

Chop a tree, hug a refugee, O Canada, you'll do me, eh?

Most mornings I greet my 6-year-old neighbour, Millie, with our secret moose call. I'm not a Freemason, but being Canadian is a lot like being a member of a secret society.

I spread out my fingers and thumbs, raise my hands to both sides of my head and pretend I am a moose with antlers.

Millie responds with hysterical laughter: I am far from home, but home from home. I wonder if that isn't how the rest of the world sees Canada – as a bit of a joke country.

Canada's identity is largely defined by negatives: namely, we are not American. Why aren't we part of the US after all? What's the difference?

The Canadian answer is to say – the welfare state, socialised medicine and a country willing to accept foreigners but not to swamp their identity.

Suggesting that Canada should attach itself to the US is not dissimilar to recommending that Iraq incorporate Kuwait as the 19th province, although this is not really a serious matter of debate. Anyway, the Americans wouldn't have us.

Canadians have accepted all the stereotypes the world has burdened us with – boring, inconsequential, boring, second-rate, boring and boring again.



HEIDI
KINGSTONE

ON THE
AGENDA

That's OK because we know better. In fact, we think we're better than the fat slobs south of the border who invade your country and try to spread democracy like plastic cheese from a tube.

We're too busy clubbing seals, stealing First Nations people's land, catching salmon with our hands or just sitting on the fence to really care.

Not only that, but, unbeknown to most of the rest of the world, Canada is still reeling from domestic scandals.

Government slush funds have lined the pockets of crooked cronies. Separatism, an issue that slept for a decade, has reappeared on the political agenda. The hockey season was cancelled. Cancelled! Unbelievable.

The blank space left on Saturday-night

TV by the absence of *Hockey Night in Canada* was filled by watching in horror and joy the demise of newspaper baron Conrad Black.

While the world struggles with its global soul, Canada searches for an identity that fits its 21st-century image – one where peacekeeping is paramount – so help it along as it celebrates 138 years of Home Rule on July 1.

DIY KIT ON HOW TO BE CANADIAN IN TIME FOR YOUR CANADA DAY PARTY:

- Hug a refugee (we like foreigners!);
- Build an igloo;
- Chop down a tree (not cherry) with your teeth;
- Drink pure maple syrup while singing *I'm a Lumberjack and I'm OK*;
- Get a federal grant and pocket the money;
- Wait on a hospital trolley for hours and declare Canadian socialised medicine the best in the world;
- Call your pet moose Chocolate; and
- Finally, end every sentence with "eh". Like, you know, "I am a Canadian, eh?"

Oh, and apologies for launching Celine Dion on the world. There are no excuses. But she did win the Eurovision Song Contest as a Swiss representative.

Now spread your fingers, raise your hands ...