

Resettlement

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SUMMARY

When you meet someone new in Newfoundland, Canada instead of asking where they're from you ask 'Where do you belong to?' Because the place of a person's birth is so much a part of them that they belong to it. And it to them. But what happens when the place that you belong to gets wiped off of the map? Back in the 1950s many isolated fishing villages across Newfoundland were deemed a drain on the government, so residents were forced to abandon the only homes they had ever known. It was called Resettlement. The "Text" that I explore in this piece is the Newfoundland Centralization Act which became the catalyst for Newfoundland resettlement. In 1952 the Newfoundland Department of Welfare began drafting the Centralization Act that aimed at resettling communities that were deemed too small, or too costly to maintain. Resettlement as a concept however predates the act by several decades and has been written of in personal diaries and correspondence going back as far as the 1920s. In many cases resettled families brought their houses with them. Fishermen banded together and used their boats to float their houses across 50km of open sea. Others waited until winter and pulled their homes across the frozen bays by hand. Resettlement was supposed to be a new start, but this forced relocation left scars on the souls of the resettled. Families who had lived together for generations were scattered across different communities, forced to start over.

[AMBI- Waves on the rocks. A single gull cries.]

Geraldine: Belong to?

[AMBI- Waves crashing]

Geraldine: Jesus what a funny saying. Isn't it? What does it mean?

[MUSIC- A single flute plays a lonely lament]

Geraldine: Where do you belong to?

Hana: Where's I from? I'm from Port Anne

Linda: King Well was on long island and, uh, it was a peaceful, beautiful little place,

Geraldine: There was Great Paradise and Little Paradise, they say, and it got its name because it was so hard to get into it. With rocks out around it. Little islands

Geraldine: Paradise what they meant was heaven.

[MUSIC- An upbeat tune plays, and the sound of songbirds and a stream can be heard]

Linda: I recall having picnics there and, uh, it was a really pretty, and it was a stream

that ran down a beautiful stream and.

Linda: And sometimes you got to really let your mind go and wander back there just to, to really think on how, how beautiful and peaceful it was.

[MUSIC- ends with heavy reverb to show that its a far off memory]

FADE TO BLACK

Linda: I know that for a year or so, I suppose before it actually happened... Um, you know, I would hear my parents talk about it.

Hana: I couldn't do much talking because. I used to sit down and sometimes I'd be there sat down and the big tears come out of me eyes because I had to leave .

Jeanette: It was always, it was always portrayed as if there was a choice in the situation, but there wasn't right.

Linda: But, you know, I, I could certainly say, I think honestly that if, if my parents. If my parents had the option to stay, they would have stayed.

Geraldine: Uh, uh, if people had of stayed there, if many people had of stayed we would have stayed but you couldn't stay alone.

Linda: But then there was said they would take the services away.

Linda: You know, if they couldn't get a teacher to come, if they couldn't get a, you know, minister for the, for the church, you know, and stuff like if they took all that away, well, people might as well go.

[AMBI- Waves lapping against a boat as a gull calls]

Linda: Yeah. It was common sight to see your house just being towed down the road, you know?

Jeanette: They had a big huge barge you could put your house right on to.

Cecil: And it wasn't no fancy barge it was just some sticks and planked over with just oil drums. That's all it was.

Jeanette: But the reasoning behind that was because there wasn't anywhere to live. If you didn't bring your own house, there was nowhere to go. And I talked to people that literally left those communities and didn't know for sure where they were going to sleep that night. That's how quick it happened. That's what happened.

[AMBI- Waves lapping against a boat as a gull calls]

Jeanette: Boom. Like they dropped a bomb in the middle of the ocean and you better get in or you're all gonna die. Except they nearly died when they came here instead.

[AMBI- Waves lapping against a boat]

Geraldine: I don't remember the exact day, but it was the year, 1967 late August.

Geraldine: I was pregnant at my 10th child. When we came in here, there was nine of them under 11.

Geraldine: I was feeling down about it. Didn't like I was coming to Placentia, but I didn't know. What did I know, about it I didn't live over here or nothing.

Geraldine: I packed it all up. And counted all the youngsters down into the boat. And when we got part of the way out one of the engines gave out. So we were out in the bay in a gale of wind for two hours.

Geraldine: And I was out there with 10 youngsters. And they all got sick. And I had 2 or 3 buckets and I got one to catch what they were throwing up all around. Never made a bit of mess.

[AMBI- Waves lapping against the hull of a boat]

Linda: It certainly wasn't only Placentia Bay it was other places around Newfoundland that it happened as well. Where they floated houses, big houses too.

[MUSIC- Melancholy piano begins to play]

Linda: I know there was some 2 story Saltbox houses. which must have been quite the chore.

Linda: And it was February before the house actually came to Arnold's Cove

Linda: I was walking, in the road with two friends of mine and sure enough, there was the house coming in.

Linda: And then it had had to get pulled out the road and placed where, where it's, where it stands now, you know?

Linda: It was never the same again after it moved. You can imagine it had to be juggled around a fair bit.

[MUSIC- Melancholy piano continues]

Linda: a lot of houses did get pulled away. But there was a lot that, that didn't.

Geraldine: Oh, my house it was a a two story old fashioned house. Two story, no central

heat. No water running, go to the well everything like that. Old-fashioned.

[AMBI- The sound of the open sea]

Geraldine: It's not like other places down in the bottom of the bay ... It was see see like

the ocean and they didn't, you wouldn't float a house across there. I don't think

Hana: I left a- well I calls it an organ

[Music- 'There's no place like home' plays on an old pump organ]

Hana: I was able to play a little bit on it but we had to leave it there, I suppose.

Somebody probably went and got it after. I thought hard of leaving there cause it's so nice there.

[Music- 'There's no place like home' continues to play on an old pump organ]

Hana: I'd love to be able to go back and stay but you can't do it see?

Jeanette: because technically when you left out there, you weren't allowed to go back. They provided you with a certain amount of money. And for that, you

gave up everything out there. Like the land was no longer yours. The house was no longer yours.

Jeanette: The wharfs and stages were no longer yours. You've signed, that was it your time

Hana: Well, nah, perhaps people did sign for that, but I didn't. Cause I said, never. Well as long as my house is up there and I wants to go I'm going yeah.

[AMBI- Wind in the grass, footsteps, crows]

Linda: The first time I went back was kind of surreal.

Linda: Went back just myself now, you know, I got a ride up with somebody and just spent a few hours here. Just kind of wandering around, you know.

Linda: Yeah, it felt like going home. But in kind of a twisted way cause you were going home, but home wasn't really there the same. You know, it was still the remains of some houses and stuff like that there, you know. Yeah, it was still, still enough there to know it, you know, it wasn't completely gone, but it was gone if you know what I mean,

Linda: Everything was left to the wind and water.

[AMBI- A swell of wind]

Linda: Oh, what is home? That's a, that's a big question.

Jeanette: Where do you belong? Oh yeah we still says it like it when we meet people now myself and my sisters. Like we'll still say it. 'So where do you belong to?'

Hana: Well Arnold's Cove is my home now. But Port Anne will always be my real home.

Linda: I would define it as a place where you, you feel that your very core your soul is there.

Jeanette: I never considered Placentia home. Never in my life. And I don't remember

Paradise as being home. Nowhere was home to me.

[MUSIC- Melancholy Piano returns and plays until the end]

Jeanette: I think that's what it did it left me not belonging anywhere. Where do you belong to? I didn't belong anywhere.