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## QUEBEC

by Larry Freeman

First flakes of snow fluttered in the chill, evening air. Senses were scurrying, alert with anticipation. Trees, denuded of autumn colors, stood stoic, in dark patterns along the ski hills of Quebec's Laurentian Mountains. The soft glow of metropolitan Montreal bloomed in the distance. A careful hand adjusted Palm Beach's radio to the evening forecast, then thoughtfully raised the heater switch another notch. We contemplated the changing weather. It was November. Winter's first storm was brewing.

We were two snow birds heading south. But we would not travel far this night. Somehow, during the morning search for groceries and propane, and an afternoon at a busy tire shop to replace worn-out tires, the measured light of a short November day had disappeared. Now, the dark suburban street was rapidly turning white. When Palm Beach wavered at a stop sign with front wheels spinning on the gentle hump of a railroad crossing, we decided to exit right, and park for the night at a well lit shopping center.

Palm Beach inched to a stop, occupying two parallel parking slots next to the orange lights of a nearly empty Chinese restaurant. Within the hour, we were sitting, toasty warm, basking in the radiant heat of a catalytic wall heater. Evening television depicted fender benders piling up on the auto route. A reporter warned against the hazards of winter driving. While Palm Beach digested an afternoon snack of 10W-30, we had ordered take-out. Now aromas of fried rice, lobster baked in shrimp sauce, egg rolls, green tea, and plum wine filled the air. Surely, the fortune cookies would attest to the wisdom of our decision not to travel.

Three months earlier, the warm winds of August had been streaming through Palm Beach's windows. We were rolling north along Interstate 89 through the Adirondack Mountains on one of America's most scenic highways. Canadian Customs and Immigration lay dead ahead. After answering "yes" to being U.S. citizens, and "no" to carrying guns, excessive booze, extra cigarettes, or too many gifts,

our welcome to Canada was warm and rapid. Had identification been required, birth certificates or passports would have solved the problem. As we accelerated across the invisible line that designates a shift of law and politics from Washington, D.C., to Ottawa, Ontario, the Interstate became Auto Route 15, and the road signs changed to French.

Before us was the Province of Quebec. Twice the size of Texas, it flows westward from the Atlantic Ocean along 600 miles of the St. Lawrence River, then north toward Hudson Bay. From the border, the drive to multicultural Montreal was just 40 minutes and 60 kilometers (37 miles). As we breezed through the city on four lanes of highway, sounds of festival filled the air. The local calendar was well-penciled with an endless series of year-round activities including sports, festivals and cultural attractions, such as the International Jazz Concert, The World Film Festival, The Comedy Shop Competition and Molson's Formula 1 Grand Prix of Canada. Nighttime explosions of colors are spectacular during July's international fireworks competition.

Four centuries of blossoming French culture are displayed in more than thirty museums including the magnificent Montreal Museum of Archaeology and History which rises from the very site of the city's founding. An afternoon spent wandering the wharves and cobblestone streets of the old port area followed by an evening's dining engagement at one of Montreal's more than 5,000 ethnic restaurants is a must. New on the scene is a casino constructed with palatial grandeur. Here, baccarat, roulette and traditional gambling add to the city's international flavor.

Soon, we would join the fun, but today, a picture-book lake awaited our arrival. Nestled between two irresistible ski towns in the foothills of the Laurentians, we would swim, boat and fish just a short drive from Montreal's delights. The moss-trimmed boulders of Lake Echo would be the perfect spot to ad lib the time and plan a day's

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