I do not know if it is my age and supposed maturing or fallout from September 11, but a passion for our country has been gradually building within me. I would call this feeling patriotism. After being fortunate enough to travel to most parts of the globe, I feel qualified to say that, unequivocally, we live in the best country in the world.

What makes up the complexion of our country is not how its people pronounce the word “out”, nor how proud and noble the beaver is. What defines a country is essentially its people. We have long been described as a mosaic; in this land, there are native Canadians, followed by ships full of early settlers from the British Isles and France, and then hundreds of thousands of individuals from all over the globe who have made Canada their home. Officially bilingual and multicultural, Canada is becoming more and more a pluralistic nation within a still predominantly bilingual framework.

That is who we are, but do we know how special a people we are? We do not fly the Canadian flag outside all of our houses. Nor do we put our hands on our hearts when O Canada plays. We live in a country with extreme temperatures, perhaps this makes us more tolerant. We tend to be pretty quiet, complacent and passive. Yet, look what happens when you fly our flag upside down; or when George W. Bush mentions just about every world power except for Canada. We are outraged!

How does the rest of the world view us? Wherever you may travel, just tell someone you are from Canada and the news is received with amazing warmth and adoration. This is not a reaction of which you ever tire. It makes you appreciate your homeland and it makes you realize how your country is seen by those around the world.

Do we not have cause to be proud? We most certainly do and we are. We go about being proud in a quiet, unobtrusive way, a way that is uniquely Canadian, a way that neither solicits nor provokes competition. The rivers, mountains, lakes, flora and wildlife are pristine and awe-inspiring in their magnitude. Our natural resources are virtually unbounded, like our spirits. We are so unconcerned about our accomplishments that most of us do not even know that basketball, pablum, insulin and the telephone are all Canadian inventions. Per capita, we have an immense amount of musical talent, from opera to pop, from Ben Hepner to Shania Twain to Bare Naked Ladies. Sir Wilfrid Laurier said “The nineteenth century was the century of the United States. I think we can claim that it is Canada that shall fill the twentieth century.”

Our pride extends well beyond our talents, resources and inventions. When Swissair flight 111 came down on our shores, we were there for the families and friends who came to mourn. When dozens of flights were suddenly rerouted to Canada on September 11 and people were stranded for days in our country, alone, afraid, we were there for them, showing our inimitable hospitality, bonding and making life-long friendships. This is the heart of Canada at its best. We have seen how Canadians respond in an emergency. We are known as the peacekeepers of the world. But that does not mean that we will not bear arms and fight if we have to; indeed, there were over 39,000 Canadian casualties in World War II alone, and even today our forces are actively engaged in the battle against international terrorism.

Each one of us comes from a different background, and as Ann Kibler, the CAIW President, tells us, we should savour the difference. But the bottom line is that we are all here now, sharing Canadian citizenship, a magnificent reputation and a country second to none. Let us know this in our hearts, our glowing hearts and let us never forget it.