

Steamed-off at customs

How would you feel if a Canadian customs officer refused you entry back into Canada? I'll bet you you would come to a patriotic boil.

I did. By George I was so mad I threatened to sing the second stanza of O Canada a cappella.

That made the situation worse.

Why the tempest? The officer asked me for proof of citizenship. I didn't have any. I gave him my O.H.I.P. card, drivers licence, a doctors appointment card. In desperation I showed him an old black and white photo of my wife in a bathing suit taken at Wasaga Beach. He refused to look at it.

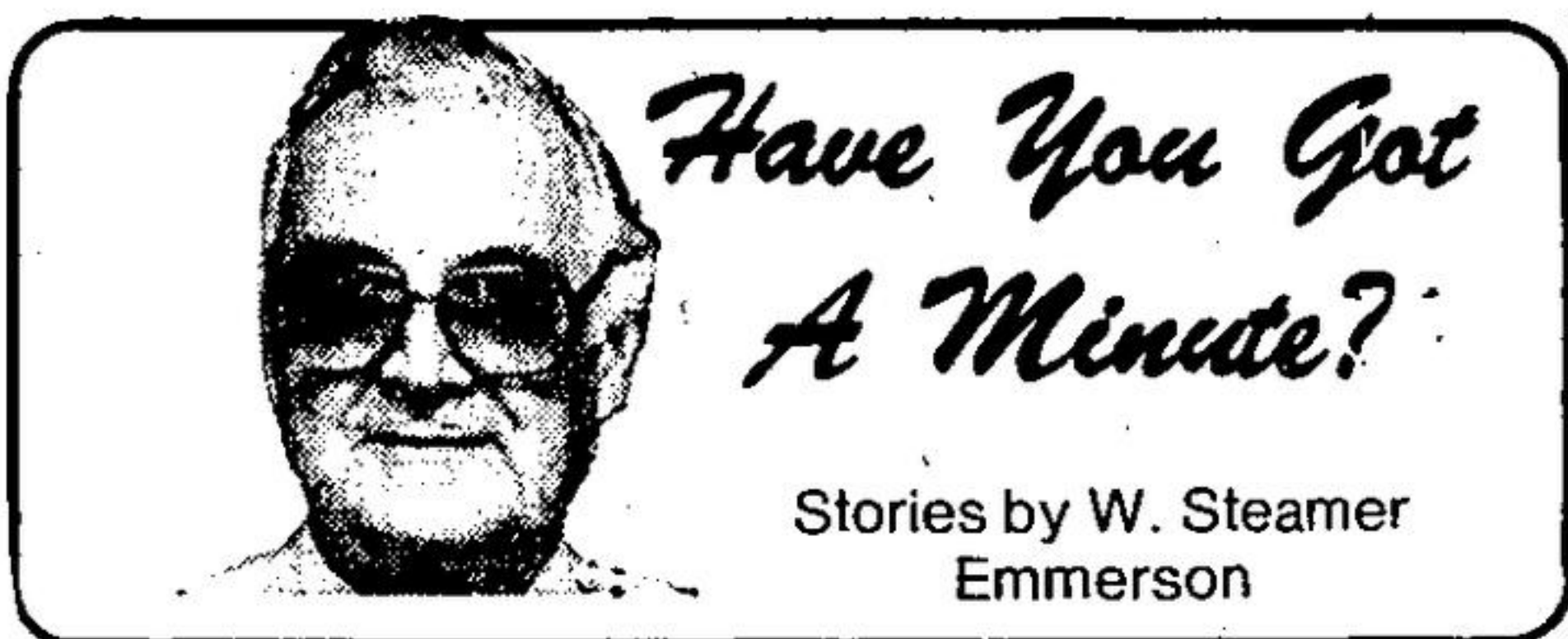
This guy was unmovable.

Graham Farnell tried to be helpful.

He meant well. To all and sundry who had gathered to listen, Graham announced that I was the Mayor of Georgetown. Coldly the customs guy replied "I don't care if he is the Holy Ghost, he can't produce proof of citizenship, and without it he's not getting in."

The Canadian door was slammed in my face. Get lost! Drop dead! I felt terrible. Graham looked as bad as I felt.

When the shock set in, all I could think of was the guy in the



Stories by W. Steamer Emerson

movie "The Man Without a Country" sailing endlessly around the world on a tramp steamer from Liverpool to Lisbon.

This passport-poor peon was eventually buried at sea. Committed to the deep as the service says. Good Lord, a little tilt of the board and splash you're gone. No proof of citizenship, no passport. Was this going to be me? Or worse, maybe I might wind up being another Box Car Willie riding the rods of North America the beautiful on the Wabash Cannonball.

The callous burial at sea reminded me of the old army joke.

A British Sgt. Major was watching an young officer with a Mel

Tillis impediment drilling a platoon of rookies.

In horror, the C.S.M. watched as they neared a precipice. The young subaltern was stuttering trying to say halt as the first file went over the cliff. The Sgt. Major shouted at the one pip wonder and caustically remarked "say something Sir, even if it's only goodbye."

Graham was struggling to say goodbye as he prepared to leave me to my fate. The one consolation I had was Graham was no Mel Tillis.

Looking back, if Joe Clark and Barbara McDougall had been in Ottawa, I would have had only to relax. They would have fast-tracked me in less than 28 days. After all, I was Canadian and a veteran.

How did Graham and I overcome this sticky situation? It was my keen eye. On the custom guy's lapel was a little red square pin. To an old soldier it told me he was a 1st Canadian Div. man. P.P.C.L.I. or 48th Highlanders perhaps.

"I see you're 1st Div.," I said in my best military voice. "I was 4th Div." There wasn't any doubt he knew I had to be a Canadian to know that.

That broke the ice, he warmed up a bit. He insisted I pay the duty on a model aeroplane I had bought my son.

Now you can't imagine how relieved I felt when I knew he was going to let me in.

When I cross the border now, I carry all necessary documents, and just to be safe I pin on my little green square 4th Div. button.

I think it was my recognizing the red lapel button that did the trick but on second thought maybe he thought I was the Holy Ghost.

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Health card hotline

The Ministry of Health has set up a 1-800 phone number to answer questions about the new Health Card that has replaced the OHIP number. Health Minister Frances Lankin has announced.

For information on the Health Card, call 1-800-268-1154 between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. Monday to Friday. Questions about lost cards, new cards, turning 65, and travelling and obtaining treatment outside Ontario can also be answered.

The information lines provide service in English, French and

seven additional languages.

As of July 1, patients need the new card to show eligibility for Ontario health care benefits, and providers can no longer bill for services under the old OHIP number. This deadline ended a six-month transition period that allowed providers and residents time to switch over to the new Health Cards.

More than 98 per cent (9.7 million) of eligible Ontarians now have their cards and about another 95,000 applicants have been approved and will be getting their cards shortly.

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