

FROM AWAY

by Rita Sylvia Warner

*Dedicated to Sadie and Henry at
Storyteller's Gallery*

Rita left here and moved to Ottawa in 1995.

We were both in our 40s.

She died three years ago.

She opened my eyes to the world and I want Cape

Bretoners to know the joy it brought me.



We have all been lonely in a crowd. Today, lets open our

doors, put the porch light on and welcome the people

from away. Extend a hundred thousand welcomes.

The End

Oh, what holds her? The clay, the spruce, the cold
saltwater

The fiddles court her, there's rosin in her veins

With feet a-tappin the Causeway is calling

Her children leaving she turns home again

Chorus:

So if you've been away and can't find your tomorrow

If your heart is lonely and you long for a friend

Trust in the wind for to guide you to the causeway

Set your sails and head back home, home again

Repeat the first chorus:

Em=x22xxx

Asus2=xx2xx

Cmaj7=x32xxx

Asus2/6=2xx2xx

B7=x212x2

G=32xxx2

D=xxx232

Am=xx221x

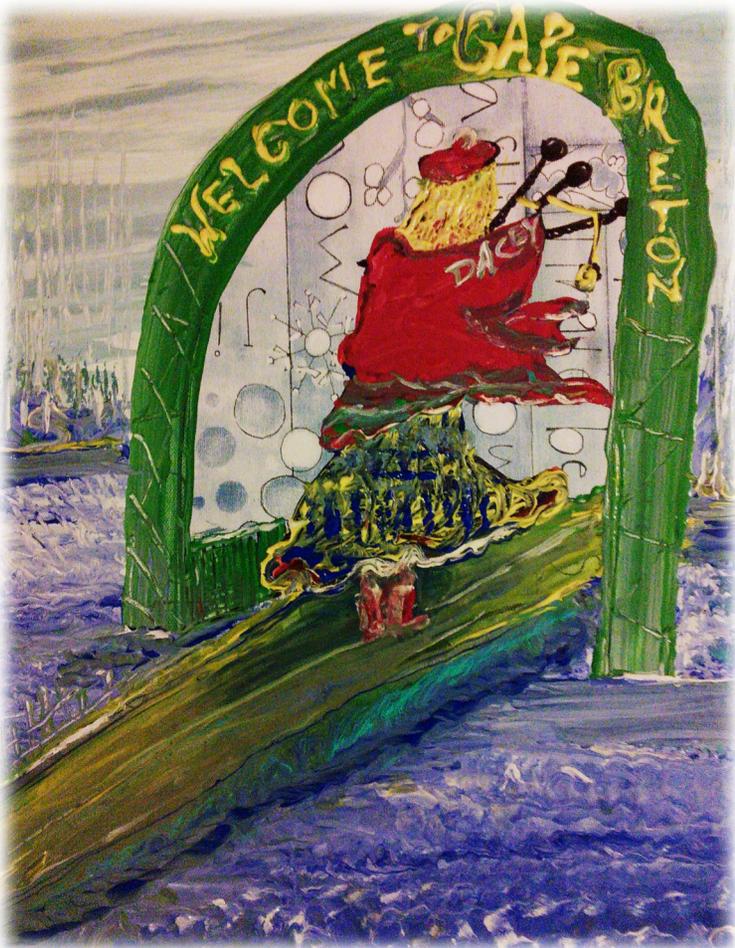
Csus2=0xx553

C=332x1x

D7sus2/F=1xx21x

Through the blowing snow the jolly fellow at the toll booth yelled, "An early snow storm! Better get off the road before dark...no plows out tonight."

"Welcome to Cape Breton" the frozen sign read.



25 years if I didn't have her because she was my soul mate. We were sisters by choice. She was from far away, but she was the closest friend I ever had.



But, our conversation often steered to her still wondering if she would ever belong.

“How many years will the label, the people from away follow us?” she wondered.

“What about my son? He was born here. Will he be Nick West from away? How many years?”

Rita and I spent many an evening by the woodstove, trying to think of ways this feeling could change or wonder why it was so ingrained in Cape Breton.

It's hard to understand the old ways of thinking. Families, inter-marriages, being on the poge, isolation, exclusion, religion and other aspects of culture are so closely guarded. Cape Breton Island was unconnected to the world for so many years until the causeway was built. “Watching you like a new sheep” is an old saying here. Wild hills, gloomy forests, cold winters and isolation create a protective stance that goes way back for centuries. And, newcomers are unknown to the flock.

I was called Rita-1 and she was called Rita-2. We did everything together. My marriage would not have lasted

She was afraid. She was used to city life. What a shock! As they crossed the Canso Causeway their old green van shuddered. They considered heeding the toll man's warning. But, as they drove on the clay, spruce and cold salt water welcomed them. A few lights shone from the windows of houses sparsely dotting the landscape of stunted trees.



She was a tiny Polish-Jewish immigrant woman. He was a rich boy from Chicago. Her captivating smile and heart of gold arrived in that snow storm with her partner Thomas on October 1, 1970. They took up residence at Angus-the-Piper's old, abandoned house. It was right next door to our farmhouse on the River Denys Mountain Road.

She was 23-years-old, and Thomas was 26, both just out of university. There were a few others like them who moved into old houses on Cape Breton Island. They were back-to-the-landers, or what we called the rubber boot gang.

The winter wind tore at her coat as she climbed the hill to our house for her first visit. It was election night when I met them. I was 19-years-old and excited to be voting for the first time. I was eager to vote for Pierre Elliot Trudeau that year, even though my father was a Tory and said he wouldn't drive me to the poll.

Her name was Rita, just like mine. She asked me if I had always lived here. I found it so strange. Everyone I knew had always lived here. My dreams were to get away. I'd hear the whistle of the Judique Flyer blow every morning at 10 am and I wanted to get on that train and go as far away as I could.

"Yes," I told her.

"How lucky you are!" she cried.

Gee, I was lucky?

She became my earth angel. She showed me how to catch the sun.

Oh, such fun learning how to build a pit greenhouse, how to weave and how to make apple butter from their old orchard. She baked Polish and Jewish food. I had never heard of a bagel before! Or borscht, cabbage rolls or endives. Rita, my new neighbour, was my Internet search engine before the age of computers. I was so lucky the people from away moved next door to share their richness of ideas.

We often visited in each others' homes. They sat at the kitchen table for tea and cherry cheesecake. Rita loved it so much that was all she wanted to eat! We laughed, cried and we also grew up together as we raised our own children.

They stayed for 25 years and eventually got jobs with the bookmobile and Judique School Library. But, our conversation often steered to her still wondering if she would ever belong.