

The Promise of Home
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I

Believe in the evidence,
it's out there, perhaps
in the very place you sit,
right now. The entire world
waiting for you to summon
the courage to say,

Hello.

How are you?

Where are you from?

This is what stands between
you and understanding,
between you and a friend.

In one room, you might experience—
China, Brazil, Iraq, Vietnam,
El Salvador, Romania, Cyprus,
England, Libya, Peru, and Turkey—
really experience, what it's like
to be a citizen abroad.

There's one catch.

To be more than tourist, or

voyeur, you must be ready
to listen, accept—
face fear of the unknown
across a table, over coffee.
This person will sound,
and look different than you.
But if you listen closely,
there will be points of access.

II

Frank IS a software engineer
from Shenzhen, China.
He's looking for work
while learning a difficult language.
Though his English is better
than a Frederictonian's Mandarin
or Cantonese, no one will give him,
an opportunity to prove
skills and experience are not tied
to any one language.
Which prompts the question,
Might it be beneficial to be mute?

Sagida IS a lawyer. When she left Libya,
her lifetime of knowledge did not vanish
crossing borders. Yet here, in Fredericton,
what did disappear is her confident
courtroom stride, told too often

she does not qualify in her new home.

Lucy IS a musician, and

educator from Ningbo, China.

Currently a community volunteer.

An admirable pursuit—newcomer aiding,

integrating. But at a cost—

the submersion of cultivated identity.

Now given the simple description:

housewife. Unable to cut red tape,

pursue her joie de vivre in Fredericton.

Charles IS a journalist,

married to Lucy. He chose

Canada. Freed himself

from the anxious Chinese hamster

wheel of unattainable perfection.

As Charles sees it, he chose

the absurd, stress-free life

of cultural alien. Like an infant,

nothing to do but accept

help in every possible way.

An accomplished filmmaker,

he's happy in a country open

to the perceived frivolity of Art,

in a city friendly to fallibility

and reinvention.

Their stories ARE Fredericton's story.

What we view every day,

IS NOT a complete picture.

We choose what we want to see,

hear what we want to hear,

see STOP signs where there are none.

Personality, skill, and intellect transcend

bureaucratic language barriers.

We must exercise

atrophied empathy.

Ask our comfortable selves,

How it would feel

to be displaced,

lose everything, including

hard-earned identities?

We must help newcomers

fulfill this promise of home.