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Far-Away Families

After living in the west for 10 years I was very fortunate to have made many friends. One particular friend was from Guyana and her family had lived in Alberta for 25 years. Alberta was good to them, as it had been to me. Her parents had never been farther east than Ontario and longed to visit the Maritimes. I fondly talked of home, raving about crashing waves and warmhearted people. I went home every year to visit and came back with stories of boat trips, my mother's home-made clam chowder, 4 a.m. kitchen parties and all-you-can-possibly-eat lobster feasts. They reveled in my tales and especially seemed to enjoy scenic depictions of the Cabot Trail and its many alluring attractions. They wanted so badly to go "back home" with me.

My parents were celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary. After eleven children and 34 grandchildren and great grandchildren, they deserved to celebrate! I was going home to help organize and prepare for the gala of our clan, a 250-person legion bash. None of us had ever organized anything like this before but we figured that between the 40-some-odd of us, we should be able to pull something off. I invited my Guyanese friends to come. After all, they had become my surrogate family over the years and I really wanted to unite the fronts. When I wasn't home for holidays and special occasions, my friend's parents included me in theirs and always made me feel like I was one of their own – I was a little pale but otherwise completely enmeshed. They gracefully accepted the invitation and we began to plan our adventure.

Upon arriving on the island we went straight to my parent's house, an over 100-year-old-once hotel that I spent my entire childhood and teenage years in. I love that house. Although I firmly believe it is occupied by a whole array of long-past souls whom my parents have never appeared to have any trouble sharing their space with, it is the essence of my being and holds the fondest memories of my life. As we pulled into the yard, the beat of a bass drum banged in my chest as I anticipated seeing them again. I envisioned their kind loving faces. Happy scenes of introducing them to my adoptive far-away family played over and over again in my head. We were antsy and eager.

The first thing we saw was my mother who was standing in the outside doorway. She was holding the door with one hand and frantically waving with the other. Her whole body wiggled and her smile could have crossed the Atlantic. She was wearing her cotton-flowered sun dress with no sleeves that came just below her knees. She looked just as I remembered, exactly. It seemed that she never changed, a wonderful comforting fact. We jumped from the car and began a hugging frenzy that would have made bears jealous. She scuttled us into the house where my father was melting over gigantic pots of boiling lobster. The craze began all over again, greetings pouring forth, hugs and welcomes bouncing around the salty kitchen like sailboats in a windstorm. The house filled with the aroma of sea juice and down home spirit. We settled in over ice-cold bottles of Nova Scotia beer and iced tea while we got acquainted and awaited our traditional feast. We chatted and giggled and it was as if they had known each other forever, all story tellers in their own right, sharing memories and knowledge like old-time sailors who had been lost at sea.

Throughout the evening, the springless door banged over and over again as my family came to meet my family, drink our beer and eat our lobsters; they are always good for that. Caps popped, lobsters cracked and bursting bellies roared with laughter. We had a huge event to plan, but not that night. That night we let the tide take us wherever it wanted to go. We cruised the seas of friendship, harmony and togetherness while strangers became family and East met West. With lobsters and beer to boot, what more could I have possibly asked for?