

Canadians and Their Coffee

Text written by Louise (Regehr) Wiens, Leamington, Ontario, January 2015

I grew up drinking tea. Plain tea with honey. Tea with lemon. Tea with sugar, but never milk. Tea in the morning. Tea anytime during the day. My mom always drank camomile tea at bedtime and my Oma grew peppermint leaves in the garden for tea. In college, I pulled many all-nighters studying and drinking tea. I only began drinking coffee in my early 40s as I was approaching midlife and felt that I needed an extra burst of energy as I was preparing to join the sandwich generation.

The book "Coffee, Tea or Me" by Donald Bain debuted in the 1960s and chronicled humorous, extracurricular, racy escapades of airline stewardesses, who were portrayed as having talents beyond those of mere basic and essential life-saving skills as they flew around the globe as members of the "mile high club." In the 60s and 70s, stewardesses sported tight two-piece suits complete with a tie, high heels, and a hat.

Their makeup always seemed impeccable and under their tilted cap there was nary a hair out of place. I borrowed the book from the local library where my name was placed on a lengthy list along with other locals anxious to read about the stereotypes of stewardesses. In hindsight, the book did nothing to expand my growing teenage mind—in a positive light, that is.

Tim Horton, born in 1930, was a beloved hockey player for the Toronto Maple Leafs and spent twenty-four seasons in the NHL. Most Saturday nights, Canadians were glued to the CBC to watch "Hockey Night in Canada" as six teams vied annually for the coveted Stanley Cup. In our home there was always conflict over this, as it aired in the same time slot as Lawrence Welk. Tim Horton became a business man and co-founder of "Tim Horton's" as he opened his first coffee shop in St. Catharines, Ontario in 1964. They soon franchised in 1967 and quickly became a multimillion dollar industry. Tim Horton died in a car accident in 1974, which then led to, and exposed, a long running and very publicized legal battle with his co-founder Ron Joyce.

My mom always bought a small can of Carnation Evaporated milk to serve with coffee to guests on Sundays. The coffee percolator was only used for company as there was often a bag of ground German coffee in the freezer; but during the week, instant coffee was the norm. Every evening my dad methodically fixed his big thermos of coffee to pack into his lunch box along with his pumpnickel sandwiches, wrapped in wax paper, to take to the factory the next morning. In my kitchen cupboard sits a small light brown wooden coffee grinder with a crank handle. Bought in Holland, the cursive insignia says "Amica." As I pull open the bottom drawer, I am pleasantly surprised to find that it still houses a few grains of coffee, which have been there for decades. There is still a faint smell of roasted beans of years gone by. "Oh, we would just walk across the border to Holland to buy our coffee," my Oma would often tell me as a child. Living in Germany on the Dutch border, this was a common excursion. I turn the crank on the grinder a few times and sigh deeply as I wipe a tear from the corner of my eyes.

Tim Horton's introduced "Roll Up the Rim" in 1974 and it has become an annual anticipated event. My brother-

in-law once won a Schwinn bike. Canada boasts over 4,000 stores and the company hires more than 1,000 employees annually. Several of our local stores are owned by a local Essex native, also a former NHL player. In my early nursing career, his wife-to-be and I worked together in a long-term care facility where we always had lots of fun as we tended to our patients. When the first local store opened, my husband made regular solo runs on his way to the office. Many months later, executing the drive-through, I was sitting in the front seat beside him as the woman handed him his order. "I think she was surprised to see that I have wife," he laughed, as he took a sip of his freshly brewed cup of coffee. On a recent Tim Horton's run, I again was asked in the drive-through, "Would you like an apple strudel with that for 25 cents?" as I hesitantly agreed. Driving away with my order, I mutter to myself, "You call this thing a strudel?"

On a recent shopping excursion to a mall in Detroit, my daughter persuades me to go into the store "Teavana" with her to check out their wares. The store front is inviting and an enthusiastic young clerk bids us inside by offering free 1 oz. hot tea samples from a large decanter in the entry. The décor and aroma are pleasing to the senses as we stand in a long line to place our order. The two scoops of loose tea are packed into a fancy air tight tin which the clerk tucks into a small colourful shopping bag. The bill is \$28. "Oh, you will need a diffuser, too," she adds, as I note that they sell for \$16.99. I make mental note to pass on that offer. I glance at a side wall lined with colourful glossy teapots in every colour imaginable. They are \$25. "Oh, and do you want the German rock sugar?" she continues, trying to drive our bill even higher. I furrow my eyebrows as she tries to reel me in by adding, "It's from German brown sugar cane." Astonished, I retort, "news to me. I'm German. I didn't even know they grow sugar cane there. Since when is the climate in Germany conducive to growing sugar cane?" My daughter starts to squirm uncomfortably as I conclude, "Besides, I worked with a Japanese nurse once who drank LOTS of herbal teas and she always told us you NEVER put anything in it. You drink it plain. As is." We leave the store with our purchase as I calculate how many cups we will get for our \$28.

Many years ago on a trip to Pelee Island we pulled up at Canada Customs on the dock as we prepared to drive our van onto the ferry. Watching us approach the drive-up window, my then two-year-old daughter called out from her car seat in the back "Daddy... I'll have a sprinkled doughnut, please."