

WHAT I KNOW

ATLANTIC CANADIANS ARE THE FRIENDLIEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

BY STEVE PATTERSON

For a long time the East Coast have been sort of like the Las Vegas of Canada: what happens there... stays there. But it's high time the rest of Canada who may not have been fortunate enough to visit the East Coast yet gets an inkling of what it is truly like.

Atlantic Canada represents friendliness... personified. From the pubs on George Street in St. John's to the pubs throughout Halifax to the pubs in Moncton - there are a lot of pubs out East. And I've been to a lot of them. What makes the East Coast pubs different are the Maritimers who frequent them. This is not to say that they live inside these pubs (though if that were an option, I'm sure many would take it) it's simply their welcoming spirit. From bartenders



Photograph: John Hryniuk

who introduce themselves and ask for your name before your drink order, to patrons who would rather talk with live people than stare at a screen on the wall, East Coast pubs are more like the 'public houses' they have always been intended to be more so than anywhere else in Canada.

Of course, it's easy to be friendly when you're pleasantly drunk. But most Atlantic Canadians I've met are pleasant most of the time (which might mean they're drunk most of the time I suppose. But I don't think that's the case either). From walking down the street in Wolfville and realizing that motorists will stop at any time for any pedestrian, to the many invitations for dinner from complete strangers in every town I visited, the East Coast isn't just a great place to meet new people. It's a place where it's damned near impossible not to make new friends.

So why are East Coasters so friendly? I can't answer that because I'm not from the Maritimes. I'm from Toronto where acts of friendliness are generally met with suspicion or downright hostility ("Why are you smiling at me? What are you up to? Stop that!"), but I think it might have something to do with the weather.

My brother has lived Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley with his lovely wife for over 15 years. It is truly one of the most beautiful regions in the country... in the summer. But winters there are 'a bit harsh,' meaning the amount of snow often exceeds the height of their homes. And there is all the Atlantic Provinces face similar circumstances on an annual basis. So people living there have two choices: Stock up on Netflix and hibernate for the entire winter season, or, invite your neighbours around and make your own fun.

**TO PUT IT BLUNTLY:
AIN'T NO PARTY
LIKE A EAST COAST
HOUSE PARTY!**

Everyone there is a storyteller, a musician, and more often than not a damn good cook! So people show up with food, drink and a musical instrument in hand (Atlantic Canadians also have extremely large hands),

and no matter when the night starts it is likely not going to end until well into the following morning.

But it is not just the frequent partying that brings East Coasters together. My brother runs a fresh pasta restaurant in Port Williams, aptly named The Noodle Guy (if you're in town, go there, tell him I sent you, and he will gladly serve you an out-of-this-world pasta dish for a very reasonable price!) and I have tagged along on trips to his suppliers in the region. Whether we meet the the butcher that provides the meat, the dairy farmer who provides the milk and cheese, or the vineyard owner who provides the wine (my personal favorite), everyone has a vested interest in each other's success - because success for one business translates to success for the region. I believe this concept extends throughout the Atlantic region. Whether it is small business owners or big business CEOs, there is a sense of "let's help each other out," instead of "let's knock each other out." And I think we can all agree, it's just a better way to live (unless you're a campaigning politician).

So, if you're an Atlantic Canadian reading this, thanks for being so friendly to me and to everyone else visiting beautiful New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland, and please - keep it up! And if you're a non-Atlantic Canadian thinking about making the visit, stop thinking about it and get yourself out there!

In addition, there is also incredible outdoor scenery (in particular Gros Morne Park in Newfoundland makes other country's parks look like Chia pets), seafood so fresh you know if was caught that morning, and a sense of Canadian history that can only be achieved in a region where Canadian Confederation was officially born.

But for me, the greatest thing about the East Coast is their people - they are the real reason you should visit. And if you are thinking to yourself "But I don't have any friends out there!" Trust me. Go there and you soon will.

Steve Patterson is the host of The Debaters on CBC Radio One, author of *The Book of Letters I Didn't Know Where To Send* and star of *The Smartass-ociates* with Steve Patterson (cbc.ca/amarassociates). He would like to dedicate this article to the memory of his friend and legendary Maritimer, Neville Gaffoy.