

Becoming a true Canadian

by KEITH SCHELL

When I was a kid, we lived out in the middle of nowhere in the country, or so it seemed to me. There were no video games, no cable TV or VCRs, and no neighbours within roughly one hundred metres of where we lived. And because of that rural isolation, we had to find ways to make our own fun.

You could read, watch what little TV there was back then, play board games, or have many cool adventures in your imagination playing with your toys.

But when you wanted to play outside in the winter, there was one activity above all other winter activities that defined us as being uniquely Canadian.

And that activity was: **PLAYING ROAD HOCKEY!**

Every winter Sunday afternoon at our house, after the driveway was shovelled out and all the other chores were done, there always seemed to be some spare time to be had, and we always tried to figure out fun ways to spend it.

And even though I couldn't stop a beach ball, I loved being a goalie. So I would always ask my Dad, 'Want to go out and take shots on me?' And God love him, he always said 'yes?' with a smile on his face. I don't remember him ever saying no. So out we went into the driveway for a few hours to play road hockey.

I have a lot of happy memories of my Dad and I playing road hockey in the driveway when I was young. And when my two little brothers got older, they would come outside and join us, and it would become a uniquely Canadian family bonding moment.

And for any boy playing road hockey in this country, on any street or in any driveway from coast to coast, there was always one unique and painful badge of honour that every one of us road hockey warriors experienced at least once in our lifetime and which defined each one of us as being a real honest-to-God Canadian. This moment is a national rite of passage which spans countless generations of Canadians and defines us as a hockey-playing nation. And that moment is this:

The moment you got a frozen tennis ball right in the nuts playing road hockey, you automatically became a true Canadian!

As a former road hockey goalie, I can't tell you how many times I 'became a true Canadian' out in the driveway, so to speak. As a kid, it never occurred to me to wear an athletic support for protection out in the driveway. You just learned to be quick or you paid the price. And usually, I learned to be quick. But not always.

We had a lot of fun playing road hockey out in the driveway growing up. And as my two younger brothers got older and came outside to join us, my youngest brother wanted to play goalie in the driveway as well.

So as the elder brother, I gradually relinquished the net and happily devoted myself to helping my youngest brother become a true Canadian as well. And, I'm pleased to say, I was quite successful in this patriotic endeavour (I smile about it now, but since becoming adults, my youngest brother's memories may differ a little bit from mine on this particular subject)!

That's the one thing about this great country of ours: it doesn't matter what part of the world you are originally from. Once you came to Canada and 'took one for the team' playing road hockey, you immediately became a true Canadian. Congratulations! Welcome to Canada! (Don't get up.)

I am one of the pained road hockey multitude in this country that can proudly stand up and declare: **I AM A TRUE CANADIAN!**

(But give me a minute.)

Happy Canada Day to all!