

COLOUR BLIND - RICHARD KARL VASEY

It had been a heady few weeks since arriving in North America on an exchange program. Richard had announced to workmates that he was leaving for twelve months ... swapping jobs, houses, and cars. One wag piped up, 'Are you swapping wives as well!' Agnes was not impressed as she had just taken up a new work contract herself and thought the comment sexist in the extreme.

During the exhaustive negotiations that followed, it was decided that an exchange of clothing would be appropriate, considering the extreme climatic contrasts between the countries involved. The use of snowshoes for surfboards, heavy gauged jackets for light windcheaters, wellies or thongs and Sherpa packs for day packs etc...etc.

A fun time was had wading through the mounds of sports equipment and clothing left in the under floor heated double garage. The amazing thing was how close in size were the items left. Medium to large boots, shoes and jackets for Richard and small to small/medium for Agnes. Only one feature made Richard uneasy about the whole process; all his clothing comprised of extreme colours and predominately the colour pink was in evidence. Meanwhile Agnes had wonderful shades of green, brown and grey! Agnes berated Richard saying, 'Well aren't you the delicate flower ... manhood threatened by a colour!'

The days went by in a glow that only overseas experience can provide. New roads to travel, new places to see and countryside to explore. Each day they would regale their experiences to the wonder of the locals and new made friends. In hindsight there were frequent side glances at our 'borrowed' clothing with one acquaintance asking, 'Did you bring your winter gear from home?' Richard said, 'Yes, our exchange home!' This was followed by collective mirth.

All too soon the happy couple were winging their way home to be met at the airport by their son James. A joyful interaction followed as Richard and Agnes described their experiences living figuratively and actually in someone else's shoes! Outlining the unusual clothing colour scheme that their exchanges adopted, James butted in and said, 'You do realise dad that Ava was your height and Noah was much smaller!'

Many hours followed as each in their turn, Richard and Agnes were mortified by memories of cross dressing in a small, conservative and God-fearing American town.