

By Maxine Hancock

# On the wings of the wind

*Who has seen the wind?*

*Neither you nor I:*

*But when the trees bow down their heads,*

*The wind is passing by.*

— Christina Rossetti

**L**earning that poem as a child in Lethbridge I wanted to protest: "I have . . . well, I have almost seen the wind."

Certainly, I had seen Chief Mountain distant and blue under a chinook arch. I had known days when we planned to go skating in the morning and in the afternoon needed rubber boots. I had spread



my arms and let the wind send me running and dancing on my way, or had bowed my head and pushed against its power.

This past winter, when my husband and I drove from Banff to Calgary alongside an incoming chinook, I felt I was as close to seeing the wind as anyone could get. That day, a soft prism of color with the faintest hues of pink, yellow and blue spread along

the ragged edge of grey cloud that was the wing of the wind.

Warm air from the Pacific swept over the mountains and down across the frozen Alberta countryside with winds reaching up to 100 km per hour. We had left a Calgary shivering in a -40 C deepfreeze and were driving back into a city of slush and shirtsleeves, the temperature at 8 C and rising, just three days later.

The warm wind rocked trees that hours earlier had stood stiffly at attention. In their suddenly supple branches, winter birds that for days had huddled in hiding now chirped and twittered.

For me, hope is a chinook arch and the wild, free joy of a wind that warms. No doubt this shapes my theology and my outlook on life as well. When you have lived in a place where chinook winds blow, you really do believe that anything can happen. You believe in the unexpected, in grace. You live ready for the exhilarating challenge of sudden change.

When I get caught in a chinook, I feel a wonderful exhilaration. If the rainbow is the sign of God's covenant of faithfulness, the chinook arch is surely a sign of his grace.

When I get a chance to walk in a chinook wind, as I did this winter, I want to spread my arms and let the wind push me. I want to be subject to the wind. I want to live in hope, aware of grace, ready for change, subject to the breath of God. I want to be aware of and responsive to the wind. I want to go with the wind — not against it. Walking against such a gale as the chinook is as

exhausting as walking with it is exhilarating.

The chinook reminds us of the wonderful irregularities of grace. Within the regularities of the Noachic covenant (Genesis 8:22) are many surprises. Within the new-every-morning faithfulness of God there are frequent changes in the life of the believer — changes that seem to be designed to keep us moving forward in life, to remind us of our pilgrim status, to keep us from becoming complacent or from settling into predictable patterns in which we are no longer aware of our absolute dependence on God. People who have lived with such a wind as the chinook can believe in change and welcome it, since changes wrought by a chinook wind are usually positive. Change is not viewed as a threat but as something to anticipate and enjoy.

When you live aware of the power of the wind that, unseen as it is, can nonetheless alter an entire climate in a few short hours, you learn to live in hope. Though it is -40 C today, with a chinook by tomorrow it could be spring.

Similarly, with God the most hopeless, locked-in or locked-up situation is not beyond his power to change, and change dramatically. A God who can send chinooks can also change lives. He can thaw hearts, transform rigidly set habits, set rivers of joy running in frozen streets.

I am not the first to compare the "wind" with the "spirit." Jesus' words to Nicodemus make the link explicit: "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows

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wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:6-8). When Nicodemus heard these words, he would have related them to a very different experience of wind from my own. But the very words of the Bible that are translated as "spirit" are words for the wind: *ru-ach* in Hebrew and *ru-cha* in Aramaic (nouns that are feminine in both languages), *pneuma* in Greek (neuter, but referred to by masculine personal pronoun).

I have not quite seen the wind, but I have felt it, walked in it, lived in it. I want to keep living under the chinook arch of hope. I want the Spirit to thaw my winter heart, warm me, invigorate me. I want to know his holy power to challenge the status quo. Come, holy wind of God, over the mountains of our lives, I pray. Do not tiptoe or whisper, but roar, laugh, melt. Take over the town. Alter our plans. Breathe into us again the breath of life that is exhilarating, joyful and open to grace. ♦

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