xanadu.

Which brings me back to my original problem. What am I going to write for those jaded New York readers? Maybe something about changing leaves; a piece on multiculturalism — or perhaps a zinger report on John Turner's cottage.

