

COMMON GROUND



# COMMON GROUND

a Political Life

Justin Trudeau



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The title of Chapter 4 is taken from the Robert Frost poem

“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” from *The Poetry of Robert Frost*,  
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Dedicated to my best friend, partner, and soulmate.

Thank you for all you do, and for all you are.

*Je t'aime*, Sophie.



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*On October 19, 2015, more than 17.5 million Canadians voted in the 42nd general election. The results saw the defeat of the ruling Conservative Party, which had held power since 2006. It also signalled the resurgence of the Liberal Party, which went from holding 36 seats in the House of Commons to holding 184 seats, securing a majority government and electing Justin Trudeau the 23rd Prime Minister of Canada.*



# Preface



**O**CTOBER 19TH WAS AN IMPORTANT DAY IN Canada. Canadians chose a very different government than the one that had been in power for a decade. And the choice could not have been clearer.

Our main opponents in the 2015 election presented a vision that has become prevalent and familiar in too many places since. It was a mistrustful, closed vision that incited division and tried to increase people's anxiety about their safety, about their jobs, about the future.

We offered Canadians a categorically different choice. From the beginning, we built a positive vision of Canada. One based on the fundamental belief that diversity is a strength, not a weakness; that openness to trade and immi-

gration can create growth that can work for regular people; and that Canada can be an engaged, constructive force for change in the world.

And Canadians responded, choosing hope over fear, diversity over division. Choosing to be an open and engaged country, rather than a closed and insular one. Most of all, expressing optimism about our future, despite the challenges, and confidence in our collective ability to build a better, more prosperous country for ourselves and for each other.

Since then, for a variety of reasons, people around the world seem to be taking an unusual degree of interest in our new government. Taking notice of a country that has the positive confidence to buck a troubling global trend. As I said at the biggest rally of our campaign, better is always possible.

We hope in our modest way that people around the world take that message to heart.

AS I WRITE THIS, I HAVE BEEN PRIME MINISTER FOR A little more than eleven months. The pace and demands on my time are pretty much what you'd expect, but that has only served to underline one of the biggest challenges of the job: staying grounded, connected to people, and focusing not merely on what's urgent, but on what's important.

And for me the solution is twofold: first, getting out of the Ottawa bubble and regularly talking with real people about their lives. Whether it's chatting with a new arrival for a few minutes at an event, participating in a roundtable with

small business owners about the challenges they face, or taking questions from young people in high school or university setting, being able to hear directly from the people I was elected to serve is a useful reminder that not everyone pays close attention to what was said in parliament that day.

And second, making family time a priority. You see, I truly feel that being present and engaged and there for Sophie and the kids doesn't just make me a better dad and husband, but it makes me better at my job as PM. Evenings in which I get to supervise homework and tuck them into bed, and peaceful Sunday mornings where the biggest decision is whether we go hiking or canoeing after lunch help give me the rested clear-headedness necessary for sound judgement.

It also helps to remind myself that ideally I'm not doing this job in spite of my young family, but because of them.

Of course the extra challenge is that this first year has been filled with international travel, on top of all the criss-crossing the country that comes with the job. Just ten days after the swearing-in ceremony in Ottawa, I went to Turkey for the G20 meetings in Antalya. From there, it was off to Manila for an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum. A week later, Sophie and my daughter Ella-Grace joined our mission to London. I closed out the month with visits to Malta, for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, and Paris, for the final negotiations of the United Nations' international agreement on climate change. Since then, I've also led delegations in Switzerland, Japan, Poland

and Ukraine, made multiple visits to Washington and New York City, and made my first official visit to the People's Republic of China.

Some criticized such a heavy travel schedule so early in my government's mandate, but I know it was the right thing to do. Canada's place in the world – whether measured in terms of our military and aid commitments, our trade balances, or our international reputation – has a real and meaningful impact on the lives of Canadians. Activists and politicians are fond of saying that “the world needs more Canada,” but it's a relationship that cuts both ways. We need the world as much as it needs us.

We often hear that people are cynical about politics, that they don't believe in politicians' ability to represent them – but the more people I spoke to over the course of our campaign, and now in government, the more it became clear that people are tired of being cynical. That people want to believe in the better angels of our nature. We took a chance, running a campaign that believed in people.

That's a lesson that applies the world over, despite the efforts of some to convince voters otherwise. Expecting the best of people isn't unique to Canada. Neither is trusting citizens to do the right thing. The only thing we did differently was to ensure that every policy we considered was rooted in the values that Canadians had told us mattered most.

Equality of opportunity is one such value. I believe that there can be no real progress without an economic vision

designed to give all citizens a real and fair chance at success. In the past century, it was Canada's growing and optimistic middle class that built a better country, not just for themselves but also for their children and for each other. That success must be encouraged, and that's why we've made strengthening and growing the middle class our number one priority.

Openness and transparency are other values that Canadians cherish, and ought to see more of in their government. In Canada, this means seeking out new ways to make citizen participation in our democracy more meaningful. But I believe that all governments can benefit from a more open and transparent approach.

The same is true when it comes to gender equity. Canadians understand that the way to build strong communities and a strong economy is by encouraging the full participation of women and girls. That's true in the business world, and it's true in public life. When we named a gender-balanced cabinet – Canada's first – it was because we wanted a government that reflects Canadians. One that would make the best decisions for all Canadians.

Cooperation is another Canadian value that applies everywhere. Whether it's lending humanitarian assistance when natural disasters strike or working proactively with international partners to tackle global challenges like climate change, we know that we are most effective when we work with others in pursuit of a common goal. Working together always beats going it alone.

But of all the values that have permeated my life – from my childhood years in Ottawa to my travels as a young man to my current role as Prime Minister— finding strength in diversity is a core Canadian belief and among the most important we can share with the world as we foster it at home. Canadians know that we are stronger culturally, politically, and economically because of our diversity, and that we must turn away from fear and suspicion to ensure that continues to be true. We do not and cannot let fear hold us back from making difficult, necessary decisions. We cannot escape the fact that fear has a real effect on the lives of people, and that it's rarely a positive one.

That's why we must do everything we can, in Canada and around the world, to stay hopeful. Not naïve, but hopeful. To remind ourselves that people are more often kind than they are cruel. That they are generous, open-minded, and optimistic. It is to those instincts that we must make our appeal, respecting our differences but remaining always mindful of the common ground we share, and the common good that we can build when we work together.

## Chapter One

# Childhood at 24 Sussex



**A** FITTING BEGINNING TO MY STORY CAN BE FOUND more than a century ago in the town of Banff, on the thinly populated northeastern coast of Scotland known as Aberdeenshire. One day in 1911 a local schoolteacher and avid fisherman named James George Sinclair traipsed out to a nearby stream with some friends and dropped his line in the water. Almost immediately the group was set upon by a constable who declared that they were fishing illegally—the waterway was “owned,” one end to the other, by the local nobleman.

Feudal land-use laws survived well into the twentieth century in Scotland and elsewhere in Europe, and

the penalties for violators could be severe. If James was caught trying to pilfer the local lord's fish again, the constable warned, it would mean jail time for him.

As James and his friends packed up their gear and headed home across the meadow, he grumbled, "If I canna fish, I canna live." One of James's companions began describing a wide-open land to them, a bonnie place where the forests teemed with game and "no nobleman owns the fish." He'd read about it in a book, the fellow said. A wonderful place it was, more than four thousand miles away, across the Atlantic and on the far side of Canada. A place called "British Columbia."

A few months later, James George Sinclair, his wife, Betsy, and their three-year-old son, Jimmy, were aboard a boat sailing to Canada. They found much more than fish in British Columbia. Their new home was a land of opportunity where hard work paid off, whatever your accent or ancestry. Over the next half century their son Jimmy grew up to earn a degree in engineering, become a Rhodes Scholar, serve as an RCAF officer in World War Two, be elected an MP, serve as a cabinet minister, have a successful business career—and remain all his life, like his father before him, an avid fisherman.

He and his wife, Kathleen, named the fourth of their five daughters Margaret. Today she lives in Montreal; she's my mom.



IN SEPTEMBER 1941, WHILE JIMMY SINCLAIR HAD THE particular distinction of serving his first term as MP for the riding of Vancouver North while commanding an RCAF squadron in North Africa, a French-Canadian intellectual embarked on an extraordinary sixteen-hundred-kilometre canoe expedition from Montreal to James Bay, retracing the seventeenth-century journey made by the *coureurs de bois* who founded the Hudson's Bay Company. The trip attracted some media attention; under the headline "Students Went on a Pleasant Voyage," a local newspaper listed the six canoeists, including one by the name of Pierre E. Trudeau.

It was an arduous journey. For my father, that was precisely the point. "I shot the rapids while the others portaged," he wrote in a letter to a friend. "The food began to give out, the portages were impossible, the rapids dangerous . . . In a word, life was becoming beautiful." This was the lens through which my father saw his native Quebec—as a proud and magnificent place full of rugged beauty. He always believed that the province's defining spirit emerged as much from the land as from the language and culture.

As a family, we've always had a strong connection to the water. In fact, water plays a role in my very first memory. I was not quite two years old, bundled up in a snowsuit and sledding with my father at Harrington Lake, the government-owned prime ministerial residence in Gatineau Park, which was one of my parents' favourite places to spend time together. It was December 1973, and the lake was not quite frozen over. My mother stood at the top of a hill, ready to burst with the

imminent birth of my brother Sacha, and cheered us on as my father went up and down the slope with me on a sled. Each swift descent ended near the stream that flowed out of the lake, the one I would later paddle down.

After a few turns, my father satisfied himself that the run was safe and decided I should have a go by myself. From the top of the hill he gave the sled a push, and off I went down the slope while he and my mother looked on. Almost immediately, my dad saw a huge problem. When he and I were aboard the sled together, our combined weight was enough for the sled's runners to break through the icy crust and slow us down. But with just me on board, the sled skimmed lightly on the crust more like a skate and began gaining speed, heading directly for the stream. As my father bounded down the slope in hot pursuit of me, my mother stood atop the hill terrified, shouting, "My baby, my baby!"

As young as I was, I clearly recall the ride ending with the sled half-buried in the sandy shore and my outstretched hands wrist-deep in the ice-cold water. I was wearing blue knit mittens, and my principal concern was that I had gotten them soaked. "Fall down river, mittens wet!" I cried out to my father, half-delighted and half-surprised, when he arrived to rescue me. He scooped me up with one hand, grabbed the sled with the other, and carried me back up the hill. It was a significant day: I had been baptized an outdoorsman.

BEFORE THIS ADVENTURE, HOWEVER, WAS THE EVENTFUL time of my birth. Sir John A. Macdonald was the last prime minister to have a child in office. My father and mother both embraced the goals of the new feminist movement that was revolutionizing the way men and women approached their roles as parents. However, they were born three decades apart, and the difference in their ages was something that was not easily overcome. To put that in perspective, my father was born in 1919, the year that women gained the right to stand for federal office in Canada.

In 1971, the Ottawa Civic Hospital still excluded husbands from accompanying their wives in the delivery room. My mother was furious when she heard about this. If her husband couldn't be at her side in the hospital when she gave birth, she would have the baby—that was me—at 24 Sussex. When word of my mother's protest reached the hospital's board of directors, they promptly abolished the old-fashioned restriction, followed by other hospitals in Ottawa and eventually across the country. On Christmas Day, my father was at my mother's side when I came into the world. It was, I am told by reliable sources, an easy and uncomplicated delivery. And I like to think that, along with my father, I helped my mother strike a blow against old-school patriarchal thinking.

My brother Sacha arrived two years after me, and Michel followed less than two years later, so we were close in many ways. We were constant playmates—chasing, teasing, getting into scrapes. Actually, we were rough-and-tumble little

lion cubs. I taught Sacha to wrestle when he was still in diapers, and Sacha was rolling around with Michel when he was still a toddler. Taking a cue from all that energy, my parents put tumbling mats in the basement of 24 Sussex, eager to see us burn off our boyish hyperactivity in a wholesome way.

Harrington Lake in those days was like the setting for a Hardy Boys novel, a place that begged for adventure. My father, to our delight, always seemed to encourage the idea. An old farmstead with an abandoned barn could be explored nearby. Halfway down the lake, past an old mica mine, sat an unused boathouse where my brothers and I would sun ourselves in the summer. About a hundred metres offshore was a tiny island that was the locus of our own rite of passage. When each of us turned seven years old, we determined we would swim out to the island and back again.

It was an example of our father's encouragement to always test our physical boundaries that he agreed to this. Of course, he guided and protected us—when we attempted this ritual he was there, swimming alongside us, to the island and back.

He also liked to surprise us. He would pull out topographical maps of Gatineau Park, place his finger on a spot and say, "*On va là.*" A half-hour later, we would all find ourselves scrambling to keep up with him and our mother as he marched confidently into the wilderness. His sense of direction was excellent, and we never got lost. But the same wasn't true for other visitors to the area. Occasionally some confused hiker would stumble upon us and find himself get-

ting directions from the prime minister of Canada. When I look back on such episodes now, they do seem surreal. But as a young child, the prime minister assisting hikers lost in the Gatineau Hills seemed perfectly normal.

A change in season didn't stop our outdoor explorations and family excursions. Snow on the ground meant many things. We all began skiing at a young age, but at Harrington Lake, we'd usually strap on snowshoes and head out the door. These weren't the modern lightweight designs available today. We wore the old wooden teardrop-shaped variety, which looked a bit like tennis racquets and were strung with catgut (which, our father assured us, doesn't really come from cats). While trekking through the wilderness, my father, always in French, would spin tales of Albert Johnson, the Mad Trapper of Rat River, an infamous Depression-era criminal who led the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) on a nearly 250-kilometre manhunt through the Northwest Territories and into the frozen Yukon wilderness. This, naturally, inspired us to take turns playing the Mad Trapper, heading into the Gatineau countryside to see if we could evade capture by other family members.

Tracking someone in snowshoes is easy if he walks in a straight line. The idea was to confuse the pursuers by walking in circles, branching off and doubling back, following a figure-eight pattern or even swinging from a tree branch to create a break in the trail. We loved this game, and it kept us going for hours.

After leading an RCMP posse on a hunt for more than a month, the Mad Trapper was shot to death by the Mounties

on a frozen bend of the Eagle River. Our pursuits, by contrast, usually ended with my father breaking up and sharing a bar of dark chocolate.

I WAS EIGHT OR NINE YEARS OLD BEFORE I HAD A FIRM grasp of my father's career and what he did when he wasn't at home with us. My mother loves to tell the story of how I referred once to my dad as "the boss of Canada." But what did that mean exactly? My friends' parents performed work I could understand—they worked in stores, or looked after people as doctors, or talked on the radio. I could wrap my head around that kind of work. The concept of public service was much more abstract, more difficult to understand.

The subject came up one day when I asked my father something about our house and he replied that we didn't own it the same way we owned our clothing or books. We didn't? That was strange. *We lived* at 24 Sussex, so why wasn't the house ours? His explanation was that it belonged to the government, which just confused me more. Wasn't my father *in charge* of the government? Didn't that make it all his? Then, in 1979, the Liberals lost the federal election. Almost overnight 24 Sussex was no longer our home, and we packed up and moved a few blocks away to Stornoway, the official opposition leader's residence. That's when I understood that the real boss of Canada was the Canadian people.

With time I began to grasp some of the more complex issues my father dealt with, and he made a point of draw-

ing my attention to major events and their importance. For understandable reasons, he spoke to his young sons about the establishment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. I was ten years old at the time, old enough to be familiar with the basic principles of democracy, including the notion that governments rise and fall according to the voters' will. In explaining the importance of the Charter, my father, who had envisioned such a document from the days when he had served as minister of justice in the Pearson government of the 1960s, pointed out that some rules were too important for the government to override.

The idea that a majority of the people—or, given our electoral system, sometimes far less than a majority—could use the government's immense power to restrict minority rights appalled my father. He called this “the tyranny of the majority.” The way he explained it to us as children was to say that, for example, right-handed people, who make up a large majority of the population, shouldn't be allowed to make laws that hurt left-handed people just because they are a minority.

Dad was a member both of a linguistic minority and of a generation that had seen people harness and marshal the state's power to do unspeakable things to each other the world over. He had fought his whole life to build and shape, in Canada, a country of unparalleled diversity: of religion, ethnic origin, and belief. For diversity to work, people have to be free. The Charter was his way of ensuring that it would be impossible for any group of Canadians to use the