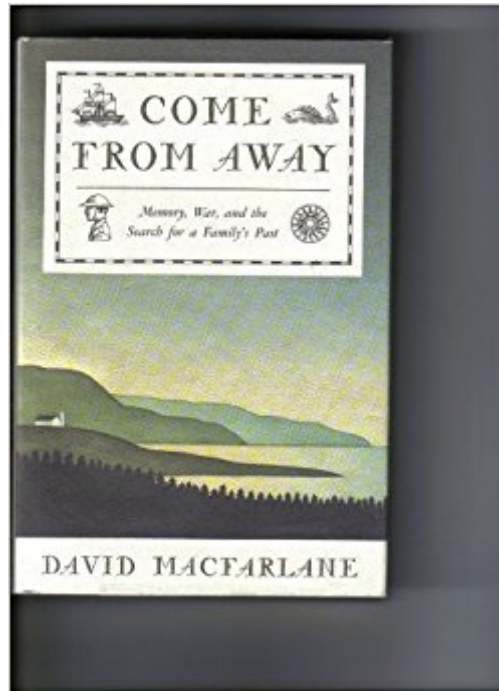




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Come From Away



Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The author grew up in Hamilton, Ontario, a far cry from Grand Falls, Newfoundland, where his maternal great-grandparents, the Josiah Goodyears, raised their seven children. In this chronicle of his grandparents' generation, Macfarlane deftly intertwines personal memory, family lore and vivid images of WW I battles where three of the Goodyear brothers perished. His grandfather, partner with two surviving brothers in the construction business, built roads, hauled freight, operated general stores and strongly opposed confederation with Canada. In the end, the brothers went bankrupt. Macfarlane portrays the exploitation of Newfoundland by outsiders and its decline from prosperous colony to desperately poor province in this engaging story of people and events. Photos. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.

As a boy, Macfarlane listened to his relatives spin tall tales and was convinced that Newfoundland "contained all the best stories in the world." As he traces the fortunes of his family through frozen winters, bouts with tuberculosis, and the losses of World War I, we glimpse a history of the entire island--its confederation with Canada, the failing fishing industry, unemployment that is twice the national average, cockeyed dreams of finding Captain Kidd's treasure, the railways and indoor cucumber farms that promised to make everyone rich. In a curious, evocative blend of autobiography, history, and fiction, Macfarlane puts Newfoundland on the map and persuades us that this is a place where the poorest of characters has something rich to say. Highly recommended for public libraries and academic collections.- Rita Ciresi, Pennsylvania State Univ., University

David Macfarlane is a Canadian, who has written at least one novel ("Summer Gone", which I read some years ago and, as I recall, was worth reading though oddly flawed). He was raised in Hamilton, Ontario, but his mother hailed from Newfoundland, and *COME FROM AWAY* is his somewhat rambling account of his mother's family, the Goodyears, and the island of Newfoundland. For much of its history Newfoundland has been impoverished and fiercely independent. (The title of the book is what Newfoundlanders call those like the author who are not native to the island.) It was an English colony until 1949, when, following a narrow referendum, it joined Canada as that nation's last province. During most of their three centuries as English subjects, the relatively few Newfoundlanders depended primarily on the sea for their subsistence-level livelihood. But with capital investment and the opening of the interior, the island was poised for an economic boom of sorts just before WWI. To do its part for the motherland and freedom and democracy, Newfoundland raised and financed its own regiment. It sent almost 5500 of its sons overseas, and two-thirds were killed or wounded (the Newfoundland regiment had the misfortune of being fodder at Gallipoli, the Battle of the Somme, and Passchendaele); that was the highest percentage of casualties suffered by an overseas contingent of Britain's imperial forces. David Macfarlane's maternal grandfather, Josiah Goodyear, was one of six brothers, five of whom served in Europe during WWI, and three of whom were killed (while the other two were seriously wounded). Thus, WWI hung as a pall over the Goodyear family just as it did over the entire island, and it dominates the last half of this family history. Much of the rest of the book is taken up with other aspects of island life -- such as tuberculosis and sealing -- that made it so arduous and punishing and lethal. David Macfarlane tells his story with obvious love and affection and in a relatively distinctive style. One of the other reviewers complains about Macfarlane's habit of engaging in long "looping" stories -- a fair criticism, although it didn't overly bother me. Along the way, Macfarlane manages a few trenchant remarks, the best being the following concerning General Sir Douglas Haig, who presided over the bloody maw of British military tactics: On the eve of the Somme offensive of July 1, 1916, Haig wrote his wife, "I feel that every step in my plan has been taken with the Divine help." Macfarlane then interjects: "Godlessness had found a prophet. Before supper on July 1, 1916, twenty thousand British soldiers were dead. The German line had scarcely budged." *COME FROM AWAY* is a decent book, but its appeal and audience are rather limited. I do not seriously recommend it except to those interested in Newfoundland or a somewhat anecdotal account of the human costs of WWI tactical insanity, or, perhaps, to students of the genre

of memoirs.

It's worth the price of the whole book to read the story of the greedy family that hosted the crusty old dying pirate in hopes that he would repay their courtesy by revealing the location of the buried treasure. He acted like a real bastard the whole time, but they put up with him in spite of it all. One day when the whole family was away except for the smallest child -- "the greediest," Macfarlane says -- some croaks from upstairs showed that the pirate's last minutes were nigh. She rushed upstairs, full of unctuous concern, to collect her secret. You'll have to spend a penny and \$4 shipping to find out what happened, but it's worth it. Lots of other great family stories in this disjointed but fascinating book.

The Goodyear family, living in Newfoundland, experienced few events that, directly or indirectly, did not end with someone's death in *Come From Away*. Bleak, gray conditions were part of the climate of Newfoundland as well as storms and icy waters. To the struggling economy, Hedley Goodyear said, "With managers such as these, who needs natural disasters?" Desolate living conditions were especially negative during the wave of tuberculosis, and people with this condition did not have a happy ending. The Newfoundlanders who enlisted in World War I learned the stages it took for a body to rot: white, yellow, green, purple, and black. Some of the survivors knew just how a person died when they were shot: their eyes rolled back, their breath was cut off, and the skull burst to pieces. At the time of the battle, all they could rely on was luck, so they stayed clear of the number three. David Macfarlane, author, listed thirty-one different things that came in threes, which is enough to make any number evil. Not much was said about the life of the main character, but more about how he viewed the lives of others. One, his great-aunt Kate, lived to be old and modest for her doings. After the loss of her three brothers in the war, she would have flashbacks and would interrupt herself to dab her eyes with a Kleenex. Both the young and old Aunt Kate had fears; "she was terrified of the most sway-backed, overweight, docile pony." The Canadians viewed those "Newfies" as Yankees view Rednecks. They've got the slurred accent, the yellow teeth, and the offbeat sense of humor. Overall, I did not enjoy this book as much as I have others. It concentrated too much on listing facts (and repeating them) and not enough on the plot of the story. If that's your kind of book, then I recommend it. If you're a fan of fiction, follow my lead and stick to the non-informative sources.

While I found parts of this book very interesting -- the history of Newfoundland and how it related to

the Goodyear family -- the author's writing style was irritating and hard to follow. The author said that his family told stories in "great, looping circles," and that is what he has done here. I was frustrated with this book because the author would go off on tangents and would not stick to the narrative, making it difficult to follow and to find out what happened to the characters in his family. I did learn a great deal about Newfoundland and how it was affected by the First World War, and for that alone, it is worth reading.

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