

## EDITORIAL

LATELY, I HAVE BEEN THINKING about the prospect of Gross National Happiness in far-away Bhutan. This may have to do with the fact that this is the season of slush and snot in much of Canada: perhaps my frustration with the uglier aspects of mid-winter explains my recent interest in surfing stories about Gross National Happiness (GNH), the whimsical but intriguing paradigm and policies with which Bhutan is pursuing economic growth and safeguarding its cultural integrity. Simply put, my unhappiness in the face of Canadian Seasonal Grossness has me wondering about the possibilities inherent in Bhutanese Gross National Happiness.

Unlike most other nations, which use the GDP, Gross Domestic Product, to measure their economic health, Bhutan has pursued GNH, a development paradigm that measures both material and non-material indicators of well-being. GNH is built on four pillars: sustainable and equitable economic development; conservation of the environment; good governance; and, last but not least, the preservation and promotion of culture. And so, as part of the first official Bhutanese Happiness Survey in 2010, census workers asked question such as, “Do you have a toilet?” and “Do you know what the constitution is?” But they also asked, “Do you know any local folktales?” and “Do you know how to weave, paint, carve?”

Because no other nation has used Bhutan’s GNH formula, it is difficult to measure Bhutanese happiness against, say, Canadian happiness. Put differently, having recently learned that Bhutan scored 0.743 on the Real GNH Index, I have learned relatively little. And yet, I am genuinely inspired by the idea of a people who understand cultural preservation and promotion as essential for their economic prosperity, social stability, and personal well-being. Despite the many economic, social, and political challenges faced by the Bhutanese, the value that their government places on culture looks downright progressive when compared to the ongoing attack that the Canadian federal government is waging on our key cultural institutions and programs: by way of example, in the last five years, the rebranded Canadian Museum of History has had its office of research and collections

abolished; virtually all private acquisitions have ceased at Library and Archives Canada, which has laid off 20 per cent of its staff; and Parks Canada has eliminated 600 positions, including 80 per cent of its archaeologists and conservators. These are not measures of national happiness.

And so, in the interests of celebrating our culture and fostering our happiness during this time of deep cuts, dark days and damp wool, I invite you to share the poems and stories collected here: after all, whether or not their pleasure can be measured, Matt Schumacher's comparison of a tortoise to a sturdy toddler in "Dear Sulcata Tortoise" is delightful; Erich Mulhall's "Between Brothers" is deliciously creepy; and, as an evocation of unexpected pleasures, Joanne Epp's celebration of the fleeting vision of an old upright piano in a red pickup truck is as good an index of happiness as I know. Enjoy!

CD