

A Truly Great Re-reset

by [Larry McCloskey](#) (October 2022)



Maligne Lake, Jasper Park, Lawren Harris, 1924

I hitch-hiked to Vancouver with a friend when I was 17. It was what young people high on adventure and low on finances did in the 1970s before the world was infected by the passive, seductive, ‘all-inclusive.’ Though hitch-hiking is not exactly recommended today, one wonders how the sense of adventure is sated or maturation achieved lounging at a resort pool sipping piña coladas.

I was away for over a month and my parents had no idea where I

was, if I was. I just turned up unannounced for Sunday dinner a day before the school term began. Dad said 'Dinner's ready in five minutes,' mom said 'Wash your hands.' It wasn't that they weren't interested in what I had been doing for the past month, but we didn't delude ourselves in a family of nine that the absence of one negated the presence of the others. When I left, their lives didn't end; when I returned, their lives didn't begin again. I would eventually give a highly edited version of the past month which would be accepted without censor.

Three days earlier, my friend and I had run out of discretionary spending; that is, without much thinking about money, we realized that our respective stash of \$200 was down to \$54 each. And when we enquired about the cost of a return bus ticket to Ottawa we learned it was \$54. We didn't marvel at the exactitude of these amounts and we didn't much sweat that we now faced the prospect of a three day, two night continuous bus ride without food or drink or means to buy the essentials of life. It was part of the adventure.

Not an easy adventure. We were desperately hungry, must have been severely dehydrated, and never wanted to be in a sitting position again. My friend ate the entire stash of cookies a kind woman donated to both of us while I briefly slept. Months after our grand adventure, he developed a sore on his coccyx from enforced sitting which required surgery. We agreed it was karma for not sharing the cookies. To this day, my friend will not accept cookies when prompted on his computer.

Not easy prepares us for life. Enduring or even embracing not easy helps develop resilience to any and all of life's vicissitudes which in turn mitigates the tidal wave of anxiety that is the present age. The calloused hands equivalent of not easy is the mental health piece that is missing in the minds of young people that converges a complicated issue on a single point: an increasing percentage of people are demonstrating an inability to cope with the normal demands of life. Could it be

that the pursuit of easy is not the winning formula for achieving a life well-lived?

I digress. For many years I've wanted to take a road trip with my wife across the continent—in a car that allows for periodic stops to eat, drink and uncoil from sitting position. But between daughters, dogs and that pesky work thing, decades passed with bucket list road trip unrealized. Then in August, obstacles disappeared (I'm still bitter that my girls decided to grow up and leave) and we drove to Vancouver island to take in all the glories of ocean and sky of the west coast. Everyone knows the west coast is beautiful and, while not exactly unknown, the mountains of Alberta don't get the attention they deserve. The keystone piece of our journey was our only formal booking: a week in a log cabin in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains on the Athabasca river near Jasper National Park.

The Jasper area has world class hiking and that is what we did for hours every day. Two distinct impressions. Long before getting to the summit for the ultimate view, my eyes constantly surveyed the landscape like an open aperture. Beauty was evident in every frame, every turn of the head, every step of the way up the path to the summit. The summit view became almost anti-climatic, if you let it.

Second impression reinforces a stereotype (is this the correct term for something that is consistently, pervasively true?). Travel to and appreciation of Canadian beauty seems more common among Germans than from any other people. The efficacy of this statement is augmented by the fact Germans are in the forests, along the paths and under the rocks of the Canadian wild. And by that I don't just mean you'll meet more Germans than Latvians or Venezuelans. Often they out-number Canadians, if you look under rocks.

So we talked to Germans, always marvelling at their barely-accented mastery of English. While being uniformly forthcoming

about Canadian beauty, they were less so about other subjects, particularly politics. Except for the third week in August when we happened to turn over a rock and find a couple of inquisitive Germans.

Politely and with hesitation, our German acquaintances wanted to know why Canada won't help. Being Canadian we matched polite question with equally polite counter question. Help how? Why help us with our energy crisis, of course. Help us beat Putin, end dependency on Russian gas, prevent another war.

For which I had little answer and many swirling thoughts. During various world crisis of the recent past, Canadians have disappointed me. Though we are not suppose to say such things, Canadian problems and politics are less complicated and consequential *relative* to most countries in the world. Yes, even big problems can be small in comparison—the truth of the claim will not spare me criticism for the statement. Based on any metric of comparison— natural resources, affluence, absence of natural disasters, health and well being of the population—we are advantaged. Still, relative advantage and easier problems do not mitigate the potential for political screw-up.

Which we seem particularly adept at ignoring, or forgiving of our politicians, which is hard to forgive. We want easy, politicians assure us of easy, and we feel grievance when it is not easy. Expectations high, awareness low. The absence of awareness and gratitude is *the* formula for political complacency. Consider this. Canada and the United States were recently on the verge of being energy independent, but that being associated with Trump policies and antithetical to the climate obsession of Biden and Trudeau, we gave it away. Our World Economic Form inspired elites no longer sweat the consequences of their actions and yet anyone not rendered comatose by ideology overload cannot but be aware what followed in the wake of delusional energy politics:

1. Putin was emboldened to invade the Ukraine secure in the knowledge that petro dollars would fuel his war.
2. Putin was likely also emboldened by the thought that western countries willing to self-immolate with climate change obsession are unlikely to put up much resistance to his ambitions. (Fortunately, the NATO response was better than expected. Putin definitely miscalculated. Still, the west may wish to re-consider projecting woke weakness to known thugs in the future).
3. Germany's aspiration to lead the world as an exemplar of green energy solutions has been exposed as aspirational over practical as is the modern way. Which is too bad because Germany has done some good work on energy conservation. But the common problem repeats—that is, throwing out what is for the nirvana of what will be before what is has lost its practical value with the result that progressive possibility is undermined by the very elites who enact it. Even being Europe's industrial leader, Germany's nonsensical version of 'green' aspired to eliminate nuclear power and embrace wind, solar and other technologies that cannot deliver what the politicians promise. A little balance would help. (Reminds me of a saying by an anonymous psychiatrist: All psychological pain derives from an inability to reconcile the world as it is from what you would have it be). After severely limiting their energy options, Germany actually became 40% dependent on Russian gas. (A cursory reading of the 20th century world wars makes this decision rather inexplicable. Case in point, Russia suffered close to 30 million deaths during the 2nd world war; less well known is the prevalence of murder, rape and pillage of German civilians by invading Russian troops once the military tide turned. It seems Russia is not done yet.
4. Then a shocking and rare instance of common sense—with the Ukrainian-Russian war in full flight, on July 6th, the

EU issued a statement declaring natural gas and nuclear power—two hitherto sources of climate crisis—to be, drum roll please, *green* and Who knew?—not Germans I'm thinking, and yet, even with this pronouncement, Germany is increasing its use of coal to make up for its nonsensical nuclear aversion. (On road trips I repeatedly used to answer not yet when my kids asked are we there yet? Same answer for green technologies replacing fossil fuel and nuclear energy any time soon. Not yet is neither repudiation nor denial, but rather an honest answer with an implicit reminder of the concept of delayed gratification).

Even with the incredible opportunity this EU reversal afforded us, Canada missed its moment. During the 1st and 2nd world wars Canada punched above its weight, making a significant contribution towards achieving victory. In 1945, with a population of just 12 million and being distant from all theatres of conflict, Canada ended the war with the world's third largest navy. Think about that. Canada was third behind the United States and Britain, and ahead of Japan, Germany and Russia, which allowed us to secure safe passage for over 25,000 merchant ships during the war (with my dad among them). In 2022, in response to pleading for resources from the president of the Ukraine, and despite our unfulfilled NATO obligation to commit 2% of GDP to defence, Foreign Affairs Minister Joly set Zelenshyy straight by declaring, "we're good at convening and making sure that diplomacy is happening, and meanwhile convincing other countries to do more." Which of course is formula for doing less, or nothing at all. Note: after a 40 year career in the university sector, I can assure the reader that convening a meeting is doing and committing to nothing.

In 1956, Liberal Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson cobbled together a force of 6000 peace-keepers (then peace-keeping included the distinct possibility of using force to lessen the

likelihood of force being needed) from ten countries to deal with the Suez crisis. For his singular leadership, Pearson received a Noble Peace prize in 1957, an achievement which exists as *the* pivotal moment in Liberal party diplomatic history. Good thing, because present Liberal thinking is antithetical to what was achieved then and what is required to replicate success today. Sadly, while Germany has confronted its painful Nazi past, Canada increasingly seems to either be unaware or else is intent on correcting history based on progressive thinking that has elevated now to be the cat's meow. The Liberals have come to exemplify the aspirational age in which we live. Convening a meeting of Noble Peace Prize committee members today would not result in a Noble Peace prize for diplomatic achievement.

Lester B. created his moment, helped foster Canada's reputation for punching above its weight, in contrast to today's punch drunk diplomatic absence (unless punching out a much smaller, troubled conservative rival counts). Lester B. made it happen whereas Trudeau 2.0 confuses ideological utterances with tangible success, is uninterested in reconciling his legacy of pronouncements with his actual legacy of discord, dysfunction and disappointment.

So, after squandering a silver spoon political career on failed ideological preening—with even his last kick of the can enabled by the absent and equally ideological NDP 'conscience of the country' Jagmeet Singh—Trudeau is gifted Canada's moment on a silver platter. Could be silver is no longer in vogue among the Davos crowd.

The silver platter opportunity exists in the fact that solving a seemingly intractable problem would be relatively easy for Canada because of our endowment of natural gas. But abundance of energy cannot address absence of political will. Just days before talking to my politely persistent German acquaintance, German Chancellor Olaf Schulz arrived in Canada to pitch a historic transformative energy deal/opportunity that would:

1. solve Germany's problems into the foreseeable future
2. alleviate Russia's stranglehold/blackmail stance over Germany and Europe
3. help mitigate Germany's failed ideological uber green experiment of recent months
4. serve notice to other tyrannical oil producing countries that Canada can step up and provide competition for nations behaving badly
5. position Canada on the world stage as a country able to do more than convene meetings
6. make gazillions of dollars for which the Liberal government is particularly immune to thinking important

Trudeau said no. No pipeline, no offending Quebec, no hint of possibility of increasing oil and gas production (even if supplying Europe reduces emissions world wide in consideration of increased use of coal because he said no) during his tenuous tenure because that could compromise his legacy. Seriously, since nothing about this request and refusal makes sense, Trudeau's fanciful and deluded thoughts about future legacy makes perfect sense. And, as a consequence, Canada, the US, and Europe have to ramp up purchasing oil from the tyrants of the world. My digressions descend.

If you're an Albertan feeling that you're a second class citizen, you are not in the grip of conspiracy theory. So, natural gas from Alberta—for which there is enough to supply all of Europe for decades as the world empirically figures out other viable alternatives—is a hard, sanctimonious no. No consultation, no person on the street survey, no CBC criticism, no means no. Meanwhile China who has never cared about emissions, burns record amounts of coal and is probably responsible for close to 40% of all world emissions, and Germany who cares a lot about emissions now burns more coal than thought possible just one year ago. It may be that caring or not is not the currency of meaningful change.

If, as it often said, the definition of madness is to repeat

the same action and expect a different outcome, Canada is well on the path to madness. Not only are we likely to repeat mistakes that Germany made, but Trudeau seems bent on ratcheting up bad under pretence of virtue. If not successful why not double then triple efforts in the same direction, right?

To add injurious insult to preventable injury, Trudeau tried to sell the German Chancellor on hydrogen for which Canada has no particular capacity to supply, and in any event, it is not what is needed at this time to deal with the pressing problem Germany faces which has incalculable geopolitical repercussions. Putin must love our PM.

The most daring Canadian reaction to the PM's singular dictatorial madness? 101 energy leaders wrote a front page open letter to Justin Trudeau in the National Post on September 16th, just days after Pierre Poilievre won the leadership of the Conservative Party. Even with a credible Trudeau alternative finally in place, and even with the severity of the energy crisis in Europe and the shame of Canada's failure to address it well known, the energy leaders' open letter is remarkable for its tepid tone. Rather than a justifiable not-so-silent scream, it is a polite, pretty please plea for the time of day— as is the Canadian way. Which has its time and place, but not now. Now is the time and Canada is the place to galvanize resolve in a manner reminiscent of our barely remembered legacy of the 2nd world war. Poilievre is an honest, straight-talking and effective critic, even if a bit wooden in his delivery. Still, if he does not survive the Conservatives propensity to eat its leaders, we won't need another convention. Based on the introduction of her husband after his victory, Anaida Poilievre could instantly step in and take over. She was notable for her easy, highly articulate and authentic remarks. She talks to people in a way that has not been heard in politics for sometime. Everyone took note.

My redneck view, in solidarity with redneck Albertans, is actually closer to green than the German green plan gone bad that requires a severe uptick in coal usage to make up for the green elimination of nuclear power before it got declared green that would have eliminated having to eliminate it if only it was known the EU was going to declare red(neck) to be the new green. Sorry for the convoluted verbiage, but convoluted is the new escape-hatch from logic. Apology is coupled with a quote from Voltaire that is getting a fair bit of usage in these ideology times: Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.

A concession of redneckness does not negate wanting what all the gaga green adherents say they want. We want clean air, oceans and rivers (while climate alarmism gets far too much press, a realistic plan to clean up oceans by extracting garbage and plastics from the top ten polluting rivers of the world gets far too little. But the top ten rivers are not geographically situated in countries where it is polite to comment).

The Liberal party under Trudeau has spend more than \$100 billion on climate change since coming into office. This number is not an embarrassment but is a bragging point. To what end? Except for a brief covid blip, emissions are up, our 1.6% contribution to world emissions is holding steady, and no discernible or empirical reduction has been achieved or seems likely. There is no current path, no hint of possibility for achieving zero emissions by 2050 as the Liberals claim they will make happen, and most cynically, they know it. And this is the crux of the problem. Canadians are willing to do what needs to get done towards achieving a positive, tangible, needed end that actually needs to get done. But needed end has to be clearly defined, has to be actually needed, and can only be determined by gauging progress towards outcome achieved. Trudeau is a very modern personhood for whom outcomes are someone, anyone else's business. The emperor has no clothes.

Kitschy matching socks don't count.

One morning not many years ago I woke up surprised by the realization that I'm a conservative. Okay, not exactly shock and awe, but my political awakening was neither deliberate nor intentional. Before that time, if I thought about it at all, I would have characterized myself as in the political middle. But to use a crude northern metaphor, the piece of ice I was standing on broke off and the main ice drifted left. I had to react to drifting ice flow and could no longer tolerate the assault on common sense and human decency. And style. Yes, the former two are more important than the latter one, but a modern political stylistic signature is to talk in ideological sound bites, make unfounded promises and claim the need for radical change over conserving, well, anything. Even as we are lied to, it takes discernment and confidence to understand that many of our elected representatives are peddlers of a vapid, snake oil sense of style that needs disposing of on the scrap heap of civilization while civilization still exists and has meaning. Still confused? We have all experienced being in a group setting where someone makes a woke (faux style, no substance) comment that may be completely untrue or is at least presumptuous as hell, and as expected, group members either nod their heads in agreement or do not respond. Presumptive permission comes from that need for style based on a constructed identity, so kitschy and cool over integrity and truth. Which makes our non-response central to the problem. Maybe its time to speak up.

My conservative awakening was really a revelation of the obvious, and may become a common story. (Though achieving a revelation of obvious is no great achievement). Somnolent people in Canada, the US and the UK are being shaken from their complacency by daily reminders of the disconnection between politics and reality. For example, as I finished this opinion piece the stock market took a dramatic hit in response to worsening economic indicators that are easily attributable

to great reset aspirational decisions made in recent months. Most egregious, Biden and Trudeau have reacted to inflation by fueling the fires with more spending. For the Davos-inspired crowd inflation is not a problem because, in reset parlance, crisis is an opportunity for redistribution. Biden ignored the self-inflicted inflationary wound and declared the economy to be brimming with health, and Trudeau used the crisis to announce new redistributive spending. One does not need a Ph.D in Economics to see the obvious.

We live in the age of stupid. We allow politicians to make outrageous, illogical, even if stylistically appropriate, ideological statements without serious challenge during an election, once elected, as elected representative, as Minister, Prime Minister or President. Aided by a compliant media, elites have insulated themselves from both truth and the consequence of their lies, and we have let them.

Canadians have a reputation for being likeable, which has merit. But from our less than consequential, complacent perch, settling for being liked does not do justice to our consequential past nor is it worthy of our potential future. A truncated version of Machiavelli says you can be either liked or respected, so you have to choose. We are not taken seriously in a world becoming far more serious and poor leadership is the reason (think Trudeau singing Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen in a London bar before representing Canada at the Queen's funeral). Rather than opting to be a Rodney Dangerfield-like nation—who gets no respect—we ought to consider and act on how to meaningfully earn respect in the world. Embracing the calloused hands of not easy is the precursor mindset for a great leadership reset—choosing substance over style—which would be a great, consequential first step.

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Larry McCloskey has had eight books published, six young adult as well as two recent non-fiction books. *Lament for Spilt Porter* and *Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* (2018 & 2020 respectively) won national Word Guild awards. *Inarticulate* won best Canadian manuscript in 2020 and recently won a second Word Guild Award as a published work. He recently retired as Director of the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, Carleton University. Since then, he has written a satirical novel entitled *The University of Lost Causes*, and has qualified as a Psychotherapist. He lives in the heart of woke Ottawa, Canada with his three daughters, two dogs, and last, but far from least, one wife.

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