

Jessica Walsh

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Jessica Walsh: My name is Jessica Walsh and I'm from Newfoundland.

ON GROWING UP IN ST JOHN'S

Jessica Walsh: I grew up in St. John's, Newfoundland. And it was – yeah, I was there straight from like when I was born until I was 18 and went to university. [01:00:26:00] And it was the only place I knew. So for me, it was a wonderful place to grow up. As a community, it was extremely friendly. I lived five minutes away from my grandparents, so I could go over there every day if I wanted to. And it was, you know, it was really easy to get together with family and friends. [01:01:02:09]

There were lots of traditions. I think that's one of the biggest things I've noticed since I left there is just how many traditions there were. And so you'd have like a Sunday dinner with both sides of your family every single week. And that's something that, that I love about growing up in that community, just that sense of getting together to share meals and exchange stories all the time. [01:01:28:21]

EXPLORING IDENTITY

Jessica Walsh: My cultural identity is something that I feel like I've, I've thought about more in recent years, as a young adult and after, after leaving home to go away for university. And so I guess my first kind of feelings about it were that I felt like this kind of transplanted Newfoundlander. [01:01:57:03] I was explaining myself as a Newfoundlander a bunch of times so I kind of got used to, to explaining what it was like to grow up there and what parts of me really stem from having spent so much time there.

And I guess I started to realize that I didn't feel like living in Ottawa for was like an extension of Newfoundland. [01:02:29:03] To me, Ottawa felt like a really different place. And I mean it is a really different place. But culturally, I didn't identify in the same way with Ottawa that a lot of friends of mine there did. And I then kind of wondered how much that had to do with Newfoundland not having joined Canada until 1949 and the fact that for, especially for my mom's family, Canada – like they didn't grow up as Canadians. [01:03:02:07] They were born as British subjects and only became part of Canada in 1949. And they went through debates over whether or not Newfoundland should join Canada and thinking about what benefits that could bring to them. And that alone was quite a divisive issue.

Being in Ottawa and realizing that I as a Canadian had this real gap I guess in terms of my understanding of Canada prior to 1949 [01:03:35:18] and realizing that I knew lots about recent Canadian history but not much about the past, was something I wanted to explore.

And then I did my Master's in London, England, and felt this really weird sense of familiarity with England that I didn't, didn't expect. So that was kind of cool. [01:04:00:12] But I definitely felt more of an attachment and an affinity with England than I ever did with Ottawa.

And then I was like, "Well why, why is this?" And it came down to like such little things that these really British day to day things like having afternoon tea or like this love of like certain types of China, or all of these things that maybe like, maybe you'd find in, in other parts of the Maritimes and in Newfoundland. [01:04:28:00]

But yeah, a load of traditions and sayings that my mom's family and my grandparents say that I can relate to.

ON AN EVOLVING NATIONAL IDENTITY.

Jessica Walsh: I think Canada is at an interesting point right now where our country is really changing. Just last week I read – there were a couple of articles written about the most recent census information that was released about language in Canada. [01:05:05:12] And that was talking about how due to immigration in Canada, the rate of – basically that French as a founding language of Canada is – I mean this isn't new news to a lot of people – but that French is, is not going to be growing as quickly, but yet other languages other than French and English are growing quite a lot. [01:05:33:00]

And so debates like the idea of should we consider singing our national anthem in other languages, or even how do we incorporate Aboriginal languages into, into Canadian traditions and what it means to be Canadian, I think those are a really important and increasingly important as more people come here from different backgrounds. [01:06:05:08] And we need to rethink what it means to us to have this English and French Canada founding myth and how we bring that forward.

SHARING STORIES.

Jessica Walsh: [01:06:19:14] Sharing stories from all parts of Canada or stories that come from these distinct histories that make up Canada are vital to communicating to other Canadians, new and old Canadians that this place isn't a melting pot, that this is a place where people grow up with lots of different languages, lots of sizes of communities, traditions, beliefs, that it's important for, especially for people who are new to Canada to know that, that Canada isn't, that Toronto isn't the only story of a collection of special cultures. Canada is full of them and that you can go to places like a small town in Northern Saskatchewan or a small place in Newfoundland. [01:07:24:09] And you can get, you get learn so much about, about why people wanted to join together to create this, this collective of Canada that retains special, special little aspects all over the place.

[End of recorded material]

Jessica is a law student at McGill University. She is also a musician and sings with Les Muses Chorale in Montreal.