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# The Lost Newfoundland of Memory: Three Visits

FRANK HOLDEN

Bertha Thorne. *It's Like a Dream to Me, Paddy 'Iron' McCarthy of Renews Relives His First Hundred Years*. St. John's: Thorton Publishing, 2003, ISBN 0-9695828-1-1

Leslie Harris. *Growing Up with Verse: A Child's Life in Gallows Harbour*. St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 2002, ISBN 1-896338-23-2

Dawn Rae Downton. *Seldom*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2002, ISBN 0-7710-2384-2

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR is a unique place with a unique culture. Why is this comment so commonplace? Because, to rephrase Kipling, "What do they know of Newfoundland, who only Newfoundland know?" The speech and the place names alone fascinate the visitor, assuring him he has found a human community like no other on earth. Yet the native, like natives everywhere, cannot be fascinated with the commonplace. His forbearers, and perhaps he himself, may have endured more poverty, helplessness, loss, and shame than they care to remember, but the more unique the place, the stronger its bonds. There is a great deal to be yet learned about bonds between humans and places.

Among the earliest outposts of European emigration to the New World, Newfoundland was eventually settled by the same Anglo-Irish folk with the same technologies, languages, diseases, religions, stories and songs, family and community mores as those who landed farther south. These latter moved inland and upriver to hunt and farm, and were soon followed by others from farther reaches of the Old World. But we who came to Newfoundland stayed on the coast and fished. From earliest times, either we moved west to the next headland and harbour in search of better fishing conditions, or we moved "away" among those others, and we seldom came back. Meanwhile, no more immigrants have followed us here since the 1820s, so we have remained Anglo-Irish for nearly two centuries. South, along the coast of the continent at least to the Carolinas, can still be heard a curiously old and untravelled English accent much like ours, on the tongues of fishermen and islanders who, like ourselves, neither moved inland nor mixed.

Herodotus, the fifth-century BC Greek, is called both the father of geography and the father of history, probably because he was the earliest “travel writer” in our western canon. He noted that climate and terrain are the abiding first causes of all human differences. Geography, then, would be, in his terms, *the father of history*. “Had Newfoundland’s soil been richer,” he would have said, “had your summer sunlight been longer and warmer, your people and their stories would have been very different.”

Like all peoples, we tell and retell stories in search of meaning and direction. Here are the stories of three rural Newfoundlanders born, raised, and shaped in the early decades of the twentieth century. Two tell of childhood; the third tells of a life that has spanned and even exceeded the century. Each little corner of coastal Newfoundland is remote from the others, and each voice pursues meaning according to its lights with its chosen tools and measures.

What makes all three compelling is the intimate profile of that pioneer Newfoundland world they share. This “lost Newfoundland,” which vanished about mid-century, was soon revised into a comforting halcyon dreamland after which many now hunger, unblinkingly fed by our modern media. We have in the sum of the three, not the revised fantasy, but the real Newfoundland that was. And, in the first half of the twentieth century, we see it in its concluding decades, when it had achieved a complex and long-developing re-invention of human community, a human community like no other before it.

Over its two or three centuries of uninterrupted settlement, outport Newfoundland became no less than this, and it became so under the harshest of conditions, natural and imposed. To revisit it today in the intimate detail these books allow, is an exotic and fascinating experience for any reader. But for the native, there is also the shock of recognition that this remote world is none other than our own immediate past.

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It is firmly within the living memory of the yet living Paddy ‘Iron’ McCarthy, who was born at Renew's in 1903, two months before the Wright brothers first flew their “Kittyhawk” machine. *It's Like a Dream to Me* is his oral autobiography, compiled, edited, and published in 2003 by his daughter, Bertha Thorne.

Rich with photos from many sources, and laden with more adventures and anecdotes than a seemingly typical rural Newfoundland fisherman might have had in a lifetime, McCarthy “relives his first hundred years” with a sharp memory and a fearless Irish wit that holds the reader’s attention at every turn. The steady ordering and pruning by editor and publisher Bertha Thorne cannot be underestimated, either, in making this little book greater than the sum of its parts.

Renew's is an ancient fishing harbour on the southern half of the “Southern Shore,” that easterly stretch of coast extending south from St. John’s to Cape Race.

The entire shore is Irish and Catholic. Indeed, practically the entire Avalon Peninsula's coastal population south from St. John's, and west around to Placentia, are descendants of pre-famine Catholic Irish from several of Ireland's southeastern farming counties, who first came as "servants and share-men" on the ships of West Country English merchants. Here they learned how to speak English and how to fish.

If there is a more homogeneously Irish diaspora anywhere else on earth, it is yet to be found. Around the rest of the Newfoundland coast, one finds Irish Catholic communities betwixt and between. However, the Southern Shore, like the Acadian north shore of New Brunswick, is more of a continuous community with an older and stronger common culture than even its inhabitants may realize.

In the range of his labours and adventures, in the individuals, families, and communities he includes, Paddy McCarthy's autobiography is also a kind of social history radiating out from Renewals. Through his voice, the feel of Irish Catholic life as a whole in these communities is as memorable, if not as artful, as the feel of eastern European Jewish life in the stories of Isaac B. Singer.

Closer to home, there are more famous yet comparable autobiographies, like Maurice O'Sullivan's *Twenty Years A-Growin*, which chronicles life in the west of Ireland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Acadian writer Antonine Maillet's most widely known work is a one-woman play about a middle-aged charwoman of Bouctouche, New Brunswick. The joys and sorrows of *La Sagouine* personify the spirit of Acadia.

In the ring and jaunt of Paddy McCarthy's speech, in his command of details, there is also the raw text of an engrossing one-man stage play about Newfoundland in general, and about the Southern Shore in particular.

There is another count on which this book distinguishes itself. Orwell once charged that a good writer must have a built-in lie detector. Once he's got hold of one and has it up and running, then he can learn how to do just about everything else, which isn't much. Keats said the same when he declared truth and beauty to be synonymous. Thinkers from Longinus to Santayana have nitpicked over the yin and yang of ethics and aesthetics. So there will be no more of it here.

Instead, let's put some of that raw text from *It's Like a Dream to Me* to the test. While young Paddy was a factory worker in Boston during the early 1920s, a German immigrant once confided: "We used to have tons and tons of fish in our country too, and we also thought we'd never see the end of it, but we did. When the big draggers came and began taking millions of tons of fish from our waters, it didn't take long. The same thing will happen in your country, and your people will curse the day of the big deep sea draggers" (35).

Paddy had first fished as a boy with his father before World War I. He stopped at 86, and only then because a federal fisheries officer fined him \$50 for not wearing a life jacket. "I spent almost eighty years in a boat going back and forth to Cape Ballard Bank," he concludes, "sometimes in the thickest kind of fog, and during the

war years we carried sand down to St. John's. We never had a lifejacket aboard, hell's flames, half the time we didn't even carry a dory to save ourselves if something happened. And then for them yaw-yawns to try and give me a lesson on how to conduct myself aboard of a boat. Sure 'twas time to give it up, wasn't it!" (89).

In a short and reassuring chapter on politics, he declares that politicians "are all tarred with the same brush" (100). In his father's time, "Old Mike Condon," already admired for his selflessness and service, once confessed to a rally in *Renews* that he "would look to himself first and to the people second." Then "Old Sir Michael Cashin gave a speech full of the usual bull to the contrary and got elected ... But that's usually the way, the more bullshit, the better chance of getting elected" (100). This may not be beautiful or even pleasant talk to some ears, but is it not truthful?

Then there are the many incidental though memorable events that the most daring fiction writers would rather steal than invent. And if these never happened, then the witnesses must have been complicit. The parish priest Father McCarthy (no relation), after losing the battle to keep movies out of *Renews* as late as the early 1950s, relents and starts showing movies in the parish hall. However: "Anytime a woman came on the screen and showed a bit of her leg, or a fellow and girl started to kiss, he would step in front of the projector so the people couldn't see the screen. I wonder how far he'd get with that stuff today?" (52).

Though the rigours of Lent and all duties and rituals on the Catholic calendar were obeyed without complaint, the sociable Irish are otherwise famously disrespectful of class distinctions and unnecessary solemnity. Paddy McCarthy admits to having had a hand in some classically irreverent practical jokes at local wakes (39). While passing through Halifax, again in the early 1920s, Paddy and a chum followed a marching Salvation Army band across town and into their "temple." Seated at the back, they were enjoying both the musical and the spiritual experience until one of them took a laughing fit. Then they had to leave before they were thrown out (34).

What befell Nickerson, the draught horse, surely had witnesses and was recounted in a St. John's newspaper. This was the McCarthys' horse, who was dumb and strong enough to have fallen uninjured down an eighteen-foot well hole in the night. And he was smart and strong enough to cooperate with the McCarthy brothers' plan that got him safely up again. These yarns are too incidental and too strange for fiction. They are better than fiction for they are the stuff from which the most convincing fictions are made.

The brothers' "second boat" was always leaky, and he tells us, "When we'd have her anchored on the frape [collar] in the nighttime, we had to keep checkin' on her in order to keep the water bailed out, so it wouldn't get up over the engine. The engine that was in her didn't need any excuses not to start because in the best of times it only went when it felt like it" (64). Paddy McCarthy kept this boyishness through all his years, but he is an adult wit who willingly includes himself in the joke, as he does here.

Why is he called 'Iron' Paddy? Because his father was "Iron Man" John McCarthy, also of Renew's, whose strength and endurance had earned him the title. His son Patrick, who assisted at the rescue of the SS *Florizel* off Cappahayden in 1917, and had his first flying lesson in 1976, is 103 years old in 2006. The family title was both earned and inherited.

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Great Gallows Harbour is, or was, at "the back of the bended knee" of Newfoundland's southern Burin Peninsula (7). It is one of the many outports now vanished from Placentia Bay after the government "resettlements" of the last century. At the mouth of Paradise Sound, it had ten families, was accessible only by boat and was a paradise for young Leslie Harris in the 1930s and 1940s.

Very few from those last Placentia Bay generations have lived in the place or the world where they grew up. Harris has journeyed still farther than most since 1945, when as a teenager he made his first schooner trip to St. John's (240). As the title warns, *Growing Up with Verse* is an unusual autobiography. It has one foot firmly planted in Great Gallows Harbour and the other in that far greater bay of rhyme and verse.

Before we discuss the unusual, let's note a few usual things about Harris's time and place that may have receded without our notice. For many centuries before universal schooling and newspapers, and long into the first years of radio, news remained accurate and travelled fast enough in the measured metre of rhyming speech. It was powerfully musical and expressive in itself, and if you actually sang it, too, you only put the icing on the cake. Like the power that drawing and painting had before photography and its recent descendants arrived, so the immense power that rhyming speech and oratory once had can only be imagined today.

In the late Renaissance the printing press brought "broadside" sheets to every street corner in the cities of Europe. Usually carried by a well-known tune, they told in verse the details of the latest foreign battles or local murders. Without print, the same was done by hand in the remotest Newfoundland outports, with accuracy being a greater priority than the finer points of poetry. Newfoundland folk balladry abounds in sea disasters and lost ships, but not because tastes were morbid. These events left widows, children, and whole communities at once in fear of, and hungry for, every detail. The heroics of young Captain William Jackman (of Renew's, of course) in saving 26 lives from a floundering wreck on the remote Labrador coast in October 1867 were heard as a ballad by most Newfoundlanders before they would have read of them in the press (Thorne 61). Even today, there is seldom a mention of this incident that omits one of the ballads. One can only imagine the tension and anticipation in kitchens and lofts when the first ballads were sung about the loss, without a trace, of the SS *Southern Cross* off Cape Race in 1914, as she raced back from the seal hunt in the Gulf laden with pelts and full crew.

In smaller matters, accuracy and diplomacy were just as essential. “Mr. Joe” cautioned young Harris even as he wrote out the verses of a local adventure. “Les, boy,” he said, “I don’t like singing that one because ’tis not all true. ’Tis partly the dirt of the Murphys, slandering Paddy Brown, who was too good a man for them” (133).

Then there is the much riskier and labor-intensive world everyone lived in until a few generations ago. Long hours of drudgery and risk were common to all but the wealthy, who paid others to do it for them. When Newfoundlanders travelled to fish and trade they did so in less leisure and safety than technology affords us all today. Most were less than literate then, as many are less than literate now, but there has always been that minority who seriously took to reading. It was an out-of-body, almost transcendent refuge from work, worry, weather, and other people that opened universes upon still homely horizons. There was also, then as now, that moral majority for whom reading any more than you had to was a waste of time and a sin against the Holy Ghost.

If young Les’s memory for verse and his talent for recitation were as famous in Great Gallows Harbour as it appears, he must have been called “egghead” or “Mamma’s boy” at some point. It was his mother, after all, who kept poetry of all kinds in the house, including the complete works of Longfellow. More than once he reminds us that, however learned he was in verse, “like all the Harrises,” he was completely unmusical. But he doth protest too much. W.B. Yeats was not the first great, yet tone-deaf poet. To hear him whining his way through “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” would’ve been something up with which they would not put on St. Patrick’s Night in the harbour. You weren’t expected to sing, in any case, unless you were a “designated singer,” he tells us (181).

*Growing Up with Verse* is as diverse an anthology of riddles, epitaphs, parodies, fantasies, lullabies, learning songs, hymns, and ballads, from the ribald to the sacred, as one will find in the language.

When he raises one foot out of the harbour and simply introduces each poem after another, he can weary the reader who may have his own copy of the *Faber Book of Useful Verse* or the Anglican Hymnal. Though singing is only the icing, opera critics, for one, have often remarked that many lyrics can be sung beautifully but not recited as beautifully. There are hymn texts, once bereft of their moving melodies, that sound as “mawkish” as Harris found so much of Longfellow to be.

But when he raises the other foot from that far greater bay of rhyme, to remember boyhood rambles in Jigging Cove, for example, it is the poetry already there that informs his finest prose descriptions of “that savage, holy and enchanted place” (191). There’s no denying that poetry and nature inform and inhabit each other. One cannot take the New Hampshire farmlands out of Frost, the Lake District out of Wordsworth, or Galway and Sligo out of Yeats, and have much of poetry or poet left worth listening to. The commonest folksongs too are love songs to “significant others” or “significant places.” Harris recites “Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary’s,” a

typical example from Newfoundland. There are many Irish songs in praise of every river, hill and hummock, mountain and glen on an island that could fit many times into the province of Manitoba.

More distinct than his range of verse or his love of nature is Leslie Harris's store of tiny details about flora and fauna, people and adventures, and the way he can replay a moment, call back the image of a person from long ago.

His grandmother's brother was tragically drowned at Cape St. Mary's when collecting gull chicks to take home as pets for the children. He was remembered in having a child named after him (14). There was Mr. Jim Picco, who, while describing the values of fox pelts, drew his voice down to a whisper to tell young Les, "The silver grey *exceeds* the black, you know!" (195). There is Mr. Joe and Aunt Bertha and the legendary balladeer "Thomas Howlett from Cape Broyle," who invariably spoke in rhyme (116). There may not be many books about lost Newfoundland which allow us to revisit it in such intimate and authentic detail.

Does another book compare with Leslie Harris's autobiography and verse anthology? The fine Appalachian singer Jean Ritchie's *Singing Family of the Cumberlands* is a mix of local folksongs and family history, also from a childhood in the 1930s and 1940s, in Perry County, Kentucky, on the banks of the "Troublesome" River. Also worthwhile for the verses and music alone, Ritchie's book is still assigned reading for folklore undergraduates across North America. Her predecessors brought many of the same songs, ballads, and dances with them from the British Isles as may be found in *Songs and Ballads of the Newfoundland Outports*, collected without recording technology by Greenleaf and Mansfield on the Newfoundland coast and first published in 1933.

Harris explains that hot wax drippings were spilled on the floors to give dancers enough slippage to enjoy their footwork. A dance song and lyrics familiar in the Ritchie Family of Viper, Kentucky, is called "Sugar on the Floor." There were no fishing schooners in Appalachia; there was no corn to be hoed and shucked in Placentia Bay; but both books have the same passionate attachment to family and place, to local history, to local singers and songwriters, to famous characters, to customs and lore. The Ritchie family even refer to unrelated neighbours as "aunts and uncles," as is done everywhere in rural Newfoundland. What they *don't* have in common, as Herodotus would say, is a matter of climate and geography.

Of the many excuses to learn and recite verse Les Harris had in Great Gallows Cove, the most anticipated must have been the Christmas Concert. This, he says, was a loose mix of song, recitation, and "dialogs," followed by a supper and dance. Part raucous vaudeville and part community function, the "material" ranged from the ridiculous to the seriously sentimental as the entire community fell for "the roar of the greasepaint and the smell of the crowd." Harris quotes widely from his program favourites over the years. There were the short couplets for shy children:



Here I stand upon the stage,  
 A pretty little figure!  
 If the girls (boys) don't love me now,  
 They'll love me when I'm bigger. (173)

After perhaps a stumbling delivery, the child would then scurry off to charmed applause and laughter. "Dialogs" were often written for the evening and made satirical reference to local events and behaviour worthy of it. Having gone "tin eared and Methodist footed" through the rolling year, young Harris must have looked forward to these stage appearances when he became the golden-tongued bard of the western bay.

The weakness of *Growing Up with Verse* is the strength of it. No self-conscious anthologist with editors or academic peers peering after him would have picked so catholic an armload from the garden of verse, with such colours and fragrances that may not have savoured each other's company, unless he picked to please himself. And he did. Since he didn't scruple to include "Boxing the Compass" and "Rules of the Road for Ships," why did he leave out Newfoundland's own "Wadham's Song"? There are the joyful memories, sadly recalled in "The Kerry Dancing," but no mention of the comparably exuberant Scottish song "The Dancing in Kyle," for one. We are given "The Shan Van Voght," but hasn't he heard the powerful and vivid melody and lyrics of "The Bold Fenian Men," a thing that burns itself upon heart and brain at the first hearing? As a companion piece to the stillness and mystery of "Flannan Isle," he might have included Walter de la Mare's "The Listeners." And what's this? "Wynken, Blynken and Nod," but no "Scarlet Ribbons"? "The Mary L MacKay," but no "Nautical Extravagance," by W.S. Gilbert? "Ducks" and "Bloody Orkney," but no "Matilda," by Hillaire Belloc? The story of Saul is a noble morality tale, but how could a proper Methodist leave out the preacher of Ecclesiastes?

Those others of us who have also grown up on verse and song can appreciate the range of his choices and only wonder if he left some out because he didn't know of them, or worse, because he didn't like them.

Les Harris did journey farther from Great Gallows Harbour than most and he did have a career on stage. Over the years many scholars have sat before him listening, and then walked up to have degrees conferred by Dr. Leslie Harris, who became President and Vice-Chancellor of Memorial University in St. John's. He retired in 1990.

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Paddy McCarthy was a "jack 'a trades," fishing, carpentering, hauling sand, scouting and salvaging from wrecks. He may have even met smugglers and moonshiners, but he did it all to raise his growing family, about whom he says little. You didn't talk about family.

Leslie Harris admits to only one unpleasant memory in Great Gallows Harbour, the slaughtering of lambs in late fall. About the isolation, the harsh and dangerous routines of daily life and work in outport Newfoundland we have ample records. But, until recent decades, we haven't seen inside that oldest and most primary human community from which all other communities have grown: the family. In Newfoundland, what happened in the family stayed there.

Then, in 1970, Percy Janes's novel *House of Hate* was published. It is said that his elder sister tried to prevent the publication. You didn't talk about family or anything else too personal if you weren't going to be "nice." Change was a very long time coming, but it did come one day and it will come again another day.

Since the mid-twentieth century, when Father McCarthy did his improvised censoring of the movies in Renewals, sectarian churches and religions have been losing their power to tell us, through our families, who we are, why we are here and how we should live. The same has been happening all over "Western Christendom." After Freud and his new notions came Psychology 101, and we all learned the secular, the scientific way to see ourselves. When both the religious and the clinical made a limited peace with each other, the rise of the "Recovery Movement," or something similar, was then inevitable.

Other dynamics freed the family by freeing the individuals in it. Birth control, instant communications, faster travel, and job options brought greater mobility to all. Schools, hospitals, medications, and technological conveniences all raised the levels of health, safety, leisure, and personal independence. They also raised the ancient siege upon the family that had been drawing ever tighter in the west for centuries, dating from at least the eighteenth-century land enclosures and clearances, when masses were dispossessed of farmland, of even their rights of serfdom, and forced into growing cities to be wage slaves, or off to other continents.

With Janes's *House of Hate*, also set in the early decades of the twentieth century, Newfoundlanders read for the first time about the intimate inner life of a family much like the ones many had grown up in, or just about everyone had heard about, even Leslie Harris. The siege had been lifted in Newfoundland for the moment.

Because new ways had also to be found to explore the heretofore forbidden dynamics between "the personal and the political," a new genre called "memoir" also evolved. Dawn Rae Downton's *Seldom* belongs to this new genre with the old name. Dickens's poor boys who made good led to the formulaic Horatio Alger stories. From Jane Austen's delicate romances has descended the not-so-delicate "Scarlet O'Hara" of Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*.

The first modern murder mystery sleuth was Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, who solved crimes without ever leaving the fireside of his Paris flat. Today, much expensive prime time television each evening tells similarly morbid stories about photogenic and cold-eyed detectives, of both sexes, who bound up, down, and around modern cities and always find out within the hour how someone got dead. So this new "memoir" genre is as new as the age and the questions it asks. The good writers

trying to make truthful and beautiful art haven't quite gotten their lie detectors recalibrated to it yet, and bad ones haven't gotten it "down to a science" yet.

*Seldom* is Downton's "memoir" of her grandmother's life and her mother's childhood in Little Bay Islands, Notre Dame Bay, Newfoundland, mainly from the early 1920s to the early 1940s. There is family history reaching well back into the nineteenth century but the story proper begins in 1922 with the marriage at Seldom, Fogo Island, of Ethel Wellon, 30, from Ladle Cove, Gander Bay, to Sidney Wiseman, 22, of Little Bay Islands. From the first page we are left in no doubt about the burden of the tale before us: "The bride was educated, refined, with an unselfish, peaceful soul. Did the groom have a soul at all? Skipper Sid, he was called back then. Later, by his children, the Old Man, Himself" (5).

Sidney turns out to be every ounce the bogeyman and persecutor of wife, four sons and two daughters, until death did them part, 35 years and 280 pages later. When Ethel dies in 1957 and her grown children return for the funeral, the sons drive the "Old Man" out of the house. He simply "disappeared," and, we hope, came to a bad end chewing on his just desserts (290).

The narrative throughout passes to and fro between the voices of mother and elder daughter Marion, lingering mainly on the child's shock, horror, and bewilderment and even longer on the malicious acts and attitudes of her ogre/father. No, there is no mention of sexual abuse and only at the end is there a suggestion of Sid's alcohol abuse. This family story is also a women's story, as the scope of interest remains within the home, within the grievances and expectations of mother and daughter. In fact, we can soon weary of hearing horrid incident upon repeated condemnation of the big bad father and his poor tortured family in this ever-darkening fairy tale. After so much uncomprehended horror by undeveloping characters, it is easy to understand Rhett Butler's famous line: "Frankly, Scarlet, I don't give a damn."

It is not that Sidney Hayward Wiseman shouldn't have been hauled out on some frosty morning and shot with frozen balls of his own shit, the suggested punishment for the Big Bad Father in *House of Hate*. It is rather that all writing must hold the reader's interest and anticipation. We must care what happens and what happens next to the characters. They needn't all develop, but those we are asked to care about must develop in some way. Yet *Seldom* shrinks to a bewildering fairy tale told by a wronged and frustrated child with no sense of perspective, humour, or understanding of its pain. Mother Ethel endures all and keeps the family secret while "theeing and thouing" herself and her children with prayers and hymn fragments. The narrative voice changes abruptly from one character to another, and changes time and place with little warning. One often has to flip back, or ahead, to see where, when and who is speaking.

Downton uses the twentieth-century tools of narrative fiction — the interior monologue, the stream of consciousness, the shift of voice — to heighten the subjective horror and disorientation of her protagonists. And, true, one way to convey

the enormous complexity and penetrating affliction of an unrelentingly evil antagonist would be to chronicle his every excess.

But *Seldom* is not fiction. It is the biography of a family. We have photographs of them, of their homes and communities. We have dates of events in their lives, maps of Little Bay Islands and Notre Dame Bay. Well then, let's discuss this real family history behaviourally, therapeutically, morally.

Ethel Wellon had been a school teacher on the "Straight Shore" for ten years, not a job for the weak of will or the thin of skin. Before that she had been a top student at Memorial College in St. John's, where she'd learned to speak French, even Spanish, to foreign crews in Notre Dame Bay. Before that, she'd been raised in a loving and prosperous merchant family in prosperous Ladle Cove, with the lowest dole numbers in Newfoundland during the 1930's Great Depression. She played the organ, could run a business, and knew her Bible. Sidney, eight years her junior, wasn't her first, even her second, choice. Married in winter, she ran away from him that first spring and came back to Ladle Cove, already pregnant. She "could have" stayed and gone into her father's prosperous business, but "a child needs a father," Thomas Wellon had told her (54). She loved her father so much that she obeyed him and went back to the grim fairy tale. We know how repressed Newfoundland was then, and is now, but if any woman could have gotten a second chance, why couldn't the "educated, refined" daughter of a prosperous merchant, in a country run by prosperous merchants, have gotten it? What's missing from this picture?

Sidney Wiseman is even harder to read. He appears to have been dominated and spoiled by his daughter-in-law-hating mother, "Aunt Lizzie." Once he became a husband and inherited equal prosperity, he played the hangashore and the hypochondriac and, of course, beat and bullied wife and children. But he read magazines and newspapers of all kinds, had a billiard room full of buddies, was the life of every party, and, we are told, "slindged" off, unbeknownst to his family, to the TB ward at Twillingate hospital, where he sang songs and entertained the other patients while he was "recovering."

Says Yeats in an early poem, "The Fiddler of Dooney": "For the good are always the merry, / Save by an evil chance, / And the merry love the fiddle, / And the merry love to dance: ..." If Sid could have been so bad, but yet so merry, it was evil chance, indeed. What's missing from this picture?

The modern Recovery Movement enjoins victims to empower themselves and break the silence, break the generational cycle of abuse, by refusing to cooperate and conceal, to be "enablers" of the abuser, drinker, batterer, but rather to confront him/her. Modern family theory advises both victims and perpetrators to revisit their family histories for the roots of these destructive behaviours which they've allowed into their lives.

As a young teenager, Marion finally explodes and confronts her father in the shop before all the customers (252). Years later, however, she realizes she has married a man with some of her father's unwanted traits. His grown sons drove him out

of the house in the end, but how much of him did they keep and bring to their own wives and families? Most people, most times, choose mates much like their parents and so create new families from what was familiar. And in surviving a horrible childhood, family therapy says, the growing child represses the pain of the unacceptable and so later finds s/he has accepted it into his/her life and future. The social worker will add that, whether dysfunctional parents are doing the best they can, or like Sid, are doing the worst they can, the results upon the children, as upon anyone, will be similarly destructive.

The ancient and almighty power of sex to satisfy the human drive for at least bodily companionship is very rarely overruled by the chastening suggestion that you shouldn't bring children into the world if you're not ready to make them welcome. Sex demands its privacy and so the family has been left private. Only in recent decades have there been government-sanctioned interventions in the name of "child protection." But because government does not yet dare govern the rich and powerful, it does not dare intervene in their families, however obviously troubled they may be. Knowing this, the poor and powerless feel only insult added to these already offensive intrusions by government, which they cannot resist, however troubled they may be. This is as far as matters have progressed in the twenty-first century.

In merchant-ruled and minimally governed rural Newfoundland of the 1930s, we may be sure that well-to-do merchant families like the Wisemans of Little Bay Islands would have been left undisturbed, however obvious their troubles were to everyone in the community, long before and forever after Marion's outburst in her mother's store.

To the moralist, it is not a problem of family at all, but of human evil, which happens to be born and then grows in families. All stories of all kinds are moral discussions about how we live and how we might live better. *House of Hate* was a landmark novel morally, ethically, because it dared to expose and discuss human evil within a Newfoundland family. It was not a landmark aesthetically, in the skillful and seductive use of narrative tools, old or new. Though it does attempt to use newer narrative devices with mixed success, Downton's "memoir," *Seldom*, is also an ethical landmark, for the same reason.

When the good, (who are not always the merry), do nothing to stop it, human evil continues about its wanton business of doing unto others as it would rather not be done by. Anyone who examines it in fairy tales, Bible stories, fiction, and drama, in human history or daily life, recognizes it by its two fists of lies and coercion.

Undefended, unenforced lies are harmless, even entertaining, like card tricks, magic shows, confessed fictions. Undenied, unconcealed violence is called an "accident," or "an act of God." Humans conceal in the first place because they either don't want to share what they have in excess, or admit to what they have done in excess. This describes Sidney Wiseman as it describes any villain. Why evil exists and persists, and where it originated, is another discussion. In the meantime, one would expect social reformers and utopians who wish to nip lies and coercion in the

bud to call for perestroika, openness, more sharing and more things to be held in common. One would expect them to call for peace and pacificism, and most do.

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Why then, after generations of harsh mercantile serfdom in the fishery, could Newfoundlanders not re-invent themselves again as a whole community when the century's inventions and conveniences made it so possible?

Because, to repress the unacceptable is to accept it. Those generations had no choice but to accept the social order imposed by merchants and profiteers. Very few believed any better could be had.

To Janes's novel and Downton's memoir we may add the first plays of David French as further testimony to the pernicious destruction that serfdom and helplessness have inflicted upon Newfoundland families.

French's *Leaving Home* has been staged across Canada and found its way onto many college reading lists, but it has not yet been professionally staged in St. John's since its first production in Toronto over thirty years ago.

Newfoundland needs to hear all the disturbing stories it can bear. As for the comforting and the comic ones, we have more than enough.

frank.holden@nl.rogers.com

