



# **The Danger Tree: Memory, War, And The Search For A Family's Past**

*David MacFarlane*

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# The Danger Tree: Memory, War, And The Search For A Family's Past

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**The Danger Tree: Memory, War, And The Search For A Family's Past** David MacFarlane  
Emulating the circuitous tales told by his mother's relatives, the Goodyears of Newfoundland, David MacFarlane weaves the major events of the island's twentieth century--the ravages of tuberculosis; the great seal-hunt disaster; the bitter Confederation debate, and above all, the First World War--into his own tale of the ill-starred fortunes of his family. He brings to life a multi-generational cast of characters who are as colourful as only Newfoundlanders can be. With humour, insight, and genuine love for those heroes and charlatans, pirates and dreamers, he explores the meaning of family and the consequences of forgotten history.

## The Danger Tree: Memory, War, And The Search For A Family's Past Details

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# **From Reader Review The Danger Tree: Memory, War, And The Search For A Family's Past for online ebook**

## **Oliver Cadam says**

Heart warming and tragic, melancholic and hilarious all at the same time!

This is a cleverly and beautifully written real-life drama exhibited through the prism of an unfolding family history in one of the wildest, roughest places on earth. The broader canvas, the incremental details, the impact of local and global events on generations of Newfoundland Goodyears, all of this is sensitively woven into a captivating, engaging, personal tale with much dry wit and tangible, modest pride.

Thoroughly recommended.

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## **Douglas says**

Since I moved to a small outport community on the South coast of the island, I have been looking for a really good book about Newfoundland. Up til now, none that I had attempted had quite done it for me: Gwyn's biography of Smallwood just made me angry, "Random Passage" would have been better titled "Random People" for how many characters it contained, and the Newfoundland of "The Shipping News" was unrecognizable to me. Here, however, is a really good book about my home. MacFarlane captures the flavour of the place perfectly, and his love for his family and the fondness of his memories of the province allow him to be appropriately affectionate. By skillfully setting the exploits of his family members against the backdrop of Newfoundland's history in the 20th century, MacFarlane presents a Newfoundland that is worthy of the reader's love and respect, and is highly recommended to anyone with ties to the island.

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## **John says**

History, genealogy, war, business, relationships, what more could a reader want in non-fiction. Best juxtaposition of forest fires and bloody battlefields. Best description of fatal bullet wounds. Any book that makes me want to learn more about what I am reading independent of the book itself gets 4 stars. Not only will you learn where Newfoundland is you will learn how to pronounce it like a native. Bravo MacFarlane.

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## **Sylvester says**

I would've given this a two and a half if there were such a thing. I would've given it a lot more if it had been easier to read, and less circuitous. The writing was brilliant at times - the first chapter especially. "She has white hair, and her skin is still soft. It's the color of waxed paper, wrapped over the thin driftwood of her bones." It's a memoir of the author and his family, a history of Newfoundland, and of the First World War in which three of his family members were killed.

For a Canadian, the history in this book is fascinating. I had never thought about the fact that Newfoundland

was once a country unto itself, and that Newfoundland soldiers serving in WW 1 would detest being mistaken for Canadians, just like we Canadians detest being mistaken for Americans. Also, the stories about the seal hunts amazed me - the brutality and danger of the job was something new to me.

The book meandered between stories, which was the whole point, but at times it was irritating. Sometimes I was confused about who he was talking about - was this an Uncle or a Great Uncle or what? I thought some of that could have been cleared up if a family tree had been included. Also, the title irritated me, all along I thought that it referred to his family tree, which I thought was lame (mine would have to be called The Crazy Tree). It wasn't until the last chapter that he explains what The Danger Tree really refers to.

In a lot of ways, an excellent book, with some really masterful writing. I thought David MacFarlane was refreshingly creative in this genre. I found it too convoluted, however.

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### **Rick says**

This book was a very enjoyable read. It is the author's attempt to connect to the history of one side of his family from Newfoundland. It is eloquently written in the same manner that his family told stories ... Meandering from topic to topic ... Rather than following a strict chronology. The comparison between the author's Ontario family and Newfoundland family is hilarious. The Newfoundlanders were just a bit more boisterous than his Upper Canadian father's family. The book is both an insightful look into Newfoundland history and an entertaining tale of a most interesting family.

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### **Dennis says**

Some great writing. Wonderful beginning and end. But much of the book's interior seemed, sorry, like the same tale over and over again. At one point, certain I'd read something already, I even checked the page numbers to make sure I didn't have a bad printing. But I am left feeling a bit guilty here: Perhaps many good Canadians find this detailed telling of Newfoundland's past to be all worthwhile and my criticism sounding too-typically U.S. If so, sorry. But I wouldn't be very excited about similar tales of, say, Idaho either.

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### **François Carrière says**

Bits and pieces of the same story told over and over again. This book could be a much shorter work with same editing.

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### **Donna says**

A book that should be required reading in Canadian history courses in every school.

It gives insights into Newfoundland as a part of Canada that are remarkable.

For example, how many Canadians (and all Canadians must take at least one mandatory Canadian history

course in school) would have realized that, when German subs were a problem in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Newfoundland was British territory? Or that western Newfoundland is not much farther from British markets by sea than from Toronto? Or that Newfoundland's economic position was more like that of Puerto Rico and the US, a poverty-stricken, debt-ridden "country" that voluntarily gave up its government to British supervision because of its economic problems? Or that there were 3 factions at the time of Confederation, those who wanted to remain British, those who wanted to join Canada in Confederation, and those who wanted to unite with the US? Or that the extravagantly expensive railroad which was constructed to unite Newfoundland was found to be too expensive to operate on such a small scale compared to highway travel... and is now a very nice snowmobile trail!

And much more, too much to list in this review.

If you read this book, you will understand Newfoundland and Canadian politics like you probably never have before.

Yes, the book is sometimes repetitious and sometimes seems disjointed. Or boring and tedious with too many details. But mostly, the author's style is personable and descriptive.

A perfect book? No. But I have never found a better book to open my eyes to understand Newfoundland. I am glad that I read this book.

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## **Alan says**

### **Come From Away**

This was a totally engaging family history which also encompassed the history of Newfoundland.

David MacFarlane tells the story of his mother's Newfoundlander heritage by assembling family stories of his maternal great-grandparents and his great aunts and uncles. The often tragic stories include deaths in the First World War, from which the title "The Danger Tree" comes from. "The Danger Tree" was a marker in the no-man's-land between the Allied and German trenches where the Newfoundland Regiment fought at Beaumont-Hamel, France. The tree's (or its replacement's) mummified remains are encased in concrete at today's Beaumont-Hamel Newfoundland Memorial Site [http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembr....](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembr...)

This book was originally published in 1991 with the title "Come From Away", which is a common Newfoundlander expression for visitors or tourists to their island. At some point the title in subsequent re-printings was changed to "The Danger Tree," perhaps to avoid confusion with the Broadway musical? The story related to the new title isn't explained until the final chapter though.

### **Trivia**

Canadian poet E.J. Pratt seems to have been quite the grifter in his younger days on Newfoundland. The stories in this book have him selling some sort of fake tuberculosis cures to finance his eventual education and life in Toronto, Canada where the E.J. Pratt Library at Victoria College, University of Toronto now bears his name.

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## Max says

"But it was three on a match that was said to be bad luck, and this had as much to do with the significance of the number as with actual fact. Threes were everywhere. They still are: three meals; three wishes; three chances; three witches; three cheers; three reasons why. There's morning, noon, night; faith, hope, charity; lower class middle class upper class; blondes brunettes, redheads. Dante divided his universe into hell, purgatory, and paradise. We speak of time past, present, future. There are, according to the ancient riddle of the Sphinx, three ages of man. There are three Graces, three Furies, three bears, three rings in a circus, and three blind mice. Races begin with a ready, set, go, and end with a win, place, show. In folk stories it is often the third brother who slays the dragon, wins the princess, finds the treasure. In Christian iconography, there are three crosses on the Calvary, three magi, three temptations, three denials. And there is, of course, the Trinity."

And thus it runs for three whole paragraphs.

This book is a family memoir written in a circuitous style, one anecdote running into the next, mixing factual history with personal speculation. The author, a second generation Newfoundland ex-pat in Ontario, does have an interesting family history. Three great uncles died in the First World War, and their brother, the author's grandfather, lost a leg. The grandfather and two more surviving brothers founded the Goodyear Company of Grand Falls. But the author has few personal recollections of these older relatives, has spent little time in Newfoundland or in the company of Newfoundlanders. The result is an extremely abridged history of Newfoundland, pared down to the most noteworthy episodes, interwoven with a handful of family legends and a great deal of filler, as illustrated by the above quotation. Some passages seemed to be included for no other purpose than to augment the word count. The most interesting parts to me was the author's account of smoking pot on the job with a couple of Newfoundlanders at the Hamilton steel mills.

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## Sheri-lee says

I'm not sure if I "really liked" this or more "quite liked" it...so, 4 stars won out over 3. Things I didn't know: Newfoundland was its own country as a colony of Great Britain; it barely became a confederate with Canada by a 52% vote to join the Dominion; in the generations before us (as it is less I'm sure with each passing generation) there were Newfoundlanders who still said they were not Canadian and if they had to choose a distinction other than Newfoundlander they would pick British. Huh. Interesting.

I'm glad I have done some reading about World War I in 'Valour Road' because it helped me in placing what was going on and where things were in the Western Front stories of this book. Without that prior knowledge, a lot would have been lost to me. It took me a bit to follow the shifts in time, place, and players in the story telling. But in the end I liked the style because in some ways it reflects how our memory and story telling often happens -- side tracked to other stories, but then back to the original thought over and again; details at times fabricated to make the story come together and make sense as to why we've filed it away.

And what stories are important and who will know them when we are not around to tell them? "I could look at old photographs and guess at the stories. I could even use lines from an opera for dialogue if I wanted to: no one would know the difference. [...] But long before I became interested, there was almost nothing left to hold these relics together. They had become isolated from one another, like the remnants of memory left by old age. The family had lost the story." There are some stories that continue to live through the generations

of our families, with undoubtedly changes in some of the details, but there are also so many side stories that have been lost. Who will tell our stories?

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### **Mimi Attleson says**

Possibly one of the best books I have ever read. If I could write, this would be the book I would have wanted to create.

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### **Heep says**

There is so much to love about this book. It excels as the history of a family that remained connected, if not close, over many generations. It also excels as a history of Newfoundland and of the Great War. It is a work of great insight and humility, and captured me from beginning to end.

The story is detailed and focuses on human lives and relationships, but in doing so the narrative becomes more universal and wise. The book never lectures, but there were many truly wonderful passages that summarized a thought or feeling so well that I tried to note them by bookmark. Some are quotes of other family members, some noteworthy pieces from memoirs and some are the author's own reflections. The book is filled with many brilliant tidbits. My choices may not do credit to the book and may be poorly introduced, but are only intended to be illustrative.

The Great War and its mismanagement receive a lot of attention and are perhaps perfectly captured in a ridiculous quote from a military staff officer who summarizes the idiocy of war (and his staff) as follows:

"It was a magnificent display of trained and disciplined valour, and it's assault only failed of success because dead men can advance no farther."

The author tells of his great-aunt who lost three of her brothers to the war. Their deaths left gaping holes in her life, but also allowed her perspective and understanding displayed in this commentary about aging:

"The problem with young people is not that they think they will never get old. It's that they think that old people have never been young."

The author's commentary on the telling of history is among the most compelling statements of the argument.

"(T)he event we use to mark the passage of time - the wars, the assassinations, the revolutions - and that seem, from the perspective of the present, to inhabit a natural and inevitable place in history, were, at one time, unpredictable and preposterous."

As a final note, I think the overall craft and excellence of the writing deserve recognition. There is not a word out of place. The narrative builds and follows a structure that pulled me along and was never too obvious. Although often very sad, the book contained a great deal of humour and vibrance as a credit to the events, relationships and personalities it relates - and as homage to great Newfoundland storytelling.

Reading books is always rewarding but sometimes more than others. And sometimes one is fortunate to discover an absolute gem - a book worth returning to again and again. This is such a book.

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### **Stephen says**

I really enjoyed this book. It has a witty, roundabout way of telling a story (in my opinion) with some good history of Newfoundland (+ therefore England + Canada as well). I received this book as a gift, and probably wouldn't have picked it on my own, but I'm glad to have read it. (The only confusing part was that the edition I read was a re-release in 2014 when the original was published 1991 (I think) - so some of the personal

timelines made me have to do some fact-checking).

Anyway, there's a lot of wordsmithing and wisdom in this book. A good Canadian author.

Here's a good piece of advice from the author's Great Aunt:

"The problem with young people is not that they think they will never get old. It's that they think that old people have never been young." (269).

There's a lot more of that down-to-earthiness (to coin something) - and, I would probably now like to visit Newfoundland more than I did before I read the book.

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## **Beverly says**

A rambling disjointed story. History of Newfoundland? - not really. History of the family? - not really (actually a family tree might have helped). History of the Newfoundland forces during WW1? - not really. A hodgepodge of tidbits that sometimes hangs together and often wander through time. Also some extraneous factoids that dumped in since they were on hand. I believe in the author's truth, but it was not a clear or informative read.

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