

MS. STEIN: Steve Nelson went to a different part of the world. He went to Canada, and will tell us about his trip there.

MR. NELSON: Good afternoon. Ellen quoted John Dewey in her remarks that every workshop should have a certain disorder, and I am he. Being sent to represent NAPSG at Canada was my first experience being a diplomatic envoy anywhere in the world, and I'm not sure that I did it well. This happened in October. I'm not sure that I remember much, and I found the only record of it on my iPhone, so you're going to have to excuse me for reading the text, assuming that I can, in fact, find the text. This could rather quickly turn into one of the more humiliating experiences I have had in a long time. Is it even possible that I lost the whole thing? Can you be patient? Thank you. It's downloading. It was on my screen just moments ago. It is here again.

My wife Wendy and I had the considerable pleasure of representing NAPSG at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Independent Schools October 22nd through 25th. While a full summary of the conference proceeding would be excessive, several observations may be mildly interesting. Given my proclivities, my primary ambition was to avoid embarrassing NAPSG or the United States. My efforts were not entirely successful, as I incurred the wrath of at least one board chair by thanking the entire country of Canada for providing a buffer zone between New York and Sarah Palin. She may have been the only conservative in the room, but by luck, she sat next to me at dinner. Other than that, I mostly behaved.

The conference includes heads and board chairs with combined and separate agendas. Several head sessions focused on a set of questions that had been elicited prior to the conference. We discussed these issues table by table, convening as a whole to report back after the session. Not surprisingly, the issues were nearly identical to those we encounter on a daily basis. My table chatted about governance issues, board-head relations, evil parents, committees on trustees, growth trustees, et cetera. We then spent some time regaling one another with ugly examples of the dangers of cyberspace and the importance of good wine in the administrator's diet.

Most organizationally interesting was a discussion about a merger between the Canadian Association of Independent Schools and the Canadian Educational Standards Institute. These discussions led to a vote to dissolve each organization and then make a new one, merging them together. This will coordinate their professional development and their accrediting function, which they did separately before.

Conference presentations included a particularly noxious session featuring a renowned comedian television reporter who seems to believe that independent schools exist to produce young capitalists who will lead Canada into a dominant motion in the global economy by branding all manner of consumer goods and exploiting world markets for nationalistic gain. I suppose you might infer that this approach to education is not my cup of tea. This presentation also included a bit of United States bashing, which I admitted we richly deserved.

During the evening dinner, I attempted to soothe anti-American sentiments by reporting accurately that my wife is a Canadian citizen and by drinking a great deal of Molson Canadian. This, as you may have already guessed, preceded my utterly inappropriate snipe at Sarah Palin.

A far less irritating session was presented by Canadian actor R.H. Thompson. Thompson is the primary architect of a brilliantly conceived tribute to Canadian soldiers lost in World War I. This massive technological undertaking resulted in a one-by-one projection of the names of these fallen soldiers in public places across Europe and Canada. A brief narrative could not do justice to this project. His presentation was poignant, powerful, and elicited tears from anyone in the room who had a heart. The woman who liked Sarah Palin didn't even moisten up. I cried, but I'm the head of a progressive school, so what would you expect? The project, quite seriously, is titled "Vigil, 1914-1918," and it really does merit your attention. Google it. Quite amazing.

And then my wife and I came home. It was a lovely trip. Respectfully submitted, your designated envoy to Canada.