



# The Enlightenment



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## Interesting Perspective on Being Canadian

*By Audrey Coulshaw*

Once in a while, someone does a nice job of describing a Canadian. This time it was an Australian dentist who wrote the following editorial to help define what a Canadian is. This is an appropriate article for Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

In case anyone asks you who a Canadian is:

A Canadian can be English, or French, or Italian, Irish, German, Spanish, Polish, Russian or Greek. A Canadian can be Mexican, African, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Australian, Iranian, Asian, Arab, Pakistani or Afghan.

A Canadian may also be a Cree, Métis, Mohawk, Blackfoot, Sioux, or one of the many other tribes known as native Canadians. A Canadian's religious beliefs range from Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu or none. The key difference is that in Canada they are free to worship as each of them chooses. Whether they have a religion or no religion, each Canadian ultimately answers only to God, not to the government, or to armed thugs claiming to speak for the government and for God.

A Canadian lives in one of the most prosperous lands in the history of the world. The root of that prosperity can be found in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that recognizes the right of each person to the pursuit of happiness.

A Canadian is generous and Canadians have helped out just about every other nation in the world in their time of need, never asking a thing in return. Canadians welcome the best of everything, the best products, the best books, the best music, the best food, the best services and the best minds. But they also welcome the least - the oppressed, the outcast and the rejected.

These are the people who built Canada. You can try to kill a Canadian if you must as other bloodthirsty tyrants in the world have tried, but in doing so you could just be killing a relative or a neighbor. This is because Canadians are not a particular people from a particular place. They are the embodiment of the human spirit of freedom. Everyone who holds to that spirit, everywhere, can be a Canadian.

Keep your stick on the ice!

# Raising the Profile of Humanism

An Editorial from the *Victorian Humanist*

By *Rossllyn Ives\**

How can we go about raising the profile of Humanism? A first step is to be clear about what we mean by Humanism, so we can present it in a convincing and readily understood way.

As a start, I suggest most Humanists would agree that our world view consists of a cluster of core ideas including:

- Humans are naturally evolved.
- Reliable knowledge comes from inquiry and reasoned thinking.
- Leading an ethical life is essential to individual and community well-being.
- Personal autonomy must be combined with social responsibility.
- Democracy and human rights are central to good governance.
- The arts enhance life through their transformative powers.

These interlinked ideas provide a framework for leading an ethical and responsible life. And it is worth remembering that Humanism is one of the most developed secular alternatives to religion. Sadly, it is not always the word that springs to people's minds when they identify as non-religious, hence our need to raise the profile of Humanism.

In a few words, Humanism can be described as “an open-ended approach to living that draws together many of the best ideas humans have had for leading a good life” — good in both an ethical as well as enjoyment sense.

Each day Humanists try to do their best to be kind, considerate and compassionate towards fellow humans and other living creatures. They do this not for heavenly rewards, but rather because it is the right thing to do. The HSV shows this by expressing support for humane policies and actions, and our opposition to policies that are unjust and against human rights, such as Australia's treatment of refugees, Indigenous and LGBTI people.

As an organised voice for a reasoned, compassionate and ethical way of living, HSV has an important role in making Humanism better known. If, as is highly likely, this year's census records “no religion” as the largest single category, this puts increased demand on organised Humanism to present its life-affirming world view in public forums; in particular to educational institutions, governments and the media.

Of pressing urgency is the fact that Humanism has been included in a new Victoria school curriculum on world views. Teachers and students therefore need to have access to information about Humanism and Humanists.

Your committee hopes that more HSV members might be willing to contribute to getting Humanism better known. One relatively simple way you can do this is by spreading the Humanist world view to others when an opportunity arises. We can supply extra copies of either the *VH* or *Australian Humanist* for handing around along with our introductory leaflet. And we can provide speakers if groups are interested in hearing about Humanism.

\*Rosslyn Ives is the editor of the *Victorian Humanist*, the newsletter of the Humanist Society of Victoria (HSV) based in Melbourne Australia. This article is printed with her permission. It is useful to learn how humanists in other countries are going about promoting a humanist world-view.

## WHY WAS THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBED?

Perhaps we should ask a Witch.

*By Duncan Watterworth*

My recent visit to Boston was supposed to be a pleasant four days of exploring and enjoying the city. But violence intervened – violence very fresh, and violence very old.

I was left searching for explanations. Was there a common denominator between the two horrific events – one historic, one painfully current – that confronted me?

With the offer of a free place to stay, Barb and I jumped at the opportunity to visit Boston. The apartment of my niece, a student in the city, would be vacant for a few days. But two days before we were to go, the bombs exploded among the spectators at the Marathon. My daughter emailed to ask if we would cancel our trip. “It’s the safest city in America right now,” I replied.

We arrived on the Thursday, but the manhunt was on for the local Tsarnaev brothers, and Boston was in lock-down. Our free apartment was outside of the city, in the town of Salem, so we ended up spending two days exploring that historic port.

Salem’s claim to fame is the notorious “Witch Trials of 1692”. Over the course of four months, thirteen women and six men were found guilty, hanged, excommunicated from their churches, and buried in shallow graves. Another man was pressed to death, and five others died in prison.

The Puritan Christians of Salem believed Satan was very real, and very active in human affairs. It was a crime to make an unlawful covenant with Satan, or to afflict someone through witchcraft. The horrors of 1692 started when the nine-year-old daughter of the Reverend Samuel Parris, and her cousin, began having fits, and accused three women of afflicting them. Soon the town was boiling with accusations of witchcraft. Arrests ensued, a court was convened, and the hangings began.

Giles Corey, an eighty-year old farmer, refused to plead either guilty or not guilty. For that, large stones were slowly piled on his body until, after two days, he finally died. His wife was hanged three days later. George Burroughs’ last earthly moments were preserved by a contemporary account. From the gallows he made an eloquent claim of innocence, and recited the Lord’s Prayer, “as witches are not supposed to be able to recite”. But his accusers said the Devil was dictating the prayer to him, and he swung.

Today the Town of Salem embraces its violent past, at least for tourism. There is a wax museum, a witch walk, and shops offering witchcraft supplies, spell kits, potions, and T-shirts. We toured Witch Village, guided by a real witch. She said Halloween week in Salem was crazy.

The faith-based absolutes of one era had become the quaint tourist amusements of the next.

On the Sunday and Monday, with the alleged bombers dead or in custody, Boston was reopened to tourists. But the city was not the same. Boylston Street was still barricaded, and we saw the makeshift shrine, the clusters of silent people staring down the empty street. Shock and grief hung in the air. And the inescapable question: Why do these things happen?

Does it take a monster to do a monstrous act? Or does it take a fallacious faith-based dogma, and some doubt-free foot soldiers?

Is this the commonality between the witch hangings and the Boston bombing? Will three centuries into the future be enough for us to look back at today's absolutist, faith-based ideologies, and their results, with amusement?

Or will we have been annihilated by them?

## **Good Times**

The October 2016 *Enlightenment* contained an article on economics, part of which dwelt on the prosperous and relatively peaceful period from 1945 to the year 2000, sometimes referred to as a "Golden age." The article which follows goes back a little further describing life in the "Great Depression," then moving on to the period after WW II, described in the article as the "best of times." I am not sure how I got this article, but it obviously came from the U.S. As a person born in 1930, I found it to be very nostalgic. Hope readers of all ages enjoy it. (DAH).

## **Children of the Greatest Generation**

Born in the 1930s and early 40s, we exist as a very special age cohort. We are the Silent Generation. We are the smallest number of children born since the early 1900s. We are the "last ones."

We are the last generation, climbing out of the depression, who can remember the winds of war and the impact of a world at war which rattled the structure of our daily lives for years.

We are the last to remember ration books for everything from gas to sugar to shoes to stoves. We saved tin foil and poured fat into tin cans. We hand mixed white stuff with yellow stuff to make fake butter. We stood in line at the grocery store when it was learned a tub of real butter had just arrived, and as kids holding a place in line to await a mother in trail, we learned after being pushed aside by an adult stranger who was also in line, to push ourselves back in line. We saw cars up on blocks because tires weren't available. We can remember milk being delivered to our house early in the morning and placed in the milk box on the porch.

We are the last to hear Roosevelt's radio assurances and to see gold stars in the front windows of our grieving neighbors. We can also remember the parades on August 15, 1945, VJ Day. We saw the "boys" home from the war build their Cape Cod style houses, pouring the cellar, tar papering it over and living there until they could afford the time and money to build it out.

We are the last generation who spent childhood without television. Instead we imagined what we heard on the radio. As we all like to brag, with no TV, we spent our childhood “playing outside until the street lights came on.”

We did play outside and we did play on our own. There was no Little League. Ball games were "pick-up" and played on vacant lots sharing baseball mitts because only the few had them. No kid had a two-wheeler bike until about 1946 when "Victory Bikes" were sold (no chrome, flimsy frame, very thin wheels). There was no city playground for kids. To play in the water, we turned the fire hydrants on and ran through the spray.

The lack of television in our early years meant, for most of us, that we had little real understanding of what the world was like. Our Saturday afternoons, if at the movies, gave us newsreels of the war and the Holocaust sandwiched in between westerns and cartoons.

Telephones were one to a house, often shared and hung on the wall. Computers were called calculators and were hand cranked. Typewriters were driven by pounding fingers, throwing the carriage, and changing the ribbon. The Internet and Google were words that didn't exist. Newspapers and magazines were written for adults. We are the last group who had to find out for ourselves.

As we grew up, the country was exploding with growth. The G.I. Bill gave returning veterans the means to get an education and spurred colleges to grow. VA loans fanned a housing boom. Pent-up demand coupled with new installment payment plans put factories to work.

New highways would bring jobs and mobility. The veterans joined civic clubs and became active in politics. In the late 40s and early 50s the country seemed to lie in the embrace of brisk but quiet order as it gave birth to its new middle-class (which became known as Baby Boomers).

The radio network expanded from 3 stations (NBC, ABC, CBS) to thousands of stations. The telephone started to become a common method of communications and "Faxes" sent hard copy around the world. A neighborhood television set was a rare phenomenon (circular B&W 10" screen). Most families could not afford such a luxury, so as kids, we'd head to the closest TV appliance store, which always had a TV in the sidewalk display window, where we would watch Milton Berle and his Texaco Comedy Hour and, sometimes, even a major league ball game from New York City.

Our parents were suddenly free from the confines of the depression and the war and they threw themselves into exploring opportunities they had never imagined.

We weren't neglected but we weren't today's all-consuming family focus. They were glad we played by ourselves “until the street lights came on.” They were busy discovering the post war world.

Most of us had no life plan, but with the unexpected virtue of ignorance and an economic rising tide we simply stepped into the world and started to find out what the world was about.

We entered a world of overflowing plenty and opportunity, a world where we were welcomed. Based on our naïve belief that there was more where this came from, we shaped life as we went.

We enjoyed a luxury. We felt secure in our future. Of course, just as today, not all Americans shared in this experience. Depression poverty was deep rooted. Polio was still acrippler. The Korean War was a dark presage in the early 50s, and by mid-decade, school children were ducking under desks. Russia built the Iron Curtain and China became Red China. Eisenhower sent the first “advisors” to Vietnam, and years later, Johnson invented a war there. Castro set up camp in Cuba and Khrushchev came to power.

We are the last generation to experience an interlude when there were no existential threats to our homeland. We came of age in the 40s and early 50s. The war was over and the Cold War, terrorism, civil rights, technological upheaval, global warming, and perpetual economic insecurity had yet to haunt life with insistent unease.

Only our generation can remember both a time of apocalyptic war and a time when our world was secure and full of bright promise and plenty. We have lived through both. We grew up at the best possible time, a time when the world was getting better, not worse.

We are the Silent Generation, “the last ones.” The last of us was born in 1945, more than 99.9% of us are either retired or dead, and all of us believe we grew up in the best of times!

## **Reforming Islam**

In a section on Islamic terrorism in Thomas L. Friedman’s latest book, *Thank You For Being Late*, his namesake George Friedman states: “In the U.S., the assumption is that terrorism requires an organization. Unfortunately, this has been a persistent misunderstanding of radical Islamism, because it is a movement not an organization. Organizations can be annihilated, but it is much harder to annihilate a movement. When one organization is destroyed another arises in its place. Any success in destroying an organization is temporary at best, and in reality an illusion, because the movement continues on.” Friedman goes on to say, “the only thing that might work in defeating the terrorist scourge is to bring pressure on the Islamic states to make war on the Jihadists.” That is, they must do it themselves, and in the process, reform Islam.

There is a historic parallel here. Christianity was not reformed by outsiders. Reform came from Catholics within the Church; Luther in Germany, Calvin in Switzerland, and Henry VIII in England among others. Moderate Muslims must take the lead and be supported by concerned non-Muslims.

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