

Silent Night

It is a moving recollection for me to remember a Midnight Mass liturgy service at St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in Yellowknife one Christmas Eve in the 1980's. My family and I had moved to Canada's Northwest Territories several years before that, having left behind the familiarities and comforts of a lifetime of associations with the customs and culture of the Canadian Ukrainian experience, and were doing our best to fit in to the much more diverse and multi-cultured society that Yellowknife presented.

The liturgy service came to a close that evening with the singing of "Silent Night", a most appropriate carol for that Christmas Eve celebration. The carol was beautifully rendered by the choir, with the vocal support of all present, and lent a notable peace and serenity to the atmosphere of the church, filled to standing-room capacity by Yellowknifers, and their guests, of diverse ethnic, linguistic and cultural antecedents.

As the English lyrics of the carol came to close, in the few moments of respectful silence that usually follow a moving performance, there arose the sound of voices to repeat the carol, but now, beautifully, in French. Everyone stayed, and those who could joined in the singing. When the French version ended, another group of voices began singing its Dogrib lyrics. This, in turn, was followed by groups repeating the carol in Tagalog, Ukrainian, German, Italian, Croatian, Hungarian and many others --- as many as were present and willing to offer their voices.

This spontaneous sharing of the carol extended the service by much more than a little, but no one left, and I don't believe anyone there wanted this beautiful sharing to end. It did, of course, but not without leaving its mark and its memories on many who were present to witness it.

For me, it has been an inspiration to remember that the very best thing I can do with the beautiful things my life gives me is to share them with all those around me.

You will find occasionally in my writings that I have attempted to translate into Ukrainian songs and poetry written in English, and vice versa. Although the idiom is often very difficult to capture in another language, this is my way of trying to share my --- and others' --- understanding of its beauties, with the utmost respect for the original language and its intent.