



A newsletter for members of the York University Retirees' Association (YURA)

Winter 2020

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Message from the YURA Co-Presidents

Welcome to 2020! We hope that your holiday with friends and family was fulfilling, and we wish you happiness and good health throughout the year.

Your YURA executive already has a number of events planned for the new year, and more are in the planning stage. Our spring theatre outing at Stratford will be on Tuesday, June 9th to see “Chicago.” The fall date for the Shaw Festival is in the process of being finalized. More specific information about reserving tickets will be sent to you closer to the event dates.

Our Annual General Meeting will be on Friday, October 30, and the search is underway for a guest speaker. If you have any suggestions, please let us know as soon as possible, as we try to confirm the speaker as early as we can in the new year.

Your executive has decided not to hold a Showcase in 2020. Instead, this fall YURA will focus on raising as much money as possible, through sponsorships, for the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon Charity Challenge, which will be held on Sunday, October 18. You may remember that in 2019, YURA participated in the charity challenge for the first time. We raised \$11,821 for the YURA Graduate Student Award Endowment with only eight YURA members walking. The charity walk allows us to field a team of twenty in 2020. The YURA office will help our participants register to participate in the 5 km walk. All walkers on our 2020 team will be provided with a fundraising page that can be sent by email to potential sponsors. We will assist all our registrants with the content of their fund-raising pages. Sponsors of the walkers will be able to donate online by credit card, or by cash or cheque, and will be sent an appropriate tax receipt automatically. In 2020, with our twenty walkers, we hope to raise \$20,000 for the endowment. Please let us know as

soon as possible if you would like to participate on October 18. To replace Showcase, your executive is working on a fundraising event for winter 2021. More about that is yet to come. In both these events—the Scotia Bank Charity Challenge and the Winter event--our goal is to add as much as we can to the YURA Graduate Student Award Endowment Fund.

At our October 25, 2019 Annual General Meeting, YURA approved that the YURA Graduate Student Award Endowment be established with the University. At present we have the “seed” money of \$30,000 for the Endowment. This “seed” money comes from donations currently sitting in an interest-free account in Advancement--money raised from the Charity walk in 2019 and a YURA term deposit that has now matured. Over time, this fund will be built to an amount of \$115,000. That amount will generate the funding required for three annual awards of \$1,500 each. Building this Endowment to that level will require us to be creative in generating funding. Personal donations, and money raised from such events as Showcase and the Charity Walk for the next several years will be directed to this purpose. Until we reach our Endowment goal, we will continue to offer these awards as we do now, funding them from our operating budget on an annual basis.

Building on the success of our visits to the Bata Shoe Museum in 2018, and the Aga Khan Museum in 2019, more excursions of this nature are being planned by a small group of YURA members chaired by Donna Smith. Please let us know if you have suggestions for the group. YURA has had a very busy and successful fall, beginning with our Lake Muskoka Cruise on September 18, and the theatre trip to the Shaw Festival on October 8th to see Brigadoon. With these two events, more than 60 YURA members and guests participated. Both

excursions allowed for time to enjoy the venues, and to renew acquaintances with long-time friends on the bus and over lunch. Our Annual General Meeting was held on Friday, October 25th, with Canadian author Anna Porter as our guest speaker. Her presentation on her new book *In Other Words: How I Fell in Love with Canada One Book at a Time*, was captivating, and many of us made a note of books of hers that we want to read or re-read. (A list of her books appeared in the Summer 2019 *Newsletter*, which can be found on our website www.yorku.ca/yura)

We bade farewell to two retiring executive members: Michele Young, and Billie Mullick. Michele has been the backbone behind YURA's web page, and Billie has helped to organize a number of events for YURA. We are grateful that both have agreed to stay connected and continue to help YURA.

The AGM was well attended and was our second event in the New Student Centre. Our Showcase, held on November 12th, raised more than \$2,000 for YURA graduate student awards. Not only did Showcase give us presence in the university community once again, it was a lot of fun. It was a chance for YURA members to donate re-giftable items, as well as baked goods. Thanks to our 30 dedicated volunteers, led by Pat Murray and Steve Dranitsaris, and the vendors who participated.

Thanks to John Wilson, Sara Kozlowski, Agnes Fraser, and John Lennox who have volunteered a day a week in the YURA office in Central Square, and without whose help we could not maintain our regular office hours. Having people in the office to greet YURA members and direct their inquiries is a rewarding activity. Please let us know if you would like to volunteer. We are grateful for the support of all our members. Please feel free to contact us with your questions and concerns by telephone (416-736-2100 ext. 70664) or email at yura@yorku.ca.

With our best wishes,
— **Charmaine Courtis** and **Ian Greene**,
Co-Presidents

NATIONAL POPULAR VOTE

by Harvey Simmons

A proposition now slowly working its way through U.S. state legislatures could have a radical effect on the future shape of presidential elections. The awkwardly named "National Popular Vote Interstate Compact," is an elegant attempt to render the Electoral College toothless and bring about the election of the U.S. President by a majority of the popular vote.

One reason for this proposed change is the dramatic way in which the Electoral College thwarts the will of the majority of voters. Five times in US history, in 1824, 1876, 1888, 2000 and in 2016 the winning candidate for president of the United States actually won a majority of the popular vote but lost the presidency in the Electoral College. Most recently, Hillary Clinton received 2.87 million votes more than Donald Trump but lost the presidency.

But why an electoral college? Learned in Greek, Roman and European history, the eighteenth-century Framers were horrified by tales of mob rule in the ancient and modern world where majorities gripped by sudden and violent passions chose as leaders demagogues or tyrants who ultimately brought about waste and destruction. History taught that direct democracy was a shaky foundation on which to build a new state. As a result, the Framers developed a republican system of government where the power of a democratic majority was moderated by being filtered through intermediate authorities--electors in the case of the presidential election, state legislatures in the case of Senators (until 1913 when the Constitution was

amended to permit direct election by the voters). By the time of the 2000 fiasco, when the Supreme Court helped the Republican Party prevent a recount and win George W. Bush the presidency, a movement toward a majoritarian system of electing the president got underway.

Under the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, signatory states agree that once a presidential election is held their electors will vote en bloc for whoever wins the national popular vote, and not, as is the current practice, for the candidate who wins the majority of the state's popular vote.

This means, for example, that if the Republican presidential nominee wins a majority of the vote in California in 2020, but the Democratic nominee wins a majority of the national popular vote, all of California's 55 electoral votes will be cast for the Democrat, not for the Republican, as under current rules.

Currently fifteen states plus the District of Columbia have signed on to the Compact, bringing with them a total of 196 electoral votes. The threshold for adoption is 270 electoral votes. After a four-year pause--from 2014 to 2018--when no new states joined the existing eleven in the Compact, five additional states signed on, four of them in 2019.

Whether the Trump presidency and his troubled Administration have influenced this rush to join the Compact is hard to determine, but his slow descent into chaos might make US citizens look back at the electoral college system and decide it's about time a majority of the people should have its way over the fatuity of an outmoded and unjust election system.

Life As It Was Back Then: Reminiscence

Our 28th Reminiscence is authored by Ellen (van der Feltz) Frei who is a resident with me at Christie Gardens. She was one of the founders of the French Club here. When she retired, Ellen was on the faculty at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario, where she was teaching English as a second language. She has entitled her early-childhood autobiography, "Life as a Colonial."

My mother and I were born in the same house, which still stands in "downtown" Amsterdam. I remember walks in our neighbourhood of semi-circular canals in 1935, when I was just over two years old. On summer weekends my parents often took me on a bicycle seat behind one of them on trips with friends, either to the countryside -- I remember the bright sunshine and the sensation of speed -- or to the seashore, with the air redolent of suntan oil, the white sand hot under my feet.

By 1936 my father no longer had a job in Amsterdam, heavily hit by the Depression. He was fortunate to obtain a position on Java -- part of the Netherlands East Indies -- from his previous employer. Since the climate and living conditions on Java are totally different from those in The Netherlands, my parents stored all their household goods, most of their clothes and their dishes with good friends. Our six-week trip to Jakarta on West Java, prolonged by engine trouble, was aboard a Dutch liner. It had a play area for children, with Betty Boop movies. I ate some meals at the table with my parents, and enjoyed exotic desserts like ice cream and preserved peaches. After finally leaving the ship in Jakarta, I remember standing on the quay, attacked by swarms of mosquitoes; I itched for days afterwards.

On arrival in November 1936, we took the train to East Java, so my father could meet his new employer. The train trip took a long time. In the cars, people preferred to sit on the side where the smoke did not blow in with soot and small pieces of

coal from the engine: we kept those windows open because of the heat.

When we arrived at the factory site with about ten dwellings for the European employees, we stayed in the guest pavilion of the director and his wife. In the elegant bedroom the large bed had a mosquito net, tucked up near the ceiling during the day, let down at bed-time. The enormous bed looked completely white; it had a bed spread, many big pillows with embroidery-trimmed edges and two bolsters. Known as a "Dutch wife" by British colonials, people used to put a bolster between their legs to absorb perspiration during sleep. The wash stand with mirror held a wooden rack with many face cloths, hand towels, as well as a double set of towels for each person. A lower compartment hid the chamber pot during the day. On the floor a covered, ceramic slop pail matched the basin and ewer on top of the wash stand. I noticed a glass carafe full of boiled, cool water, topped with a mesh cloth weighted down at the corners with a bead, for use when brushing our teeth. Condensation pearly on the outside of the carafe. During afternoon naps I slept in that wonderful bed; at night a trundle bed, pushed under the bed when not in use, would do well for a child. The pavilion had a front porch, with comfortable wicker or rattan chairs.

Never again did I stay in such a splendid pavilion, though it was probably fairly common. Even on the island of Sumatra around the end of the 19th century, the plantations my grandfather managed would have had similar guest pavilions. The appurtenances had not changed much, though in my time the factory and houses had electric light.

On a wall in the main house I noticed a clay water container—it was a cooler for drinking water. Breakfast in the dining room: porridge, a soft-boiled egg, a slice of bread with cheese. The daughters, aged ten and six, took me outside. It was the rainy season: they showed me a ditch covered with

duckweed. I insisted that it was grass, promptly wetting my socks and shoes by trying to walk on the surface. We celebrated December 6 —St. Nicholas Day for the Dutch — with that family; a photograph shows us three girls in the garden, near their banyan tree, a large member of the Ficus family. The Javanese considered these trees sacred: they might be haunted. Every public square, as well as many large, old-fashioned gardens, had a banyan tree.

For my father's job, we settled at sea level on the coast in hot, humid Surabaya. Within a week we moved into a rented, furnished house. My parents expressed great pleasure with the wonderful terrace in front of that house. In their letters they wrote repeatedly how much they appreciated it in the early morning. They took advantage of the cool evening air by a walk or by sitting on that terrace. Our garden had a papaya tree; one memory of Java includes the delicious tropical fruits beyond oranges, bananas and mangos.

Street vendors, balancing on their shoulders a large basket suspended at each end of a bamboo pole, brought all sorts of items for sale to our house. It always fascinated me to watch my mother (assisted by one of the servants) examining the quality of the goods. Bartering was the rule. There were no retail standards and the buyer had to beware. For example, charcoal for the kitchen came in woven bamboo containers large enough to hold a pig. The cook showed my mother how to examine the outside of the bottom of the basket for dampness from leaves used as padding. Good charcoal had to be dry: then it provided the correct amount in the bamboo container. My parents had started learning some Malay aboard ship. Once she had her own home, my mother ran into *the servant problem*. For Javanese people the pay was low; as a European you were expected to keep servants. They had their own quarters at the back of every house. I was not allowed to fraternize with them or slip into their 'slack' habits. Hygiene dictated that as a newcomer

to Java I was not to walk barefoot or eat from roadside stalls the way the servants did. At that time the prescribed conduct presented an enormous taboo to me, because everything the Javanese did intrigued me greatly. I was more quickly at ease with the Malay language than my parents were, as my mother observed with frustration at her own slow progress.

It's obvious from her letters that my mother had no idea of Javanese customs and attitudes. Although she struggled hard not to, she admitted periodically giving in to "refreshing" temper tantrums. Those days' cross-cultural advice told us never to raise our voice or lose our temper. Poor Mom! She gave a vivid description of trying to communicate with the servants, Malay dictionary in hand, still totally at sea. She wrote that she went through several sets of servants in a short time. Our first houseboy owned a yellow-crested cockatoo and a budgie — they did not speak. I enjoyed their company at lunch as long as that housekeeping couple lasted.

In the morning, we got up at six o'clock — at sunrise. My father had to be at work at eight, with two hours for lunch during the hottest time of the day; he worked until five o'clock at least. My mother took me daily to the swimming pool nearby: I swam well by the time I was four. I also liked playing on the swing in our garden. In addition to taking an afternoon nap after lunch, everyone bathed when they got up. The bathrooms did not usually have hot water. Traditionally everything in the bathroom was made of concrete (no tiles), including a large cube-shaped water container, from which you dipped the water onto yourself. City bathrooms had a shower as well. The mothers of my friends showered with their children until the age of seven, including me. In the afternoon, bathed and dressed in fresh clothes, Mom and I often went for a short walk. Up and down the street, women and children were practising piano scales.

On Saturday nights I had a good time playing a board game or card game with my parents. On many Sundays we made day trips in a car with friends, to unpretentious resorts in the mountains around us. In November, the hottest time of the year before the coming of the rainy season (the monsoon), we took a holiday at a friends' cabin on Mount Welirang. The parents went on an overnight climb to the crater of that sulphur-producing mountain. I was furious that they left me behind with the friends' nanny.

On Queen Wilhelmina's birthday, August 31 in 1938, we went to a military torch-light parade. Everyone wore red-white-and-blue or orange ribbons. What fun! Once my parents and I visited an evening fair in Surabaya: a corner of the town square was magically transformed behind fences of woven bamboo, with some electric lights and a lot of oil lamps; the fireworks frightened me.

The three of us enjoyed living in Surabaya. We had neither radio nor telephone; servants delivered messages from one house to another.

As it turned out, we spent two years in Surabaya, one year in Jakarta and another two years living near the factory of which my father was one of the sales representatives. The bombardment of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 put an end to the world as I knew it. Of course, it was the same for others.

– **Ellen Frei**

(Ed.: When the Japanese invaded Java, Europeans were placed in camps. Little Ellen and mother were placed in a civilian camp while her father was placed in a military camp where he died. Ellen and her mother returned to Holland after the war.)

TRAVELOGUE

Seeking New Worlds above the Treeline

Part 1: Places

by Frances Frisken

Getting there was not Easy

The pilot's voice was calm; matter-of-fact. "Well folks," he said, "we're going back to Iqualuit." It wasn't a surprise, given that the airport at our destination, the Greenland town of Kangerlussuaq, was now hidden by the hills receding behind us. It was even reassuring. We'd already been circling for several minutes and the pilot had told us that fuel supply could be an issue if we circled very long. And we couldn't land because a small plane had blown a tire on the airport's sole runway just before we got there and the runway was not yet cleared. So we flew for another hour and a half back to Iqualuit, capital of the Territory of Nunavut, where we had already spent an hour in the plane while ground crew repaired a mechanical problem, aided by telephoned advice from their Ottawa headquarters.

And so began our two-week *Adventure Canada* tour of Greenland and Labrador in late September 2018, when snow was already beginning to settle in the holes and crevasses of the rocky northern landscape. We had been advised to expect the unexpected; that the itinerary was "subject to change without notice" because everything depended on the weather and the seas. We had not expected, however, to have to prove our flexibility even before we joined our cruise ship, the *Ocean Endeavour*. Originally built in Poland for the Russian Navy, this ship had undergone several upgrades, the most recent of which had fitted it out for travel through arctic ice. It holds a maximum of 198 passengers; our number totalled 191. It also carried an Expedition Team of 33, 8 ship's officers and a large number of staff (many of them from Central and South America). Bill and I were part of a subgroup of 19 passengers

recruited by Al and Lin Pace, owners of Canoe North Adventures in Orangeville, which was one of several organizations that partnered with *Adventure Canada* for this cruise.

The Itinerary

We got to Kangerlussuaq on our second try, to be taken by bus over a bumpy track and in zodiacs (large inflated rubber rafts) to the ship, to be heralded as being among the very few people in the world who had crossed the Davis Strait three times in six hours. Before that first evening was over, we were called out on deck to see a display of northern lights – a mysterious streak of metallic green across a dark sky. An early wake-up call the next morning introduced a typical day filled with activities: a mandatory lifeboat drill, a zodiac visit to the face of a glacier, an afternoon visit to Kangaamiut (a small fishing village on Greenland's west central coast), and an on-board "Introduction to Greenland" by one of five "culturalists" on the Expedition Team, all of them members of indigenous communities. The day ended with a concert given by Jordan Harnum, Newfoundland musician and songwriter, who had already sung to us while we waited on the plane in Iqualuit. He continued to do so for the rest of the voyage, sharing his responsibility for our entertainment with Dave Paddon, a retired airline pilot who had grown up in Labrador but retired to St. John's. Dave specialized in "recitations" – amusing or poignant stories in verse that he writes about people and events that stir his imagination.

The next morning, we travelled south to Nuuk, Greenland's capital, principal economic hub, and home to one quarter of the country's population. This bustling city of roughly 17,500 people boasts "new suburbs, apartment developments and two traffic lights," as well as enough construction cranes to make Toronto visitors feel at home. From Nuuk we crossed the Davis Strait back to Canada, to anchor in the deep water outskirts of Kangerlussualujuaq, an Inuit community near the

mouth of the George River on the east side of Ungava Bay. We would visit that community the next evening before proceeding in a southeasterly direction along the north coast of Labrador, stopping along the way to visit abandoned Inuit settlements, the beautiful Saglek Fiord in the majestic Torngat Mountains National Park, and the town of Nain, administrative capital of the semi-autonomous region of Nunatsiavut (meaning “Our Beautiful Land”), so named by the Inuit who reached a Land Claims Agreement with the Canadian government in 2005.

Our final stop in Labrador was Indian Harbour, site of a Grenfell Mission cottage hospital established 125 years ago close to an Inuit winter settlement. From there we crossed the Strait of Belle Isle to the northernmost point in Newfoundland, stopping to visit l’Anse aux Meadows, the Parks Canada reconstruction of the only site of Old Norse settlement so far discovered in Canada. After a final shore visit to the Terra Nova National Park, we headed for St. John’s and then home.

Apart from whales and seabirds, the wildlife was usually a long way away and had to be pointed out by people who were adept at spotting movement in a landscape dotted with dark rocks and clumps of snow. Nonetheless we learned a lot about it and much else from the many talks, films and slide shows that complemented shore visits and zodiac cruises. What we got, in fact, was a crash course in the history, geography, geology, archaeology, flora and fauna, people, culture and governance of the eastern Arctic, given by people who had lived, worked and/or studied there. (One of these was York Biology Professor Dawn Bazely, who includes research of Arctic plant life among her areas of specialization.) As if that weren’t enough, passengers could attend one or more workshops on such offbeat topics as throat singing, song writing, spotting or counting wildlife, “rock petting”, the Inuktitut language, wood carving, photography and

more. In short it was a trip so filled with new information, new experiences and new impressions that everyone who took it was likely to remember it differently. All I can do is describe what for me were some of its highlights.

Memorable Excursions

For the many different sensations and impressions it left me with, the visit to Kangiqsualuajuag on Ungava Bay was the most enjoyable but also the most uncomfortable excursion of the entire cruise. It began on the morning of Day 5 when a “packing party” of volunteers gathered in the main lounge to fill 25 large duffel bags with hockey equipment bought with money donated to Project North, a not-for-profit organization committed “to enhancing and improving the lives of children in Canada’s North.” (This particular excursion was organized by Michelle Valberg, co-founder of Project North and an award-winning photographer who travelled with us both as cruise photographer and as a Nikon Ambassador.) That same gathering saw the self-selection of a team of volunteers (aged between about 30 and 60) willing to play a ball hockey game with a team of local youngsters. Formed at the same time was a team of volunteer cheerleaders to back them up.

Kangiqsualuajuag was our first wet landing, which meant donning rubber boots, waterproof pants and the teal blue rain jackets that all passengers were given before leaving Toronto. We got to town in time for a brief visit to a food tent where two cheerful local grandmothers in traditional clothing served tea with bannock, which they made on a grill over an open fire. We then headed to the arena to join a large turnout of the town’s population, come to watch the presentation of the hockey bags and cheer on the local ball hockey players. Their team won the game by a score of 11-1 despite the best efforts of Adventure Canada players and their pom-pom-waving, vuvuzela-blowing cheerleaders.

Then it was back to the shore to hunt in the dark for our borrowed rubber boots among the piles left there when we arrived, followed by a long wait in a cold rain for our ride back to the ship. This trip, the night's final adventure, took 25 minutes but seemed to last for hours as we headed into a sleet-filled wind, huddled into our rain jackets and clinging to ropes while the zodiac bounced crazily beneath us. "My parents would never do this," commented our young zodiac driver (a vivacious young woman much loved by all) when we were about half way back, making me feel more adventurous and slightly less miserable for a fleeting moment. It was an evening I would never want to repeat but was very glad I hadn't missed.

Our first zodiac cruise two days earlier had been calmer and brighter, taking us in full sunlight through ice-spattered water as close to the face of a glacier as it is considered safe to go – close enough for people in a preceding boat to feel the spray when a large chunk of ice dropped into the water in front of them. This was normal behaviour for glaciers we were told; what is not normal is the fact that pieces of glacier are breaking away much more frequently than they used to. Only a few years ago the glacier we saw had been much wider; now there were large expanses of bare rock at each end. This process is going on throughout the Arctic, making glaciers the canaries in the coal mine when it comes to evidence of climate change.

There were also excursions to the sites of abandoned Inuit villages, where we walked among the rocky outlines of former Inuit homes and the similarly marked locations of churches and community halls erected by Moravian missionaries, who began to settle on the Labrador coast in 1791. Visitors could join guided walks of different degrees of difficulty, always preceded by bear monitors charged with ensuring that careless tourists did not get any unpleasant surprises. (We were given instructions on how to try to drive away

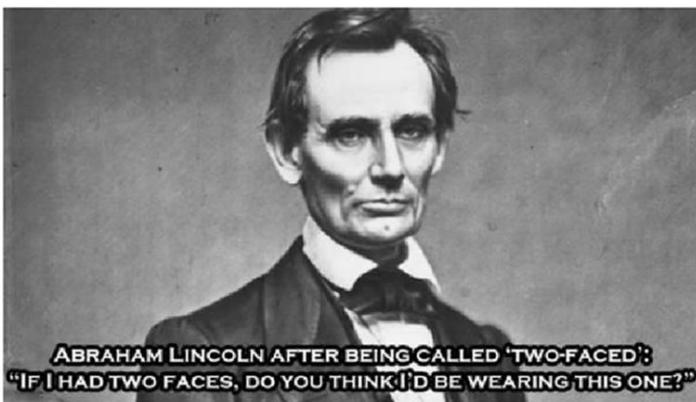
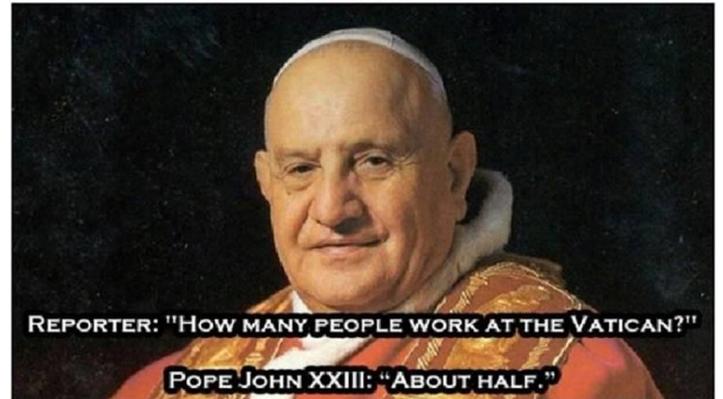
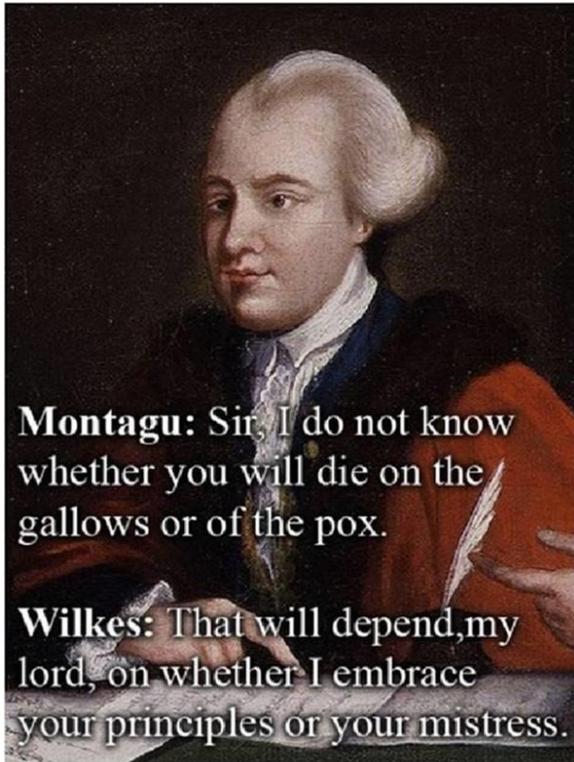
a threatening polar bear – an activity that calls for a degree of self-discipline and clear-headedness that would be difficult to muster at such a time. Fortunately, the challenge did not come up.) Both polar bears and black bears roam most of the territory we visited, with the former being indiscriminating carnivores and so the most dangerous to come across. And despite its being depicted in the south as a casualty of climate change we were assured that the polar bear population is not only healthy but also increasing. This trend is attributed to a rapid increase in the population of seals, one of their main food sources, as a result of celebrity-led attacks on seal hunting. What are declining rapidly are caribou, long a staple of the Inuit diet, a trend blamed both on overhunting and on a loss of habitat to industrial activities.



Some of us did see one black bear while on a zodiac excursion into Saglek Bay - a black smudge gorging on blueberries, or so we were told, in the middle of a large spread of ground cover in rich autumn colours – deep red, burnt orange, dark green, old gold – made richer by the late afternoon sunlight. Because most of our trip was above the tree line, this blending of autumn colours in an otherwise austere landscape was a surprising and uplifting discovery.

to be continued...

HUMOUR DEPARTMENT



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(in non-COVID times)

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