

Beyond Risk and Uncertainty

BY DAN ROYER

Moving to Selkirk, Ontario, my wife and I worked to fit our ministry style into a Canadian cultural context. Members of our congregation suggested it was a big step for us to go to a new country. I kept a mental list of things that made the risk-taking worthwhile.

Central Junior High School's four-storied structure towered over me. The building's ancient brick exterior was weather worn and crumbling. As I passed through the olive green metal doors, they seemed to slam behind me with foreboding. This experience was going to be a whole new world compared to my previous years at Park Place Elementary School. Not only were there four floors in each building but also two separate buildings on the campus. My class schedule called for me to begin the afternoon on the third floor of the Central Building, and then proceed to my next class in the basement and down in a narrow corridor that evoked images of a hidden passageway. Normally, the allotted time for changing classes was adequate, but on this day the ink cartridge in my Scripto fountain pen leaked and covered my hands with black ink. A delayed stop to scrub with soap and water did not help the problem. I found myself entering the corridor leading to my science classroom just as the bell rang. Without a word, the door to the classroom abruptly was closed, leaving a few of us stranded outside the class. When the door opened, the teacher invited us in and wrote our names on the blackboard as we entered the room. After making my way to my desk, I shrank into my seat wishing I could blend into the gray metal desk and regain some sense of anonymity. I have often reflected on the way I struggled to adjust to life at Central Junior High School and how much change took place in that one short year.

It has been a long time since I was a nervous twelve-year-old trying to fit into a whole new world at school. However, our decision to immigrate to Canada to accept a ministry at Selkirk Christian Chapel had some of the same elements of risk and uncertainty.



My wife and I arrived in Selkirk, Ontario, in September and started our work in this village of five hundred nestled on the north shore of Lake Erie in the Canadian “Banana Belt.” We began to learn about the community and worked to fit our ministry style into a Canadian cultural context. Prior to this experience, my awareness of Canadian culture was limited to my teenage experience with a short-wave radio on which I occasionally listened to broadcasts from the CBC, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. I had also ridden across southern Ontario between Port Huron, Michigan, and Buffalo, New York, with a stop in Niagara Falls during a memorable family vacation. Other than these brief experiences, my contact with Canadian culture was limited to episodes of *The Red Green Show*.

We understood that we had a lot to learn—a new vocabulary to absorb and new customs to become acquainted with. Some things were minor, like the custom of taking off your shoes when entering a home. Others were a bit more enigmatic, like the time I was talking to one of our church members who said that he had to go to “the mustard.” My puzzled look caused another member of the group to turn in my direction and translate, “that means he is going to the doctor.” We learned that “eh(?)” is not necessarily a question, a “whack” is a large group of the same thing, and that “hydro” is electrical power, not something to do with water. It was clear to those we met that my wife and I possessed traits that marked us as citizens of a different country.



Some of the people in our congregation suggested it must have been a big step for us to go to Canada. I began keeping a mental list of the things that made such risk-taking worthwhile.

Rusty is a man in his early seventies who has worked hard his whole life. He worked in a factory that made gypsum board, and he operated a family farm. His wife, Dorothy, is a devout homemaker. One day Dorothy privately requested prayer for Rusty, who was going through a difficult time following illness. I offered to make a visit and soon we began to stop in and visit the couple regularly. After a number of visits and conversations, Rusty confessed his faith in Christ and soon we arranged for his baptism service.

Geoffrey is a blond-haired dynamo. His family lived next to the church building and on any given day when the weather was warm enough, we would find Geoffrey in the parking lot riding his bicycle. His sister Tasha

frequently accompanied him. When they watched as I changed the church sign, I often let them help me place the new letters for the weekly message. Geoffrey and Tasha were regulars at our midweek Kidzone events. We got to know their parents, Mike and Dawn, and on occasion took an opportunity to have coffee with them.

Ira and Connie were very welcoming on our arrival in Selkirk. Connie went to the hospital for surgery and then discovered that she would have

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to remain in the hospital to receive treatments for the cancer that had been discovered. We made regular trips to the hospital to visit and pray, and when I received a call that she would not be able to last much longer, I went to her room to read scripture and pray with her. I opened my Bible and read the words of Christ from John: "Very

truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life" (5:24). Connie grasped my hand tightly and with all the strength she possessed (she was barely able to talk) whispered the words, "I believe." I understood that this child of God was prepared to go home. Later that evening Connie left this life and entered into that same eternal life.

We were introduced to John and Tammy through a visitor who came to our church. When we met them, their four-year-old son was being treated for leukemia. Part of the treatment prescribed was a steroid, which produced erratic and sometimes very difficult behavior. As Jacob went through his treatments designed to kill off the deadly cancer cells, each week's treatment brought this young blended family new sources of stress. One hot summer day Jacob collapsed and was unresponsive, and because of his condition he was rushed to McMaster Hospital in Hamilton where he received leukemia treatments. We made the hour-long trip to the hospital to wait in the emergency room with the family as doctors conducted tests and examined their son. After a period of time, we learned Jacob's condition made him more susceptible to heat exhaustion, which caused his collapse. He soon made a full recovery.

Michael and Shannon attended our annual church picnic that was held in September. As I made the rounds and talked to those who were more familiar, I was introduced to this new couple by one of our leaders, Frasier. As we visited and talked, we were introduced to their children, Julia and Carter. I discovered common interests with Michael who also played guitar

and had similar musical tastes to my own. As we talked together I learned that Michael had a real heart for the Scriptures. As our friendship developed we began to see Michael and Shannon grow in their faith and take on significant roles in the congregation. Michael began to teach Middler boys in Sunday school and Shannon took on the task of preparing the bulletin.



In the end I realized that risk and uncertainty were not the whole story about our decision and move to another country; divine providence was at work long before we arrived on the scene. In the 1980s the church had a very good pastor who paved the way for our ministry because he also was an American. His name was Terry, and his faithful ministry made it possible for us to enter a church that already understood American traits and accepted our quirks. I will never be able to thank him enough for his work in Selkirk. Unfortunately, I will not have that opportunity in this life, because Terry has gone on to be with the Lord, but I will always be grateful for him.

I have thought about those whom we came to love, those we served and those we mourned. Their faces are etched in my mind, but space limits the stories I can share. I am awestruck at the way it all fits together. And then I remember that of all people, I should realize when we walk in the path that God lays out before us, risk and uncertainty lose their hold over us.



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