

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Canadian finds home in a foreign land

UNB student shares travel journal of England and Denmark

by Alex Pope

It's a university student's dream come true: an airline ticket to London, England to visit my British family for the holidays, and a side trip to Copenhagen, Denmark - a country I've never seen - to visit my father, who is living and working there. It promises to be a grand adventure, an opportunity for me to exercise a little independence in a country that I know like the back of my hand, and to explore a new one, without sacrificing any of the comforts and amenities of a Christmas on home soil.

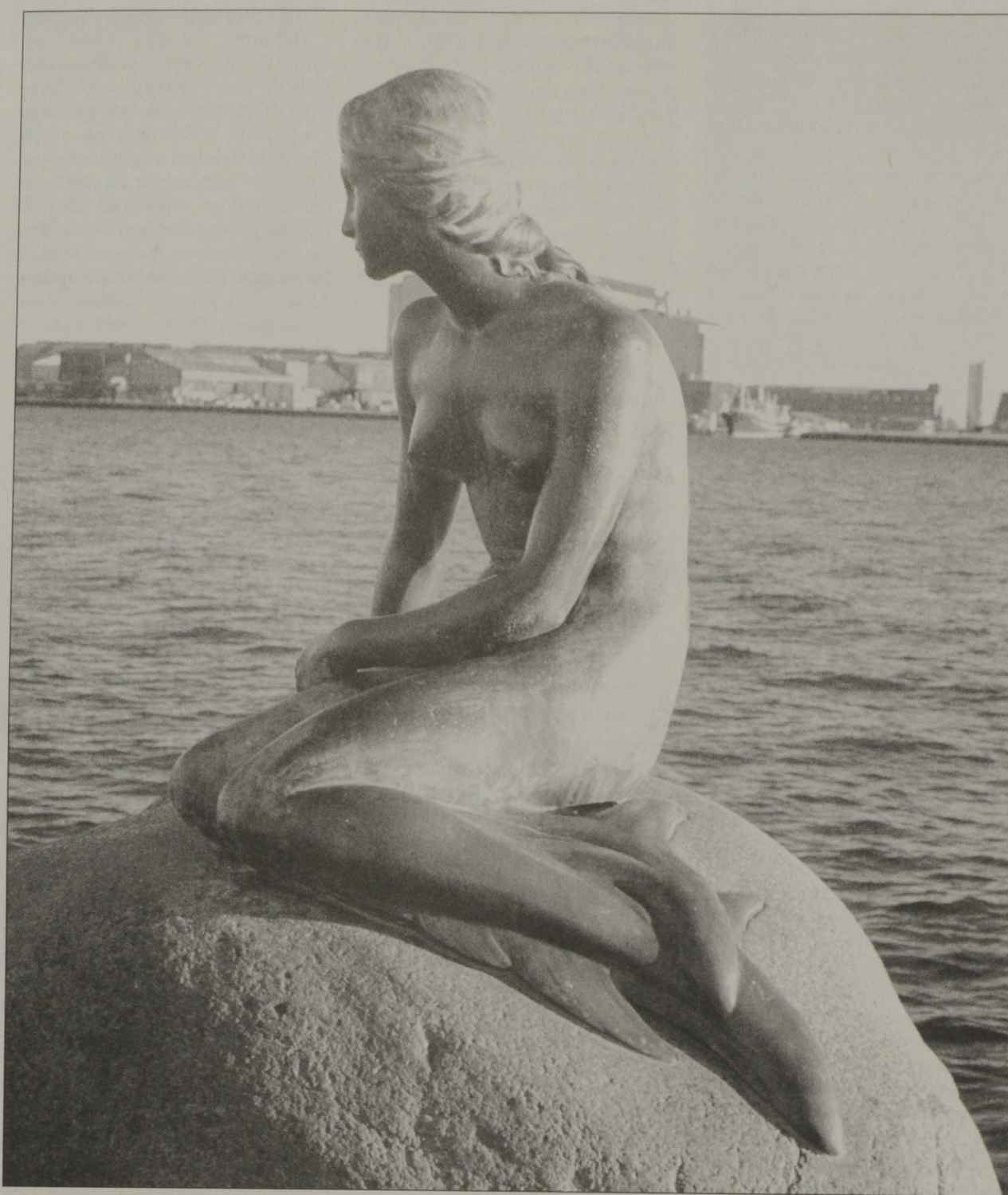
I'm excited - until it becomes all too clear that the divine forces have decided to punish me for my reckless behavior this past semester, and I am struck down with a hellish case of the flu three days before my departure.

My excitement rapidly gives way to drug-induced ambiguity about the whole affair. Case in point: when I see the plane I am supposed to take to Halifax to meet my connection to London, it takes a moment or two for my brain to make the distinction between 'airplane' and 'albatross'. A friend who came to the airport to see me off on my grand adventure comments, "You're so lucky, Alex."

A mere 12 dollars buys me some liquid heaven (also known as Robitussin) at the Halifax airport, and the next 10 hours pass in a hallucinatory blur. I fall asleep just out of Newfoundland, immensely comforted by the fact that I am, at that very moment, contributing to the international spread of the A/Fujian flu strain.

The next thing I know, I'm riding the famous London underground (mind the gap), which is still unbearably hot, even in the middle of December. All around me people are grumbling about the frigid temperatures; I exit the train at Waterloo Station and step outside into full sunshine. The day is a balmy 5 degrees Celsius.

I haven't reached my final destination yet, although I can sense that a real bed is within my grasp. I still have to catch an overland train to the southern end of the country, to Southampton, the birthplace of the Titanic, and home to my grandparents. It isn't a region that gets a lot of attention from the media or film industry - most filmmakers prefer the sophistication of London proper or the dysfunctional reputation of Manchester in the west as settings for their projects.



Alex Pope/The Brunswickan

Sculptures old and new are scattered all over Copenhagen, Denmark.

There is a moment where, as I stand beneath the skylights in the newly renovated Waterloo Station, my apparel and stance screaming 'Lost Canadian Tourist', I experience a brief burst of energy and a strong desire to skip my grandparents' house altogether and go on a madcap adventure in downtown London. I write it off to a side effect of the Sudafed capsules I've been eating like candy, but mentally make note of all the things I'm not seeing, including, in no particular order: Big Ben, Westminster Cathedral, Carnaby Street, Trafalgar Square, The London Eye, Soho, Broadway, and some new building shaped like a cucumber that my father is always bitching about.

Then, I get on the 11:30 train bound for Southampton, where I encounter Adrian, the Clueless Doctorate Student. His first comment to me is about my massive suitcase, which stands as high as my waist and is packed full to bursting. I

think I smile halfheartedly as I burrow down into my jacket in search of a Kleenex.

"Girls always seem to pack more," he muses, and I tell him I'm going to be away from home for a month (which is technically true - after Denmark, it's on to Montreal, then Ottawa). Of course, once you've let your sociable self show through, it's impossible to hide it again; I end up eating chocolate buttons and cheese and onion crisps (potato chips) with Adrian for the duration of the two hour train ride to Southampton. I learn that he is doing his PhD in Paranormal Studies, and is on his way to Southampton University to deliver a lecture. As British people will tend to do, he asks me if I'm American.

I'm used to being asked this question; it's a strange feeling when you realize that you're in a country full of people who speak differently than you, yet you're the one with the accent. What I didn't realize was that

Adrian's inability to distinguish a Canadian accent from an American one actually betrayed a complete ignorance about anything to do with Canada.

Over the course of two hours, I explain the following to my fellow Briton traveler: 1) Canada has provinces (the concept of territories proves too advanced for Adrian). 2) We didn't fight in the War on Terrorism. 3) New Brunswick *does* exist (really really!). 4) It actually gets hotter than England in the summer. 5) We've graduated from wood stoves to natural gas. 6) Likewise, we've abandoned our igloos for more practical townhouses (the igloos kept melting).

By the time the train arrives at Southampton Airport, I've put Adrian to sleep, and manage to slip away undetected to meet my grandparents. I stay alive long enough to greet my grandfather's friend, Reg, in their tiny, turn-of-the-century house in suburban Southampton, who tells me I sound like Marlene Dietrich with my raspy voice. Then I crawl upstairs, and sleep for fifteen hours.

Midweek, I earn myself a trip to the walk-in clinic.

My 82 year old grandmother drives us (without glasses) through the narrow, hilly streets of town. We pass endless rows of houses with no driveways, their facades so narrow an average city block is occupied by twice the number of houses you would see on a suburban street in Canada. Fun fact: England is about one-sixth of the size of our country ... and has over double our population.

It's no wonder my sister and her husband talk seriously with me about emigrating to Canada during my visit with them at their townhouse in the industrial seaside town of Portsmouth. They want to know what New Brunswick is like; I tell them, "quiet." At least they've heard of the province - the nurse at the clinic (which is inexplicably closed on a Tuesday afternoon, but allows me to see someone anyway) takes a sideways glance at my health card and says, "New Brunswick - that's near

Vancouver, right?"

Then, she hands me a packet of antibiotics, tells me my head is rife with streptococcus bacteria, and advises me not to do any more flying; I don't tell her I'm going to be doing just that in three days' time.

From what I observe on the BBC news broadcasts and learn by talking to my family members, England is a country with problems not unlike those faced by middle-class Americans. It makes me wonder whether there is any connection between Prime Minister Tony Blair's avid support for America's military crusades and his aspirations to a British defense infrastructure of American notoriety, and the rapid, ongoing deterioration of England's social infrastructure.

Funnily enough, the more I see and overhear, the more I notice that the only thing Britons think they know about Canada is that it's a kind of promised land: bad weather aside, it's wealthy, pretty, peaceful ... and empty.

I land in Copenhagen, Denmark, on a bitterly cold winter's evening, and drag myself through the airport (a testament to streamlined Scandinavian design) past cheerful Christmas displays sporting Danish hearts and white fairy lights. My head feels like it's in a vacuum, but I'm happy just the same. Copenhagen is a happy city, by some quirk of geography or population. That is my first impression of the place.

It is clean, because everybody rides bicycles instead of driving (there are actually traffic lights and stop signs in the bike lanes). It is architecturally attractive, with flat-fronted buildings that curve seamlessly along the cobblestone streets in the medieval city, and sculptures both ancient and modern stand in every square, on every street corner ... even under the

(SEE TRAVEL JOURNAL, PAGE 7)

Alexis sets stage on fire

Ontario band returns to Fredericton for an encore performance

by Michèle Legendre

On December 10th, yet another amazing show went down at the Fredericton Elks' Club. Alexisonfire was returning to Fredericton after performing in Sussex to replace a cancelled show in July. This time, they were joined by the bands Jersey, At the Mercy of Inspiration, and Hollow.

The Elk's Club was packed (go figure, it was an all ages show) and the crowd was ready to make it a great show. Many waited patiently and glanced over the merchandise tables as Saint John's Hollow made a quick sound check and rolled through a brief set of fusioned funk and rock with a hint of screaming.

Those who had never heard of At The Mercy of Inspiration were more than shocked to see what this band had to offer. At the first beat of heavy driven music drenched with screaming vocals, the club turned into an angry moshpit of flying studded bracelets. Others rushed to the sides to save themselves from the fury. Luckily, no one was injured and the band did a great job at pumping up the crowd for what was to come. I hope we'll see At The Mercy of Inspiration in Fredericton again soon.

Burlington, Ontario's Jersey played next. This was my first time seeing them live and I wasn't too excited after hearing 'Generation Genocide' hit the waves of MuchMusic a few times too many for my liking. To my surprise, the guys were extremely nice and threw a decent show as the crowd sang along to their songs.

The crowd wasn't as energetic as they were for At The Mercy of Inspiration, but George and Wade of Alexisonfire fixed that problem when they ran into the crowd and started dancing around to the beat. Their set could've been a little livelier since the singer, guitarist and bassist were always glued to their microphones, facing the crowd. But nonetheless, they kept their set at a good length and were just enough to keep the crowd entertained



Michèle Legendre/The Brunswickan

Alexisonfire guitarist Dallas Green may have lost his voice, but that didn't keep the band from putting on a tremendous show.

to see the last band in the lineup.

At last, Alexisonfire took the stage and was setting up their amplifiers, pedals and drum set for the show. I talked to guitarist Dallas Green and found out that he wouldn't be singing during the show due to catching the common cold and having a sore throat. It was a little disappointing to see Alexisonfire perform without Dallas's backup vocals, but that thought was quickly forgotten when they started playing. Wade started playing the first notes of '44 Caliber Love Letter', the first song from their self-titled album and the crowd automatically started to head bang with the rhythm.

The music was dead on, just like the CD; George screamed every word with perfection, and I sang Dallas' missing vocals in my head. The crowd

got right up to the rim of the stage and were dancing and stomping to the music. After every song, George would stop for a minute and talk to the crowd as guitars were being tuned. Luckily one song ended in time for George to tell two guys in the crowd to stop fighting: "This isn't a cock measuring contest."

They continued to play great songs such as the well-known 'Pulmonary Archery' and others such as 'Adella' and 'Little Girls Pointing and Laughing.' Dallas did end up singing for a very short amount of time, but it was greatly appreciated because it was just as I remembered Alexisonfire live in the summer, when they first performed in Fredericton. They threw an amazing show and I hope they'll be back very soon.

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