

Farewell, Canada

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There are major shifts in our lives that sometimes are visible only in the rear-view mirror. They leave us wondering why we didn't notice the shift at the time. There are other major shifts that loom before us for months or years. They sometimes leave us wondering what all the fuss was about.

A major shift in my life came in August of 1966 when I took a job at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. Even though I became a landed immigrant in Canada, it didn't seem at the time that all that much had happened. I suppose the lack of noticing a major change was the result of little change geographically and considerable family nearby in Seattle.

There are many similarities between Seattle, where I had grown up, and the lower mainland where I then found myself. However, over time I developed an increasing awareness of and appreciation of differences between my adopted country Canada and the country of my birth. My decision to come to Canada had absolutely zero political overtones, but in retrospect I now recognize the move as one of the best decisions I ever made. It was a major shift that became visible only in the rear-view mirror.

I now am approaching another major shift and this time I recognize it ahead of time. Tomorrow — at the time this article was written — I start the journey to Australia, my new country of residence. There is no hiding the fact that this is a major change. As far as poker is concerned, Canada is where I learned almost everything I know about the game. I had played a small limit home game as a graduate student in California, but it was Vancouver where I started playing regularly in higher limit home games and then moved on to games spread in public cardrooms. I had my first experiences with tournaments while living in Canada. Lumbermens in Burnaby and Casino Regina were the first two cardrooms where I developed regular attachments.

I am going to miss dearly the wonderful Canadian poker community. And it is a wonderful community. Casino Regina hosted a dinner in my honour for which I thank the casino, the people who did the organizing, and those who attended. Dave Taylor emceed the event and tore a few strips off my hide, as well as the hides of others in attendance. Dave is one of the funniest people I have encountered and the entire thing was done in good spirit. What struck me as I looked around the venue was how typical this is of the poker community. We compete against each other but there is a marvelous underlying sense of camaraderie and community. I just can't imagine a group of slot players having a farewell dinner for one of their own who is about to head overseas.

I have witnessed many changes in the Canadian poker world over the last 41 years I have been living here. Poker is healthier than ever in Canada, but players must remain vigilant in the face of opposition from the unwashed. There are more cardrooms than ever and online players have avoided major problems. However, there are disturbing signs that appear now and then. Provincial regulators interfere in ways that clearly indicate they know little about the game. Some politicians rumble about attacking the right to play online poker. Poker players must develop a strong collective voice in order to keep the game under player control as much as possible and to establish the legality of online poker.

Some of you have asked me about poker in Australia and the situation is improving. There are few actual cardrooms and some that do exist run games with terrible conditions. Nevertheless, the game has caught hold. Several poker leagues have developed in Australia. What they do is go to a venue, usually a pub, and set up a tournament. They use portable tops to put on tables so that tables frequently seat only six or seven players. The players take turns dealing which is another problem because some people are terrible dealers. The entry fees are either non-existent or small. Frequently one plays in these tournaments to build up points to qualify for tournaments with good cash prizes.

It is clear that the game has caught on in Australia and things should only get better. I would love to see some cardrooms opened and hope there are some ambitious types who are thinking of doing so. I am looking forward to my new country and shall never forget the 41 wonderful years in Canada. I also shall visit from time to time and hope to make it to some of the main tournament events, but for now, farewell, Canada, and thank you for all you have given me.