

POLITICS AS USUAL: Birthright?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

We have just watched the Olympics and revelled in the achievements of ?our? athletes, our ?Canadian? athletes; many of whom come from other places but have been fortunate enough to call Canada home now.

To be Canadian is to be fortunate indeed. I am an immigrant. And every day, I am thankful that my parents chose Canada as our home. Our family has benefited immensely from that decision. We have enjoyed a fantastic quality of life ? the best schools, health care, environment, housing, amenities ? and on and on.

We were and are indeed lucky. How wonderful for us. But what about everyone else?

As I watch the news and see the latest terrible images of children fleeing wartorn Syria and then hear the appalling rhetoric from some bellowing loudly about not letting ?those? people into ?our? country, I am struck by one overwhelming thought ? Why?

Why am I so lucky and they are not? I do not for one minute ascribe the circumstance of my birth as due to anything but the vagaries of chance. Because to do so would be dishonest with myself. Where I was born is not something I earned. It is something that just happened.

It is not to my credit that I was born in Ireland and allowed to immigrate to Canada any more than it is a child's fault to have been born in a Somalian refugee camp. I did not choose my birthplace, any more than they did.

Birthright is not a meritocracy. It is intellectually dishonest to suggest otherwise.

Those self-righteous folks who advocate building a wall, pulling up the drawbridge, slamming the door on folks who wish desperately for a better life, the life that we all enjoy as a matter of course, should think long and hard about how and why they have what they have.

Before I get some flaming emails, I am not saying that we throw open our borders. Far from it. Every country has a right to decide how many people it can support; to protect itself from those that may seek to destroy it from within. We have a right to decide what and who will make our country strong.

Similarly, I do not support the idea that those who jump the queue should somehow be given sympathy for doing so. There are folks who have been following the legal process and waiting patiently for years for their turn to be Canadian. Why should they have to wait even longer, because someone else decided to ignore the rules? How is that fair?

However, that assumes that the process for entering our country is, in fact, fair. And that's where I think a broader discussion is required.

Who decides what, who and how many? Based on what? What are the criteria? How are they developed? Is that based on fact? Or emotion? Evidence-based policy, not lifeboat ethics, should be the basis upon which our immigration ? and refugee ? policies are set. There will always be a fear of the ?other?. It shouldn't be the reason we shut people out.