

Reasons Why
for Laszlo Gefin, '56er

"He's some kinda Universal Welfare Tommy Douglasite!"

Because in the early Seventies National Geographic called Saskatchewan the only communist province in North America

Because Saskatchewan is not Alberta, settled by a dispossessed deported peasantry, not American ranchers

Because Sask Student Loans helped me study philosophy and poetry at home and whose flexibility kept me from
defaulting so I could pay them back no problem

Because I had and have to pay for my glasses and dentist

Because in the Great Depression just a boy Tommy Douglas broke his arm—The doctor set it for free

Because in the Dirty Thirties everybody was literally dirt poor plagued by drought and locusts

Because hobos went door to door asking for water, onion, potato, and carrot to make themselves some Nail Soup

Because their Volkswagen was the Bennett Buggy

Because at the Regina Riot the police gunned down the workless on their cross-country way to complain at the capital

Because of old Ukrainian collective farmers way out in the country

Because my friends drove red Ladas

Because my Uncle's antique cars are in Who Has Seen the Wind? we saw at its premiere—he took us to a threshing bee
where old cars were raced to see which was slowest

Because I prefer Russian vodka over all

Because my grandmother melted brown sugar and caraway into moonshine and we toasted each other "God bless you!"
in Hungarian

Because my dad got beat up at school not because he didn't speak English but because he didn't speak Ukrainian

Because the only Hungarian I learned was curses

Because my Great Uncle Peter and Aunt Julia are DPs from Bukovina

Because he rode the rails walked the dusty grid roads and slept on hay in barns

Because Tommy Douglas told a parable about Country Mice electing Fat Cats

Because they told me You know the Truth! You should go into politics!

Because the British Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts are modelled after the Saskatchewan Arts
Board

Because over two dozen of Canada's social programs originate in Saskatchewan

Because we have a China Town with street signs in Chinese in Regina (but no signs in Cree for half the population)

Because fibre optics was invented there a necessary condition for the Global Village

Because the first television broadcast was made from Saskatoon

Because of Saskatoon Berries and Saskatoon pie, syrup, jam, chocolates, and spirits

Because I sat on a bench in Victoria Park one spring Saturday morning reading Kiekegaard and Pound's ABC of Reading
and Selected Poems understanding nothing

Because lying out on the sunny lawn fifteen I read "Not how the world is is the mystical but that it is" and understood

Because John Newlove the Regina Public Library's writer-in-residence gave me his Fatman and reading it in the shade
on the white picnic table on the patio in our backyard thought "I can do that!" and wrote my first three poems

Because John Cage conducted a workshop at Emma Lake July 1965

Because Saskatchewan is the bed of a shallow prehistoric sea

Because weather systems of bison thundered over the land turned only by prairie dog villages of millions

Because my brother the doctor is walling his house in the capital with stones picked from farmers' fields

Because I grew up on Coldwell Road named after a signee of the Regina Manifesto

Because the Regina Manifesto calls for the downfall of capitalism

Because of 'T the anarchist with guns in his walls, washing machine cleaned with Spic 'n Span between each load, locked
up every Royal Visit

Because another signee was named Wordsworth

Because at the Summer School of the Arts on Echo Lake in an old sanitarium we were taught to write as we talk in our
idiom as we phrase it

Because my first love's name's etymology is Dionysius' Mark and I asked her out once for every line in a sonnet

Because Modern poetry starts when the winter night sky over the prairies makes plain no single theory can encompass
them

Because the tornado's vortex is an ideogram for inspiration

Because the province's borders are absolutely arbitrarily geometrical

Because verse's root is Latin for a farmer's ploughing

Because of winters 8 months long and in their middle rising in the dark and coming home in the dark for six weeks

down to -70 with the windchill and snow banks white dunes up to the eaves
 Because on cold black January dawns, hours reading Hegel over a mug of coffee, cream and sugar, and a sticky steaming
 cinnamon bun, in a violet pink and gold yellow aurora the sun rose
 Because Tommy Douglas' rhetoric flowed inspired by unconscious Liberation Theology Christianity and peasant poverty
 Because my grandmother had her poppies rooted up by the RCMP
 Because you didn't go to the Indian parts of town
 Because everyone laughs when I say "I'm from Regina"
 Because everyone's been through Regina
 Because of the natural genius of friends who renovated their home and own furniture and keep two dogs, four cats, fish,
 and birds, and a baby boy and a garden lusher than two square metres of jungle
 Because my brother-in-law built his own furniture and grand country house from a hole in the ground up with the
 relatives beside a Stone Age Saskatoon Berry grove
 Because the Saskatoon is the Kiwi of the 21st Century
 Because I was adopted and can invent my blood-parents and their lives
 Because the Conservatives thought you could run a province like a used-car lot and now most are jailed for their clumsy
 corruption
 Because I left with hundreds of thousands of others needing what home could not supply
 Because my grandfather fought at Ypres first gas attack, returned and was wounded three more times and enlisted in the
 Second War, dead before I was born
 Because my parents sat on the steps watching the skies waiting during the Cuban Missile Crisis
 Because my father had to choose between staying on the farm or getting a job and never became an engineer
 Because the Saskatchewan Arts Board paid for my four years' studies in Montreal and my first trip to Europe which
 inspired my Budapest Suites and there I met my dead brother, drank poppy tea, and played surrealist parlour
 games all night
 Because everybody called me the Ambassador from Saskatchewan
 Because growing hemp, food and cash crops, we could provide our own food, shelter, housing, clothing, and paper—
 We should fill all the uranium mines in the north with concrete (two-thirds of the world's uranium!)—Make
 greenhouses to grow whatever we can't above out of all the abandoned potash mines (two thirds of the world's
 potash!)—The rivers, the sun, and the wind might light our nights and heat our winterhomes—If a million
 people can't get their acts together to supply their basic needs, what're they doing?
 Because rocking chair anarchist Les said smoking a cone of home grown "Better old folks homes in Estevan than
 swimming pools in Bogota!"
 Because when I visited the Louvre with my lousy French I felt like I'd been raised in a hole in the mud under a plastic
 garbage bag flapping in the wind
 Because I was born not in a half savage country but an utterly barbaric one
 Because the Lab Building at the U of R is partly a maze for testing LSD subjects
 Because one psych prof would join the hands of his class in a circle and try to levitate the Ad Hum Bldg
 Because I think I remember the last Mass said in Latin at our church when I was still a babe in arms, the smell of incense
 Because 'Saskatchewan' can translate Heraclitus on time into Cree

(Montreal March 1998)