



Preface

C A - N A - D A 1967

I WAS RAISED in the southwestern corner of Alberta known as the Crowsnest Pass, a mountain pass through the most eastern part of the Canadian Rockies from which the venerable and notorious Crow's Nest Pass freight rate derived its name.¹ The Crow Rate was a important factor in the evolution of western alienation toward Ottawa and central Canada, which is a major theme of this book.

Five small towns clustered within a few kilometres comprise the Alberta side of the Pass: Coleman, Blairmore, Frank (home of the Frank Slide), Bellevue and Hillcrest. Coal mining began in the region about 120 years ago and was the major industry in all these towns. Notoriously cyclical, the work was hard, the accidents many, and the fights between labour and management frequent and hard fought.

Even though the total population of the Pass seldom rose above six thousand, within that small group of hard-working people almost every European nationality was represented: from the British Isles to Ukraine and from Scandinavia to Italy, Spain, and the Balkans. Even Syrians and Lebanese settled here. As I was growing up through the 1940s and the

1950s, many residents still spoke English with strong accents. Some—particularly immigrant housewives—spoke their native languages exclusively.

My parents were children of immigrants from Belgium and Italy. Both grandfathers were connected to the coal industry. As might be expected from that background, I came from a liberal household with politics a common topic at the dinner table. However, a radical I was not. In high school I was more interested in girls and music than politics, and during my time at the University of Alberta, I worked hard enough to pass, yet have fun. My parents, like many parents in the Pass, instilled in me the importance of education and making something of oneself. To those ends I decided to become a lawyer and earned my law degree in 1963.

During a trip to Europe after graduation, I read of John F. Kennedy's victory in Theodore White's *The Making of the President, 1960*, which convinced me and countless other young people in North America that politics was a honourable and exciting calling. Surveying the political terrain upon my return, I concluded that my choice was between the Liberals and the Progressive Conservatives. Lester Pearson had just defeated John Diefenbaker to form his first minority government and the Tories² seemed to be on their way out. With JFK as my idol, and my natural liberal proclivities, in December 1963 I bought a membership in the Liberal Party from the senior partner of the small firm where I was completing my articles of clerkship. I cut my political teeth working in the 1965 federal campaign for the Calgary North candidate and attended my first Alberta Liberal Party convention in Calgary in January 1966.³

The following year I was nominated as the Liberal candidate in the Alberta general election for the Calgary riding of Queens Park. Ernest Manning's Social Credit Party, which had been riding high for years, occupied fifty-seven seats in the legislature, while the opposition Liberals held the remaining three. Peter Lougheed's Tories had no seats at all yet, but were taking their first baby steps in his first election as leader. After running a vigorous campaign with plenty of campaign workers and enough money to buy signs and pamphlets, I was defeated by a low profile ex-school teacher, Lee Leavitt, the Social Credit incumbent. He scored



The author, his wife Pat, and Trudeau chat at a Liberal Party reception during the Calgary Stampede, July 1978. Trudeau signed the photo a year later. [Courtesy of the author]

almost 5,000 votes to my paltry 1,700. In between us was Lougheed's Tory candidate, who received about 3,800 votes. It was my first attempt at public office and my first taste of defeat.

The year 1967 showcased Canada's Centennial and Expo 67 in Montreal. Accompanied by the voices of dozens of kids, jazz trumpeter Bobby Gimby's catchy and upbeat theme song "CA-NA-DA" dominated the airwaves. It conjured up a young country full of promise, vigour, and good will. The enthusiasm was contagious; my wife, Pat, and I, along with thousands of western Canadians, journeyed east to see the show firsthand.

After a few days of long queues and inflated prices in Montreal, we departed for Quebec City to attend the Canadian Bar Association annual

convention. At the stately Chateau Frontenac hotel, a Calgary lawyer friend, Allan Beattie, and I listened to a panel of Quebec francophone and anglophone lawyers arguing about the two solitudes. That discussion was followed by a speech by the new federal minister of justice. Although Pierre Elliott Trudeau was well known in Quebec at the time, he was far from a household name in Alberta.

Picking up our simultaneous translation devices, Allan and I joined a crowd of perhaps four hundred lawyers in the hotel's ballroom. The nattily attired 48-year-old minister appeared youthful and lean, unlike many federal politicians who carried extra pounds and unhealthy pallor from too many late nights, scotches, and rubber-chicken dinners. He spoke English like an English-speaking Canadian—unlike any other French Canadians I had heard speak English—and he could effortlessly switch from English to French and back again. For English-speaking visitors, this was as annoying as it was impressive, because every time he spoke French, we required those awkward electronic devices to translate.

And he droned. Oh, how he droned—about constitutional reform, bilingualism, and a constitutional bill of rights guaranteeing, among other things, linguistic rights for English- and French-speaking Canadians across the country. For a couple of young lawyers not too long out of school, these topics didn't keep us at the edge of our seats; in Alberta those issues were not even on the radar screen in 1967. But Martin Sullivan, author of *Mandate '68: The Year of Pierre Elliott Trudeau*, called the speech, "one of the most lucid documents Trudeau had ever written, and it put the case concisely for making a Bill of Rights the cornerstone of Canadian constitutional change."⁴

Perhaps two-thirds through the speech, I nudged Allan and we exited the hall to wander along the escarpment toward the Citadelle and the view of the Plains of Abraham. I pondered what little I knew of Canada's history in this most historic of Canadian locations.

"I don't think he has what it takes to be the next prime minister, do you?" I asked my companion.

"Not a chance," Beattie replied.