

READER'S GUIDE

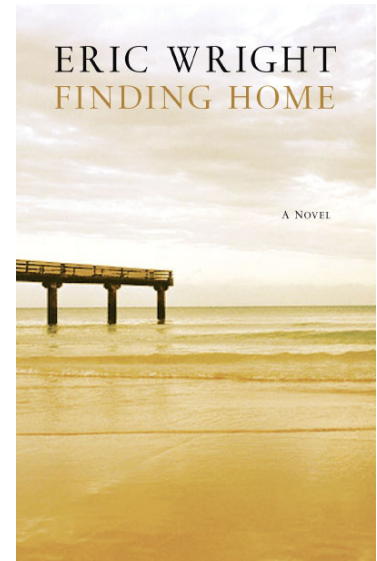


Finding Home by Eric Wright

Cormorant Books Inc.

INTRODUCING *Finding Home*

Will Prentice, who immigrated to Canada from England some thirty years ago, realizes that sometimes you have to leave home to find it. The week after his wife asks him for a divorce, Will returns to England to attend his mother's funeral. Embarking on a driving tour of the English countryside, in part to unravel a secret from his mother's past, in part trying to see how much of England he remembers, and where he belongs, he begins to re-examine his life back home in Canada. His driving companion is his uncle's grandson, Fred, a recent Cambridge graduate at a crossroads in his life who is interested in Canadian Studies. As Fred drives Will through various English boroughs, Will talks him through a journey across Canada, from the fishing villages of Labrador to the rainy coasts of British Columbia, reawakening Fred's imagination and defining the heart of his own passion. Eric Wright's portrait of two countries, Britain and Canada, supposedly similar but literally an ocean apart, asserts Canada's uniqueness and reminds us that home is not only geography and landscape, but also a state of mind. *Finding Home* is a sensitive and optimistic look at Will's search for a new beginning after work and kids that will resonate with anyone who has ever had to face an uncertain future.



IMPORTANT THEMES

Home

Will's experience of the sea leads him to wonder whether he had been "repressing it for many years, not the sea, but home. Was I homesick, finally?" The breakdown of Will's marriage and his mother's death leaves him wondering if home should be where he comes from. Yet, in describing Canada to Fred during the course of his travels, Will articulates his love and appreciation for his adopted country, and by the end of the book, it becomes clear to Will just where home is. Will's journey gives him the strength and encouragement to shape a new life for himself, out of the rubble of his marriage, and the loss of his mother.

Identity

Will's identity wrapped up in an internal debate about whether he is Canadian or English. He says at one point, "I don't know what I am." His trip across England is as much a search for his own identity as it is for his mother's. But it is also his father's identity that he seeks, as he wonders if the man in the photo could be his father. The secrecy that Will's mother had maintained throughout her lifetime is slowly unravelled to reveal the depth of her character. As Fred remarks to Will, "In the beginning, the opening chapters of your story, when we only had your version, she was hard-headed, casual, even neglectful, and secretive. Now you have to add in what we've been told about her generosity to Great-Aunt Phyllis, to Bessie and to you, in the end. She's become a fully rounded character."

Relations

Will discovers an entire clan of relatives eager to know him, and finds himself eager to know them. His mother's death and funeral, and his subsequent travels through his past, have made him realize what he's been missing. The breakdown of his marriage, his age, and the age of his children also play a role in his longing for family. Will surprises himself by wanting these relationships. As he considers his relatives he thinks about how "The English

are less interested in their relatives than any other nation on earth, including the French. That's what I've noticed in Canada." His mother's death has his Uncle Albert "indicating that he would find some contact welcome, and sending his grandson as a goodwill emissary it looked like. It was a nice development, and it fitted with my own impulses."

Q&A WITH ERIC WRIGHT

1. You have written many novels, can you talk about how you became a writer, and such a prolific one at that?

I became a writer in 1958 when *The New Yorker* bought a small piece I had written about my time in the war called "Blitzkrieg Days" (which later became part of a memoir). At that point I was penniless, married, and out of work. Correcting two of these conditions took all my time and energy, and although I kept a small flame burning with pieces in *Punch* and *The Montrealer*, for example, I didn't explore what I could do for another twenty-five years, when I cut my teaching workload in half and began writing some novels. After that, I had no trouble writing a book a year in my chosen genre.

2. You grew up in England and immigrated to Canada. Were your own experiences as an immigrant inspiration for the writing of this book?

Of course. That is, this book is an exploration of my own feelings after thirty years as an immigrant. I didn't know how I felt until I had finished the book. I *might* have concluded that Will belonged in England.

3. Are the characters based on people you have known?

Will is me, and Fred is his own man. All the other characters are more types than individuals except my favourite, Bessie Cullough, whom I met for twenty minutes while I was waiting for a train at Oxford and who obviously enchanted me because I've had her in my head never since.

4. Will says, "They say you can't go home again but I'm wondering if you can ever leave it. Where is home?" Do you think this sentiment is a common one felt by immigrants?

It is interesting that I have never talked about this to other immigrants. In conversations, we have reminisced and compared notes about this new country of ours but this question has not cropped up, perhaps because it is frightening. After all, to discover that you should not have emigrated is all right within six months, say, but it would be a pretty sad self-discovery after thirty years.

5. When Fred is asking Will about separatism, Will says to Fred, "Your question requires a response from a born Canadian, a thoughtful response, of course, but one grounded in emotion ... The longer I live there the more I feel like an Anglo, but I'll never become the real thing." How are Will's feelings about Canada different than the feelings of a born Canadian? How are they the same?

The point here is that however one is soaked in Canada, culturally, politically, and in all the other ways, one wasn't born here, and so is without the instincts and prejudices of the native. For instance, I spent a long time living in Winnipeg, admittedly among the bohemians there, not realizing how wary the English (Anglos) were of the Ukrainians, and the French of the English, etc. The phrase "goddamn hunky-dogans," used by a particularly nasty Anglo foreman of his labourers, is one it took me a long time to unpack. A Ukrainian Catholic girlfriend translated it for me.

6. Why did you choose to write the novel from a first-person point of view?

It was an instinctive choice, immediate and natural. By writing in the first person I could let the reader see what was happening to Will and judge by his reaction what he was experiencing. Written in the third person, I would, I think, have been fighting all the time to avoid explaining why Will said things or did things. Put it in another way, in the third person the narrator would have to seem to know all about Will; in the first person he could stay unconscious. It's obvious, but difficult to articulate.

7. As the story developed, were you surprised with the direction it took, or did you know the ending when you began?

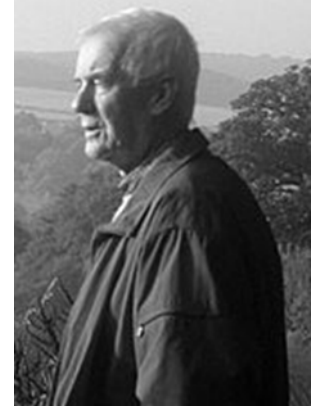
I always knew what Will's final decision must be. But I had no idea how he would get to it. And I was surprised at how happy he was to return to Canada, how little regret he had at leaving the land of his birth. What really surprised me, as I went along, was the realization that I hadn't read Will's story before. The experience is so common, but, as far as I know, not the stories about it.

8. What do you hope readers will take from your book?

This is tricky. Perhaps, simply, what separates immigrants from their children, and what binds them together.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What choices do the characters make? Which choices did you agree with? Which ones didn't you agree with and why?
2. What is Will searching for? Does he find it?
3. How does Will's opinion of England change from when he arrives to when he leaves?
4. How does Will's opinion of Canada, and his Canadian identity change throughout the story?
5. Will goes on a lot of rants during his journey. What does he rant about and what do these rants tell us about Will?
6. Describe Will's relationship with Fred. How does it evolve over the course of their trip?
7. In what ways do the events in the book reveal evidence of the author's world view?
8. Discuss Wright's use of foreshadowing. Did you find key events surprising or inevitable?
9. Did the ending surprise you? Can you think of how it could have ended differently?
10. What did you think about Will's mother's relationship with Bessie?
11. What aspects of the book seem autobiographical? Do they enhance your experience of the story?



ABOUT ERIC

Eric Wright was born in London, England and immigrated to Canada in 1951. He is the award-winning author of seventeen crime novels, including his first novel, *The Night the Gods Smiled*, which won the Arthur Ellis Award for Best Crime Novel, the Crime Writers' Association's John Creasey Award, and the City of Toronto Book Award. His memoir, *Always Give a Penny to a Blind Man*, about growing up poor in working-class London, was published in 1999.