



The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Kitchener

ON EAGLE'S WINGS

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Plum Pudding: A Personal Appreciation

Charles Stuart

I like plum pudding. I mean, I really, really like plum pudding. Is there anything more to say on the subject? Not really. But that has never stopped me from nattering on. And so, begging your indulgence ...

I have long been an enthusiast of that incomparable Christmas delight, the plum pudding. Although I do not recall my first encounter with the pudding, it must have been when I was very young because I have associated the dessert with Christmas for as far back as I can remember. My mother was a fine cook and a restless and ambitious one to boot, not holding to the annual roast fowl but varying the Christmas menu from year to year to include roast capon, roast beef, and, on one memorable occasion, roast Cornish hens glazed with tangerine sauce and stuffed with a wild rice mixture. Although the roast and veg might not be predictable year in and year out, the dessert was: plum pudding.



My mother always steamed the pudding to perfection and served it with a hard sauce. For anyone unfamiliar with this sauce, the term 'hard' might be a deterrent to trying it. Why it is even called 'hard' is beyond me as it is firm only when refrigerated or frozen. Heated or served at room temperature, it is as soft and yielding as any sauce ought to be. Neither is it 'hard' to make; you basically melt butter and stir in lemon juice, powdered sugar, a pinch of nutmeg, and a liberal sprinkling of your spirit of choice, mine being brandy. Spoon over the steamed pudding and emit sighs of rapt pleasure.

Mom made a decent Christmas cake, but I don't think she ever tried her hand at plum pudding. Puddings were always store bought. And they were always good. Being a cheapskate, I invariably purchased plum puddings in the weeks following Christmas to reserve for the following December. Full confession: I still sometimes do. And partly because I have been known to steam a pudding during the full blast of a midsummer heatwave. Did I mention that I like plum pudding?

My preference is for a pudding of substantial size, one that will feed an extended family with leftovers to raid in the aftermath of the Christmas Day feast. But, you know, you take what you can get. During the two sabbatical years I was able to enjoy living abroad with my wife and kids, it was a challenge to recreate a traditional Christmas dinner. The year we lived in France I went to my local butcher with strict instructions for the roast and was assured of "un vrai rôti de bœuf à l'anglaise, bien lardé." The larded round roast they sold me was tasty, but it was a far cry from the rib roast I had imagined. No matter. I had somehow, somewhere, procured a plum pudding. After steaming, flambéing, and saucing, the Christmas feast was complete.

During our sabbatical year in Brussels we visited Vimy Ridge to attend the Remembrance Day ceremony but stayed in the nearby city of Lille. Adjacent to the train station that serviced the Eurostar was a Marks & Spencer outlet. I

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wasted no time in the pursuit of Christmas dessert. The puddings were about the size of mini cupcakes, and I must have bought half a dozen. They were perfectly fine, and the tradition of the Christmas feast was unbroken.

Of course, I missed the excellent – no, the superlative – puddings produced by St. John's. They are, to me, the gold standard. And I don't know why. I have myself volunteered for Pudding Factory. I have combined the ingredients with my own two gloved hands. I don't think there is anything remarkable about what goes into the St. John's puddings or that distinguishes them from the contents of other puddings. But I swear that some sort of alchemy occurs to convert the sugar, lard, fruit, and flour into an exceptional example of pudding.

When I first began attending services at St. John's I selected the church because it was within walking distance of my house. That was in January 2012. At that time I had no idea that my parish was a source of my favourite Christmas dessert, nor that the product was so accomplished. I could not help but toy with the idea of a divine synchronicity that led me to such a church. And although I was a laggard when it came to involving myself in Pudding Factory, I was an eager supporter of its product, usually buying one pudding for the Christmas table, another as a standby, and a couple more as Christmas gifts for family members. Which I would, naturally, offer to steam, flambé, and sauce, before assisting in their consumption.

Yes, I had become a kind of monster: I hoarded puddings. When Pudding Factory was suspended in 2020 due to COVID-19, it was regrettable for all kinds of reasons. Personally, however, I was fine – I had my own private stash. Indeed, in addition to a pudding at Christmas 2020, I also enjoyed a pudding in July 2021.

What a relief that Pudding Factory was back in business last November. I volunteered. I mixed – my small contribution to the ineffable magic of pudding making. And I purchased. Given the pandemic restrictions, the factory was operating on a reduced schedule with smaller output. I could purchase one pudding, and one alone, which I did. But on the day I picked it up I learned that there was a wait list for those who had been late to place their orders. Among them was a new congregant who was eager to taste their first ever St. John's plum pudding. I couldn't bear that thought of someone being denied what is to me the defining sweet of the season. And so, in an act of selfless charity, I surrendered my pudding.

This act was, naturally, not really selfless at all as I still possessed at least one pudding of uncertain age. And on the afternoon of Christmas Day 2021 I disinterred it from the depths of the freezer. How long it had rested there amongst the end bags of peas and corn, I know not. Its appearance when I removed the waxed paper was not reassuring: splotches of white suggested a degree of frost burn. And the aroma was perhaps a little funkier than desired. Still ... pudding! Leaving nothing to chance, I carefully prepared the hard sauce hours in advance, and I had the pudding steaming well before the roast and veg were ready to be plated. When I lifted the lid to check the pudding, it looked and smelled fine. But not one to take a risk, I took pains to liberally sprinkle the now moist and fragrant confection with brandy. Once ignited, it flamed for a solid minute. And as for taste, after saucing, well, one word comes to mind: perfection.

Let's hope that Pudding Factory will be able to ramp up production in November 2022. Should that prove impossible, I suspect that a neglected corner of the mini freezer in my basement may hold the promise of yet another imperishable artefact of past efforts. And if so, I am sure it will be delicious.

REFUGEES: a POETIC double take?

Notes by Andrew Brockett

Since 2016 the Anglican Deanery of Waterloo Refugee Committee (on which St. John's is well represented) has done magnificent work – fully sponsoring four refugee families and supporting another two families through the Reception House Family Partnership Program.

Although the pandemic has severely curtailed the number of sponsored and Government-assisted refugees arriving in Canada and has drastically slowed down Federal Government processing of applications (a situation made worse by the urgent need to re-settle people feeling Afghanistan), other desperate refugees are still managing to make their way to Canada and claiming asylum when they get here. For Kitchener-based COMPASS Refugee Centre which “assists, accompanies, and advocates for” *refugee claimants* in 45 different Ontario towns and cities, the pressures have certainly not diminished – in the past twelve months they worked with 786 files representing over 1904 individuals from 71 countries around the world. That number includes 118 files opened in the past year as border restrictions have gradually been lifted. (Statistics from *COMPASS Refugee Centre Annual Report 2020-2021*.)

And the most recent Government of Canada immigration target is to resettle a total of 52,950 refugees and asylum seekers *this year*.

Understandably, for those involved with welcoming refugees and supporting them in their resettlement, there must be fatigue and even burn-out. So, this poem (undoubtedly not new to many of you) by the British poet Brian Bilston may, at first sight, seem appropriate:

Refugees

They have no need of our help
 So do not tell me
 These haggard faces could belong to you or me
 Should life have dealt a different hand
 We need to see them for who they really are
 Chancers and scroungers
 Layabouts and loungers
 With bombs up their sleeves
 Cut-throats and thieves
 They are not
 Welcome here
 We should make them
 Go back to where they came from
 They cannot
 Share our food
 Share our homes
 Share our countries
 Instead let us
 Build a wall to keep them out
 It is not okay to say
 These are people just like us
 A place should only belong to those who are born there
 Do not be so stupid to think that
 The world can be looked at another way

(Now read from bottom to top)

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It is hardly accurate to categorise the poem as “palindromic” because it definitely does NOT read the same backwards as forwards.

For his droll poetry, Bilston (whose real name is Paul Millicheap) has become known as the “Poet Laureate of Twitter”. He published the poem “Refugees” on Twitter in March 2018. It is easily found on the Web.

Another poet whose work can also be found on the Web, and who was quoted in the COMPASS Refugee Centre 2020-2021 Annual Report is the British Somali poet Warsan Shire – her poetry is more visceral and direct. Here are some excerpts from her 2009 poem “*Conversations about Home (at a deportation centre)*” – also known simply as:

Home

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

your neighbors running faster than you
breath bloody in their throats
the boy you went to school with
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
is holding a gun bigger than his body
you only leave home
when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
fire under feet
hot blood in your belly
it's not something you ever thought of doing
until the blade burnt threats into
your neck
and even then you carried the anthem under
your breath
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilet
sobbing as each mouthful of paper
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a
truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire

...

the
go home blacks
refugees
dirty immigrants
asylum seekers
sucking our country dry
n-__-s with their hands out
they smell strange
savage
messed up their country and now they want
to mess ours up
how do the words
the dirty looks
roll off your backs
maybe because the blow is softer
than a limb torn off

....

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in
your ear
saying-
leave,
run away from me now
i dont know what i've become
but i know that anywhere
is safer than here.

In the striking picture of the separation of the sheep from the goats at the judgment of the nations, Matthew records Jesus as commending the “sheep” because, among their other works of love, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Matt. 25:35).

Deanery Refugee Committee

Ann Coughlin

Although the Deanery Refugee Committee has been “on hold” throughout this past year, we still have been able to support refugees and newcomers in KW, most recently through collecting warm clothing for newly arrived Afghans at Reception House – Thank you to all who helped in this.

We are hopeful that 2022 will see the opportunity to again sponsor families as a Deanery. We await direction from the Diocese on this.

We know that sponsorship will cost about \$27,000 or perhaps a few thousand dollars more if there are special circumstances that arise and because of the rise in the cost of living and rental accommodation. So, we will need to hold a Deanery wide fundraising effort as we did at the beginning in 2015, when the first Syrian family was welcomed. You, our parishioners, were very supportive and generous. In 2015 you donated \$7,650 towards the Deanery Sponsorship programme when asked. Another \$550 was donated by January 11, 2016. In July 2016 Simon Guthrie volunteered to ride his stationary exercise bike in our Parish Hall for 12 hours non stop to collect money for the Deanery Sponsorship. Through Simon’s amazing physical feat our parish family donated a further \$5,105.45. So in less than a year we raised \$13,305.45. There were two further donations, one of \$25.79 in June 2018, and our Church had budgeted in its annual budget for an \$800.00 contribution and made the donation in July 2019.

Thus, by our fundraising efforts and our Church’s donation our parishioners have raised \$14,134.24 for this most worthwhile cause of helping our 4 sponsored families leave war torn Syria and Africa and move to our beautiful province and country.

We pray that people from our various churches will again step forward to take on roles of responsibility; several of the first team have now stepped back making room for new people. Each sub-team has prepared helpful guides so that we do not need to “reinvent the wheel.”

If you are interested in being part of St John’s Refugee/Newcomer team, and of the Deanery team, please contact David Whitfield (davidswhit@gmail.com), Syd Reginato (reginatosyd@gmail.com) or Ann Coughlin (anncoughlin50@gmail.com). We would be delighted to have a ready and willing group to step in when we are able to again welcome a family to Canada to begin a new life.

World Day of Prayer

Enid Emery

The ACW would like to invite all members of the congregation to this years World Day of Prayer service which will be held on Saturday March 5th at 11.00am --'in person'-- at St. John's. Pre-registration will be required.

We also hope to have the service 'live streamed' for those who are unable to attend in person.

The service this year has been written by the women of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The theme of the service is based on a passage from Jeremiah 29: 1-14 (NIV) " Know the Plans I Have for You".

Additional services will be held in Kitchener at various churches on Friday Mach 4th. There will also be a video on Rogers television. More details will be provided in February.