

The Scene and the Unseen

An Anthology of Literary Non-Fiction

EDITED BY ROBERT G. MAY



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Preface

ROBERT G. MAY

THE SCENE and the Unseen is the second annual anthology of literary non-fiction by the students of WRIT 290, an online course offered at Queen's University at Kingston.

In WRIT 290, students are asked to read a number of representative examples of literary non-fiction works by authors such as Annie Dillard, Kathleen Norris, Adam Gopnik, Richard Rodriguez, and others. Students learn about what goes into a work of literary non-fiction, what the genre's conventions are, and how to respond actively to works of literary non-fiction. Students have the opportunity both to write critical essays on the works of literary non-fiction they read, and to try their hands at developing their own original pieces in the genre.

Students' culminating assignment in WRIT 290 is to compose an original work of literary non-fiction on a subject of their choice. Students are first asked to write a short proposal and to sketch out a provisional outline. Then, they are asked to transform their outline into a working rough draft. The final stage of the project asks students to revise their rough draft into a polished, publication-ready final copy. At every step of the writing process, students receive advice and feedback from their instructor and teaching assistants. Students' final drafts are then published here with minimal further editing. The works of literary non-fiction in this collection thus represent the product of several months' work by a group of dedicated and assiduous students of writing.

In WRIT 290, students learn that literary non-fiction does not exist in a vacuum. Unlike a private diary or journal, literary non-fiction assumes an audience other than the authors themselves. Literary nonfiction is meant to be read, enjoyed, and appreciated by more than one person. The Scene and the Unseen is thus an appropriate title for this anthology. In so many of these pieces, the author describes a specific experience or location—a concrete scene—but then expands on this description to meditate on some larger idea or message—something abstract and unseen, at least by the corporeal eye. The pieces in this collection have been drawn from the authors' own personal imagination and experience, but they will also find resonance in the individual minds of readers. There are pieces here about losing a cherished friend or relative, about travelling to an unknown destination for the first time, about falling in and out of love, about encountering and overcoming a personal obstacle. In each case, readers are able to read beyond the immediate scene of the piece to perceive the various unseen ways it may have applicability to their own lives.

Interested readers may also download the first WRIT 290 anthology of literary non-fiction, *Through the Eyes of Ourselves*, at http://post.queensu.ca/~mayr/anthologies.html.

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And thanks to the WRIT 290 students who contributed ideas for the cover design and title for this year's anthology. The cover art depicts a hand-crafted mosaic mirror frame created by L. Gonneau and photographed with permission by Kelly Fitzmaurice. The title *The Scene and the Unseen* is based on a suggestion by Jordanna Bernstein.

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The Scene and the Unseen

An Anthology of Literary Non-Fiction

The Escape

BARKAT AHMED

A S MY foot cracked through the ice and sloshed into the cold water, I felt the pure misery of a wintery hike. From that point onwards, every step took its toll. My mind began to create danger scenarios in my head, each one more elaborate than the next. My paranoid mind began to sensationalize the unfolding of future events. I thought of what could happen to my one foot, which began to feel numb. I imagined how it would affect my hiking partner, Ben, and whether or not if he would be able to carry me out of the rest of the hike. I entertained thoughts of how emergency services would reach us if I was unable to proceed. What began as a relatively casual hiking trip began to resemble a survival situation in my mind. Looking back, I vividly remember how it began. A friend and I had planned to hike a trial which he had partially completed in the summer. After high school, Ben and I had parted ways to attend university across the province. We reunited after a year, while he was home for winter break. We decided to catch up over a hike and decided on a trail.

As I slammed the door on my dad's 1998 Rav4, I hollered out to Ben, "Don't forget the snacks!" I began walking towards the trail map. Ben came up behind me. "It doesn't look so bad?" he said, looking at the trail up ahead. Last night's snow fall made it look as if the ground had been covered by a white felt blanket that had been embossed with foot prints of previous hikers. This made the opening of the trail fairly predictable. As we began walking, Ben asked various questions to feed

his growing curiosity of religion. We had pursued completely different career paths. He was pursuing education in environmental studies, while I was in religious studies. The time passed as we talked about everything from Buddhist ecology to meditation. We reached a point in the trail where the previous hikers had retreated. We ignored the subtle warning to retreat and decided to continue, until we reached a fork in the road.

"We should stick to the trail, what you think?" I asked Ben. He nodded in agreement. We both plunged into the pool of accumulated snow. It was up to our knees, which made restricted movement and made it a real chore. At this point the hike was taxing. Every movement required great effort. As we came to the first of a few steep inclines, my whole being was strained trying to push up it. What made the trial even more difficult was snow beginning to accumulate in my boots. Ben was climbing behind me, with a heavy pack on his back, through deep snow—panting, panting, panting—but he didn't have enough air to take in.

Upon reaching the top of our first peak, I used my arm to clear the snow off a rectangle-shaped boulder. The view was breathtaking. Sitting on the cold rock, we caught our breath and took in the beautiful sight. A few minutes had passed, and the weather was getting cool. We decided to keep pushing a steady pace.

This time Ben led the way. As we walked through the forest, everything was beautifully silent in this wintery morning. There was a chill in the air as the sun had died out. The light was fading, creating new shadows and dark patches around me. Everything stood utterly still around me, like statues in a museum. We came to a fork in our path, which led us off-trail but was easy to travel as a snowmobile had packed the snow flat. This led us to a vast and picturesque path across the frozen river. The unique experience of travelling on winter ice is something to savour. The ice crunched beneath my feet, similar to the uniquely satisfying sensation created by broken glass coming into contact with the rubber sole of a shoe.

The weather changed quite drastically. The sun vanished behind the clouds, and a cold arctic wind blew across the frozen river. I mustered the strength to keep pushing and trying to keep pace up with Ben. Upon reaching the mid-point in the river, a layer of ice broke beneath my right foot, plunging it into ice water up to my ankle. As Ben led the way, I followed behind his footsteps. I was careful not to break the ice again.

We had begun to lose track of where we were in relation to the trail. I noted to Ben that we hadn't seen a trial marker in quite some time. He assured me. I grabbed some granola bars from my pack and offered one to Ben. Both of us had not realised how far we had come. We had been hiking for over two hours now and were a long way from the trail and even further from the car. I internally began to panic, while remaining calm on the outside.

We came to the realization that the snowmobile track had led us astray, when we came to a dead end. We were tired and wanted to rest but there wasn't a place to sit. Sitting anywhere and keeping still would only make us colder. Deciding to build a fire, we ran around gathering birch bark and dead wood branches. The wind challenged our effort. In the end, following a string of bad decisions, we decided to abort the plan. At this point, I was cold and utterly exhausted. I had lost the feeling in one of my feet, form the accumulated snow in my shoe. I urged Ben that we should make our way back to the car as fast as possible. Things could get a lot worse from here due to the unpredictability of winter weather. We marched back with our defeated spirits and did not talk much. My efforts to complain were thwarted by Ben, who advised that the best thing we could do is to focus on keeping a steady pace. This would keep us the warmest.

In the end, we made our escape. By keeping our composure, we made it back through the trail, successfully retracing our steps. It was a relief to see old Rav4 parked where we left it. I reached for my keys, got in, and slammed the door shut. We warmed up in the car, reflecting over the disaster we had averted.

Hold the Light

LUKE BALL

ERFECT," HE yelled. "Is that Luke here to help out?"
"Hey." I instantly regretted my decision to stop in and do laundry. It would not have mattered if he detected my lack of enthusiasm. Now that I was home, there would be no designated hitter. At my house, if you were in the ballpark you were on deck.

My earliest memory of doing projects with my dad was squeezing under the kitchen sink with him to fix a leaking faucet. My job was to "hold the light." My vital role in this partnership was to shine some light on the exposed pipes, so that he could determine if there was a loose fitting or a corroded pipe that needed to be replaced. The weight of the big blue flashlight required me to hold it with two hands, just like you would hold and then eat a sausage from a concession stand at Fenway. In those days, when he asked me to do something ... it was like I was heading for home plate during third-grade recess.

Putting up the Christmas lights was not what I had planned today. These "spare me an hour of your time" kind of jobs would always go into extra innings. Now that I was here, I could only hope that he had already been to Canadian Tire. Up and down the aisles to find the newest drill, or a fastener to clip the lights to the shingle, used to be as good as watching a game seven. Shopping with him today for extra bulbs or more extension cords would destroy my plans.

"No one ever wore socks with flip flops back in my day," he says. His remark about my uniform has some velocity and is intended to brush me back off the plate. "Where is your winter coat?" A routine curve. "After we finish at the front, I thought we might put a string or two across the hedges at the back. Maybe the deck too." Throwing his change-up this early in the game means it is going to be a late season tilt. A New York Yankees versus Boston Red Sox sort of day.

Last summer, we took out the above-ground pool and extended the deck. We did some preliminary demolition work and used the cut-off saw. I must have heard it a million times. "Measure twice, cut once." It was the measuring tape that time. So much like the light. Standing, holding, waiting, listening ... doing exactly what I was told. "What are we going to do here, Luke?" Like it mattered what I thoughtcountless lessons. "Grab one of those two-by-fours and make sure it's not twisted." I knew full well that each of the boards he had purchased had already been hand-picked and scrutinized. He had shown me how to use the shims as spacers on another project, and as predictable as a bunt, with a runner on first and none out, he needed to show it to me once again. "Don't sink the screws too far into the boards or I'll have to take them all out." Every day that week he would leave an elaborate and itemized game plan on the kitchen counter, complete with perfectly drawn geometrical shapes to represent where the sona tubes, deck boards, and screws should go. When he arrived home after work he would not say much, but like a major league pitcher searching for the seam on the ball, he would run his fingers over the joints. Without a word, I would know which boards would need to be redone.

Even cleaning the garage was a battle. "Seriously, dad, I think I can manage throwing garbage into a truck." Other lessons too! How to properly roll an extension cord. How to stack wood. "If you think about the stuff you are taking to the dumpster you can minimize the number of trips you have to take." A blue flowered and stained yellow wing back chair hung way up near the trusses. "Nope, that's from Victoria Street."

"Never throw out empty peanut butter jars because they are perfect for drywall screws or nails."

Whenever he was in the garage with me, I was careful not to get too close to the baseball equipment. After I abandoned *his* dream of me playing baseball, he would get so steamed when anything reminded him of those days. That time I refused to hold the light. That was the

angriest he had ever been. "You want to quit playing baseball?" Strike one! "You're not going to the tryouts?" Strike two! "After all these years, you're done?" Strike three! That summer was spoiled. The mood around the house was foul. Even now we don't watch much baseball together and he never missed a road trip.

He doesn't talk about him much. Died young. Before I was born. Sounds like he did his fair share of "holding the light." There were a few times when the memories were too much and they would just spill out of him. He talked about the storm windows on Victoria Street. Again, game time was inopportune. Same plays. His house, a Victorian, had twenty-four windows, and each of them had to be carried down the ladder, one at a time, checked for damage, cleaned with vinegar and newspaper, and either stored in some criss-cross pattern in the garage, or put up for the winter. He said he could still smell the vinegar. He too was in no hurry to finish. He too shared nuggets for putting putty on the windows or how to stack the windows in the garage so they would not topple over.

I know I hit a grand slam. His silence and the occasional signal indicate he did too. When I think back about growing up, it is not the holidays or the celebrations, but the losses, the clashes, and some tense games that I will always remember. It is the memories of "holding the light" and those seemingly trivial lessons that weave my family together.

Impasse

JORDANNA BERNSTEIN

BREATHE deeply. A faint sage scent wafts through the open window of my van. A warm breeze gently envelops my exposed limbs and tousles my already untamed hair. My mood rises with the elevation gain. The vibrant, multi-coloured landscape mesmerizes me. The brilliant sun accentuates the green conifers, the sparkling emerald lake, and the indigo columbines blanketing the hills. These exquisite gems quietly clamour for my attention, but the jagged, snowcapped mountains, towering against a flawless blue sky, boldly demand it. I sip my coffee, shoulders relaxed, and turn up the volume of Alanis Morissette's, *Jagged Little Pill*. The smile sneaking across my face coincides with a gradual awareness that this synchronization of stimuli is bliss.

I am peaceful. Invigorated. Free.

But I had stumbled and plummeted before soaring.

I was attending Queen's University devouring language and psychology courses, along with a scrumptious side dish of extracurriculars. I was sated. Then my mother's relentless mantras duped me. She repeated, "You have no career plan. At a minimum, a law degree will look good on your résumé." She insisted that security and prestige were invaluable, while exploration was frivolous and unpredictable. Naively, I settled down and swapped my arts and science program for an endless stream of mind-numbing legal cases at Osgoode Hall Law School.

Daily, I drove, zombie-like, across the concrete landscape and battled the bitter wind tunnel that connected the parking lot to the university. The disenchantment with my surroundings extended to the hyper-competitive students, aptly suited for this adversarial profession. The professors' demands drained me. At night, drenched in anguish and regret, I slept restlessly. Dread shadowed my tomorrows.

I surrendered to this deprived existence, year after soul-crushing year. Contributing to the legal aid clinic, talent shows, and seminars provided some sustenance. Still, like the inmate volunteering in the prison library, I was biding my time. Thoughts of escape prevailed. Five years of legal training culminated in my call to the Bar, and commemorated the utter loss of my academic enthusiasm and spirit. Depressed, directionless, and starving, I was at an impasse. I dismounted the hamster wheel in search of nutrients that would heal my offended gut.

Applications to adventure travel companies write and deliver themselves. I am optimistic that the exclusive Butterfield & Robinson will hire me to lead their cycling tours through France. My résumé boasts the complete package: avid cyclist, bilingual, law degree. Thanks mom.

One afternoon, Dick Gottsegen, an American lawyer, phones me. He is the trailblazer of Timberline Adventures, a mom-and-pop operation devoted to hiking and biking through the mountains, canyons, and deserts of western North America. The interview, or rather banter, begins. Dick ridicules my Canadian accent and the Canadian dollar; I mock American politics. Dick shares the tenets of his vision: challenge guests with unparalleled experiences in sacred lands, luxury accommodations and fine foods are overrated, laughter is compulsory. Dick's character and his tales of the Grand Tetons and Canadian Rockies entice me. The next day, Butterfield & Robinson offers me my dream job. I box up conventions and external voices, along with my legal books. Unpredictably, I bid au revoir to France and take flight to Timberline.

Unchained from the law and en route to my first tour, I am high with anticipation. In the course of three trips, I hike the Grand Canyon from rim to river to rim, conquer the Going-to-the-Sun road in Glacier National Park, and cycle to Moraine Lake and Lake Louise. I am

hooked. Like the air, my mind clears with each ascending footstep. I shift gears and reach my cadence sweet spot. My journal gushes, "Each day, I feel more like my true self.... I vibrate at a different frequency here." My spirit renews; I am filled with vigour, foreign to legal life. I zestfully haul bikes, lug suitcases, and converse with guests. This exertion, combined with mind-blowing, ten-mile climbs, lulls me to sleep.

I return perennially. I will not voluntarily surrender this nourishment, and neither will the guests. They implore me to reveal my favourite tour so they can guarantee their next fabulous trip. How can I choose between the kaleidoscope of wildflowers atop Logan's Pass; the exhilaration of dangling off Angel's Landing among Zion's vermillion cliffs; or the otherworldly trek through Havasu Canyon to the majestic Mooney Falls? I advise, "Close your eyes. Flip open the brochure. Point. Done."

Dick's unreliable schedules and hand-drawn maps are as challenging as the ascents. Lost hotel reservations, lost bikes, and lost minds are also part of the adventure. I strand the guests after filling the van with diesel fuel rather than regular. I am barred from re-entering Canada with an American-leased vehicle, and forced to sleep in the van overnight. Dick's comedy routines kill with my mishaps. My first attempt at a bike repair, guided by an incessantly highlighted manual, remains his favourite bit. When on a roll, he mischievously recaps that my hire was purely pragmatic. "Legally, I needed a native for the Canadian destinations. She had four limbs, she held a Canadian passport, quite frankly, she simply fit the bill." One year, I suggest to Dick a brief guiding stint. He retorts, "What will you do instead? Watch Oprah and eat bonbons?" I stay the season.

Dick doles out insightful advice in the same manner as his jokes—with affection. We share an affinity for daybreak and coffee, and can often be seen skulking around a hotel or viewpoint, savouring sunrises and the absence of guests. Dick's physical prowess is camouflaged with cotton athletic attire from a bygone era. He is a magnetic, yet unpretentious leader, and a role model for steering your own wheels.

By courageously leaping after my passions and the unknown, I discover the natural world, kindred souls, strength, and resiliency. This spiritual awakening reverberates.

Decades later, Alanis Morissette resounds while I tend to neverending homemaking obligations. Blissful mountain memories flood and soothe me, and then unsettle me. My current routine is bland. I crave flavour and spice. It is time to elevate again.

To Dance, To Live

MARENA BRAY

DO YOU remember the most significant moment in your life? Do you remember the second most significant moment in your life? For me, both those moments include highland dancing. I'll begin with the second most significant moment. As most know, injuries are a commonplace problem in any high-intensity sport and while some are lucky enough to never have this problem, I am not so fortunate. Mine happened just last year on an unusually warm day in March. Being at Queen's at the time, I was taking lessons with a new instructor on Wednesday nights. Up until that point I hadn't suffered any pain, except for the usual aches of working muscles, since the summer. It started like any usual class: I got to the studio 20 minutes early to stretch and it all progressed as usual. The only major difference is that for some reason I felt inspired to push myself a little harder that day and evidently I did so just a little too much. During the second-last dance of the night, I was having a hard time performing one of the steps. After going through it a few times by myself (hop-brush-beatbeat, high-cut and high-cut, hop-brush-beat-beat, big high-cut and leap, repeat) I was ready to put it to the music again. Unfortunately, this time, while landing on the ball of my foot for the last leap of the step, something pinched or seized or cracked, and a reoccurring injury that has plagued me before had returned.

Now let me back it all up a bit to what I consider to be the most significant day of my life. My dance career started seventeen years ago

when I first walked into the dance studio as a short and stout four year old. I had only seen highland dancing in a commercial on TV for the Glengarry Highland Games in my small home town of Maxville, Ontario. The only thing I came to learn at the end of that dance class was how to hold my arms correctly and how to jump from one foot to another. Little did I know that that single dance class would alter my life. I went on to dance three times a week, plus practices at home, to competing monthly and making unforgettable memories.

Highland dancing is a high-intensity sport that started in Scotland, carried over to North America, and grew popular in Eastern Ontario. I was fortunate to grow up in a town of Scottish heritage, making my choice of dance very popular. We are solo competitors whose main goal is to become the World Champion at the Worlds competition in Scotland. Unfortunately, I have never met this goal, mainly because of injuries.

Back to my foot and the bizarre injury. They typically say that in high-intensity sports reoccurring injuries happen over time, but fortunately and unfortunately for me, all it took was one wrong jump. The biggest difference this time around is that I knew I had done damage and I actually wanted to know what was wrong with my feet. Doctor after doctor told me it was possibly a stress fracture, but the fracture wasn't showing up on the x-ray scans. What then? The only other possibilities were arthritis or weak joints. Both are not plausible and both would end my dance career. There is no possible way for me to describe the pain. I can walk just fine, but any jarring movement to the ball of my foot results in aching, and then a shooting pain from my big toe to big tarsals in my foot. Isn't that the problem with pain, though? It's so hard to describe and it's different to every person.

My life was suddenly filled with an absence. An absence of dancing, which then led to an abundance of something else. This new abundance was of longing. I had a longing to return to something that had been a part of me for so long. A longing to return to my ghillies and jump around once more. The pain in my foot is a constant reminder that I desire the thing that hurts me most. Isn't it funny how one small moment can be so catastrophic? How one small moment can turn out to be so significant in your life?

I have now spent almost a year off dancing. I still have absolutely no answers about my injury. This means I cannot work out properly, as cardio is almost impossible. So I focus on other things that interest me, like my English degree and my extracurricular activities, but it's still impossible to forget. There's that whole cliché that you don't know what you have until it's gone and as much as I want to discredit it, it's so true. Some days I don't even feel like I'm the same person without dancing in my life. And of course there are other things I can do; I still go to the dance competitions and cheer on my dance school, I volunteer to help out at the competitions, and I always offer to teach classes whenever I'm home. But there's something about doing it myself. There's something about executing the movement a hundred times and perfecting it slightly each time. There's something about wearing my dance kilt and ghillies on a stage in front of a judge. I mean really there's something about just knowing that I can do something without causing my body and injury site pain.

At this point in my life, I am preparing to graduate and hopefully embark on some life-changing journey that will lead to a career and a life outside of education. I always thought I'd be preparing to retire from dancing around this time and starting my own dance school. As it stands, I'm prepared to try to start up dancing again while doing some teaching on the side. As far as my injury goes, I don't know where it stands and I may never know. I can start off slow and work myself back up to where I was, with periods of rest as needed. Pain will always be a concern, but determination and strength will always prove to be more resilient in my life. So in the end, is it the good things in life that keep us going as a species, or is it the pain that persuades us to move forward?

Yet Another Piece

about a Millennial's Wanderlust

REBECCA CUTHBERT

SPENT a lot of my final year of undergrad on a bus, or waiting at an Lairport gate, or trying to sleep comfortably across two coach seats. I was fortunate enough to be able to study in southeast England for four months through an international program that is offered at my alma mater, Queen's University. During my time abroad, one of the main weekend activities—besides drinking cheap beer and playing darts at the campus pub—was travelling around Europe with people I had only known for a few weeks. We were all young North Americans caught up in the excitement of how close everything is in relation to each other in Europe, and we would not allow ourselves to pass up the opportunity to hop on a bus for £30 and end up almost anywhere else for a few days. Needless to say, four months of moving around a continent resulted in our taking a lot of public transportation to get to one place or the next: I went on many coaches and trains all around England, a very long bus drive that included a stint on the Chunnel to Bruges, a train to Brussels, a flight to Madrid, a supertrain to Barcelona, and countless taxis and subways within each city to get to various tourist spots.

It was everything I ever wanted for myself. I grew up idolizing an older cousin of mine that spend the majority of her twenties living in a lot of different places. She came out of her experiences with fluency in two new languages, breathless pictures, and a lot of amazing stories that she shared with me whenever she was in Canada. I wanted to be

just like her. I still want to be like her. England was the start of everything for me.

All that time staring out the window of a coach or train stereotypically reflecting on life actually does lead to some pretty interesting revelations that one can only come to understand through the experiences of travelling. Many people will regale you with tales of how a beautiful cathedral or witnessing an ancient ritual was such a transformative experience for them. Where they go on a trip is definitely important, but a lot of people tend not to focus on the importance of how they got there in the first place. About a month into my semester abroad, three of my friends and I booked bus tickets to Belgium for the following weekend. Our bus left Victoria station in London late on Thursday and got us into Bruges very early on Friday morning. All I wanted to do the whole trip was sleep so that when I woke up, I could be magically transported to another country. But our bus driver was the type of person who loved his job and revelled in chatting with his passengers throughout the trip. Now this would not have been an issue for me, except that the man enjoyed including the whole bus over the PA system if he found the conversation was particularly funny. Eventually I gave up on the idea of sleep, and I sat back to watch this man's genuinely enthusiastic interactions with the rest of the passengers. After a while I realized that this man loved the fact that his job allowed him to meet people from all over the world who spoke as many different languages as the three he spoke fluently himself. So here I was, staring at the northern French countryside zoom pass my window, as French, English, Flemish, and even a little Hungarian was spoken all around me. The significance of that moment did not occur to me until two weeks later when I was in the airport in Barcelona trying to catch a flight I was late for and was hopelessly lost because I do not know any Spanish or Catalan. Language is a huge part of travel that can either push you and get you to engage with the people around you to learn a little bit more about the world (like my Belgium bus driver), or it can be a barrier from making a flight on time and not sweaty from running through the airport.

But a twentysomething year old writing about her travels and all the things it taught her along the way is so common today that the question, "What is with my generation's wanderlust?" cannot be ignored. I could throw out all sorts of statistics about how student debt is on the rise as unemployment rates for young people continues to look abysmal in the current job market. I could cite article after article that contains the newly accepted "twentysomething" term and discusses how my generation is facing the hardest transition from student life to working life compared to any generation that came before. And you know what? All those articles are true. Life right now for young people is extremely difficult, but hasn't it always been hard? When has it ever been easy to shed the support of childhood and face the daily dance of adult responsibilities? So what's up with the millennial wanderlust and travel craze? Why is it that right now I can list at least a dozen of my friends who have graduated and are currently living in a foreign country, or are about to graduate with me and have plans to "just travel, man, all over Asia and maybe some of Africa as well"? Wanderlust has become this generation's new tool for putting off facing that moment no one can turn back from—adulthood.

Am I also a victim of this so-called "travel craze"? I wouldn't try to deny it even if I didn't just spent the first half of this piece discussing four months spent in Europe. I think it's obvious that I am very much caught up in my wanderlust, and my biggest problem right now is that once I walk across that stage, all I want to do is take off again. But I've also been offered a full-time investment job that could give me everything that I'm supposed to be striving for: money, stability, and social respect for being a contributing member of society. What's my solution? I have zero ideas. All I can do is send out a plea to any of my older readers to actively support any twentysomething's wanderlust that may be in your life right now, because this shit is hard.

No Escape

JAMES DURHAM

HAVE YOU ever felt trapped in your own head, unable to escape the never-ending doubting questions that dog your every move? Well let me trap you in mine....

7.30 a.m. the alarm clock emits its shrill, squawking sound, jolting me from my sleep. I blearily crack an eyelid and take in the pale, gray morning light as it filters in through my window. Another day, another trial. It's now 7.31 a.m. and the alarm is still blasting. I roll over and contemplate hitting the snooze button and returning to my restful sleep, versus leaping out of bed with the vigour and immediacy of the alarm that roused me. If stay in bed—the far more attractive option—I know that once I rise, I will be doomed to a half-asleep weariness for the remainder of the day, dragging me further and further down until I finally succumb to the relief of sleep at the day's end. However, if I awaken now, I will be faced with a whole host of issues requiring my immediate attention to a degree I am not yet awake enough, or prepared, to contemplate.

7.32 a.m. and the alarm shrieks on, forcing me to make the first defining decision of my day. Finally answering its unending and urgent insistence for response, I turn off the alarm and slowly drag myself from my warm, soft sheets into the cold, harsh reality of the day. While this was not my first choice, I feel relieved that, for once, I have adhered to my doctor's recommended sleep schedule; although how much of a sleep schedule am I really following if it has hardly even

been established? My doctor has long since been a proponent of establishing a routine as a means to ensure mental stability, but to me, this seems strangely paradoxical. How can one establish a routine without the mental stability necessary to do so? I mean, listen to me; I can barely convince myself to get out of bed, let alone develop a comprehensive daily routine.

As it stands now, I have a limited routine in which I am secure. Following my awakening, I shower and get dressed. Getting dressed is perhaps the most important, and nerve-wracking, part of what I have already established within my routine. It's something I take extreme care in; people often judge other individuals by their appearance, something I know all too well. Sometimes I wonder if they're even looking, but regardless, I meticulously select my costume for the day to make myself into the person I want to be seen as.

Some days this means covering up as much as possible. I would seek to be incognito, moving through the crowds, head down, keeping to my own, unseen and invisible. Other days I will try to influence my self-perception. I would dress flashily, experiment with new styles, seeking validation and approval from those around me, but I'd feel stripped to the bone, empty and neglected, if this effort should go awry or unnoticed. Today I have a job interview; I dress myself in upscale casual clothing, pulling my arms through a fitted button down, pushing my legs into a pair of cigarette-legged dark denim pants, and manipulating myself into a tailored vest—not a crease out of place.

I am now faced with one of the more challenging aspects of my morning routine: breakfast, or more broadly, my diet. These clothes I'm wearing are fitted; don't you understand the attention to your body that must be paid in order to maintain that fit? When you have no time to work out, what other option do you have than to skip meals? Despite this, I have been specifically instructed to eat breakfast everyday to maintain weight and manage the physical effects of my daily medication; the nausea that occurs if this is ignored can be unbearable and debilitating. Given the significance of the job interview ahead, I think it best not to risk the negative effects of my medication on an empty stomach. Whereas I may normally eat nothing or simply a bowl of cereal, today I choose to ensure my ability, and I prepare a full breakfast.

I open the fridge and take out a carton of eggs and the milk jug. I briefly contemplate the bacon but choose to forgo it; who really needs the extra fat anyway? Moving to the pantry I pull out a single packet of oatmeal, tear it open, and—not wanting to waste my energy finding a clean one—pour the oatmeal into the semi-clean cereal bowl from the night before. I pour the milk into the bowl, put the oatmeal in the microwave for exactly one minute and twenty-seven seconds, and return the milk to the fridge. While the oatmeal is in the microwave I crack two eggs in the pan and scramble them. Once the oatmeal and eggs are ready, I grab a banana out of the bowl on the counter, sit down at the table, and eat my breakfast while contemplating the job interview ahead; we'll be meeting in a coffee shop for the interview, I sincerely hope they don't expect me to order anything.

I finish my breakfast and get up from the table. Feeling self-consciously bloated, but energized, I carefully load my dishes into the dishwasher and begin to prepare myself to exit the house. I walk down the hall to the closet by the door and proceed to spend the next fifteen minutes deliberating over which jacket to wear, if I should wear a scarf, and what shoes go best with my attire. After trying on and taking off four different combinations, I eventually settle on a dark denim jacket, a pair of black kangaroo leather boots, and a scarf that seems to cover my neck and accentuate my jawline—I've always been self-conscious about my jawline. Finally somewhat satisfied with my appearance, I open the door and, with just the slightest hesitation, step out onto my front porch.

The sun is blinding, but fortunately I have a pair of sunglasses in my pocket; I take them out and cover my eyes with them. Suddenly, my neighbour calls out to me, and the function of the glasses becomes two-fold. At least now he won't be able to see my eyes darting everywhere, looking for any way to extricate myself from a conversation. I notice the time as we exchange the necessary pleasantries; it's now 9.00 a.m. My urgency to leave the conversation now has greater necessity beyond my personal aversion to small-talk; I'm going to be late for my job interview. I politely excuse myself from the conversation and begin walking briskly down the street to the bus stop, unable to fathom how it took an hour and a half to leave the house, and cursing myself for the idiosyncrasies that forced me into this position.

Here I have reflected upon the beginnings of my daily struggle *ad nauseam*, the constant influences in my effort to present myself a certain way. These are the daily stressors in my life, and this is the source of my meaningless and ineffectual anxieties from which there is no escape. What are yours?

The High Tower of Religion

The Struggle of Being a Christian in an Increasingly Secular Society

MICHAEL EDWARDS

The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. (Psalms 18.2)

In ONE step, I was made a human being without formed ideas, yet I am not denounced. When I began my journey to the light, I was just a child with a dream. I believed in everyday things such as music, sex, and fun, and I had plenty of ambitions to deal with too. My first thought became a transformation into a being of trust, wealth, and understanding. I am young, I am Michael, and I am defined by one word, a Christian. It was the year of my immigration arrival to Canada. I arrived with all my hopes and fears coupled with powerful inquiries about a new homeland, and my family were on hand at the Toronto Pearson airport. My mother was leading me with my bags at a breathless pace, filled with excitement that I carried with me as I passed easily through the barriers at Pearson. In fact, I remember the excitement of this initial visit to a foreign country, and how I would feel if I could get on with my life. I had always seen my travelling as part of an adventure into the unknown like a potholing expedition into a cave. I equally see living as a Christian in this Canadian material world,

and secular society as a kind of cave with a brighter ending, in which I remain unscathed while Christ holds my hand and walks with me.

Not long after my arrival, just eight months later, I am at a crossroads, and I witness my father's passing from prostate cancer. I feel his passing now as if it were just an illusion. It is like one piece of my favourite book, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In this book, published in 1844, Alexandre Dumas initiates us with the hero, Edmond Dantès, in a scene about the uselessness of humankind. It is a dark place like death, in which Edmond is imprisoned in torment for a crime he did not commit: "Edmond: Life is a storm, my young friend. You will bask in the sunlight one moment, be shattered on the rocks the next. What makes you a man is what you do when that storm comes. You must look into that storm and shout as you did in Rome." Though others disagree. Although I experience what some people call bereavement for the first time. It is more like loneliness; however it is far more than this, it is the end of my family structure, and yet I extol my new catholic faith, a new beginning.

Navigating the world, I was like the *Homo sapiens*, looking for my soul, and converted at once to the light, wherefore I became Homo religiosus, though some say, a new person. I face my storm now, psychic, pensive, post-adolescent, and powerful. I always travelled with my mother and father in lockstep fashion until now. We were at a new beginning, all neophytes to Canada's process, lifestyle, and people, so I embrace my family's challenges with immense gratitude to God. However, as a loved one disappears, I am forced to find strength in other things. I often referred to life's hollow chasm as my loneliness being indulgently placed at my table, because it seems like a flickering lamp of reflected dancing phantoms, or the illusion of peppers-ghost, or the vacant shadowy reflections of Plato's cave. I reserve judgment about my spiritual phenomena—the four horses of the apocalypse—in favour of cathexis. A loved one helps to dissolve secular doubts with vivid dialectic experiences. I remember that I love my parents so much, and nothing could fill that void. For example, one may consider meditating ambivalently through a social crisis of fulminating events by choosing one's allies. My act of contrition emanates from the Most High like a waterfall, an aurora, a morning mist, and a mountain amidst a rushing stream. My expeditious realm leads me to battle, I gather my thoughts, and spontaneously, I decide to turn to God for help. A ray of sunlight enters the room, while I am coming to terms with the state of war between mortality where humankind is vulnerable to death and immortality where death is impossible.

Historically, my bereavement is as the foreshadowing historical landscape of the great purge: Operation avalanche (1943), Operation torch (1942-43), and Operation overlord (1944); however, I begin to start praying at times for more strength to believe in Christ as my redeemer and my high tower—"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies: thou has anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over" (Psalms 23.5). I have decided that I should make the best of my life. One day, a friend finds me at public event, and he decides to let me play at ethno-cultural musical event. At my audition, I realize that I have a lot of talent just waiting to be heard, so I agree to play with some backing singers. Eventually, I am rehearing every week and touring the student bars. They were habitually francophone, lusophone, and usually anglo-canadian in nature. My musical ideas flow into my mind, filling me with peace as I learn to meditate about my inner soul. If, as Immanuel Kant argues, form is the a priori aspect of experience or innately acquired, then he enabled me to appeal to my innate knowledge of forms to define the nature in existence. Through my parental loss, I am forced to become in control of all my senses, so that I can eventually see that my spirituality is my guide (Emmons et al.).

At this point, I gain my wings and move onwards to surmount my weaknesses through prayer by meditating in silence. I felt that I was a social citizen of a new country or a brave new world. Renewed in faith, I sometimes just end up reciting prayer for specific needs in lieu of my supplication. I carry my religious hopes to comprehend my spiritual necessity to know God. The treatise of religion is a great step in a right direction towards discovering one's connection between religion and emotion within a group dynamic (Hume). Hobbes' *Leviathan* is a great masterwork like the great philosophers of Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, and Rauls known as "social contract theory." His work on moral philosophy established my awareness of relationships, sacrifice, and submission to authority or a sovereign power. For example, I believe that the authority of Love, gratitude, and joy are

among the signs of genuine spiritual experience (Hutch). I am driven to believe in God through my cathexis in this way and I learn how to fly.

My first three years in Toronto were positively calm, timid, and sedate in comparison with my move to Queen's University afterwards. I was resolute about choosing my local Roman Catholic Church in Kingston, Ontario, named "Our Lady Of Fatima Parish" near campus. Every Sunday, the pastor prepared a sermon beginning eclectically in Spanish, despite the fact it was a Brazilian patronage, and he would say, "Hello, How are you my friends? Today, we will look at the scripture, and pray for our community in Kingston. The love of God is like a community that accepts the truth as the word of God and like a community that does not hide affection," in the perfectionism of his loyal faith in the Holy Spirit. Typically, I perceive religious emotion to function by developing certain "feeling states" that provides intense positive emotions, humour, or euphoria. One may find positive emotions are distinguishable as patterns of one's parents' religious traditions. Interestingly, Proverbs 4.23 says, "Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life," because I needed to find new positive emotions, maybe I should find my niche first.

Before my steps become great strides, great expectations, and great powers, I realize my Tower, my Judge, and my God is with me. The Church on Division Street in Kingston is where I felt accepted, although I did not know of the complexity of the social hierarchy of Catholicism, community, and the far-reaching academia at Queen's—a real culture shock. I can remember feeling on elated each time I was seated at Church. I was gaining an open mindedness during my transcendence into the Queen's community. I recall that affective emotional regulation is causal, efficacious, and in top-down fashion (Murphy). I was like Ali Baba, a mystic, shouting into the mouth of cave, "Open Sésame," though a blinding light reveals my treasure. Catholics believe that to gain happiness of heaven we must know, love, and serve God in the temporal world. Religion was becoming as meaningful to me as the incarnation of the Son of God, a word-son made of physical flesh. I felt like a citizen of that the union of the trinity, and a united community of the same sacraments under the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff.

Moreover, I am sure that my years at Queen's are part of a divine plan to sustain my healing process with a transcendent being of theism. As a private individual with an academic goal, I am frequently exposed to multiculturalism, political themes, and various religions or emic model forms that appear as anthropological mimics of each other. Specifically, an emic relationship infers that two or more religions replicate information consisting of impressions that permeate varieties of the same allegoric essence (Neilson). My parapsychological phenomena, music, and degree subject in clinical studies exposed my mind to the efficacy and simplicity of the emic model of materialism, the public sector, syndication, social networks, urban multiculturalism, or social gentrification, not just Catholic devotion. My faith in God, or My High Tower, is the inner interface of my belief within human freedom (Neilson). My premises for spiritual state are duals; I am used to walking in dark cave, and entering a physical relationship with good friends. During my adolescence, I realized that marrying young is foolish, but I attempted it anyway without fear and alienation. In fact, the presence of strong transcendence, according to scholars, actually relies on a quest for knowledge about human limits (Nelson). In the novel The Count of Monte Cristo, Edmond Dantès learns that even he could not resurrect the dead; however, he still gains an advantage from knowing his limits in spite of retaining an elixir to heal human blemishes, illnesses, or wounds: "Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge" (Proverbs 14.26).

Certainly, I was no longer alone, but I had felt the burdens of family struggles quite young without really knowing how to cope. A Catholic state is not a quasi-religion like so many cults of North America. Catholic philosophy is not a form of hypnotherapy in which sovereignty is born from the mouths of politicians involved in fraudulent pyramidal schemes from an emic model of society. Christianity like Buddhism was a definite unique religion based on evidence promising spiritual resources of surety and usury by "devotional practices" (Neilson). It was a step to the contrasting etic model of unique religious doctrine (Neilson). In fact, monotheistic, etic religions like Catholicism posits an entire social evolution over millennia built on the evangelical Lutheran church doctrine of 95

theses, philosophy, and substantiated by the post-war theological church to endow all humankind with personal power, constitutional rights, family values, and moral independence.

At the final stage of my transformation, like the first step of life, brings the joy of triumph, acceptance, and eternal life. Plato did not believe that a superficial shadow of real things constitutes knowledge it only leads to ignorance, blindness, and secularism. Neither did the Apostle Paul, who wrote humankind "sees through a glass darkly"—a mirror by casting off the obscure or imperfect vision of reality. For although we do not now see clearly, at the end of time, we shall do so. My career studies at Queen's University are like the coming of knowledge and perfect vision. However, working in the public and private sector as a consultant preoccupied my daytime hours in a different kind of perspective. Although a workplace religious ethos had both positive and negative impacts on workers, employers were narrow-minded, covetous, and stingy. On the positive side, many religious service providers found a reduction in funding, ample public vigilance, yet hostile student work conditions, but at least a framework to deal with discrimination (Mitchell et al.). On the negative side, the pluralistic approach to religious value systems within the workplace could not go far enough. Therefore, considering that as a Christian, I had lost status as a result of the legal framework of human rights in Canada, I prayed for redemption more than most (Mitchell et al.).

In the beginning, I used to play in some musical bands of my youth to pass the time. Although in Toronto my musical appearances became my cultural contribution to the Latin-Afro American community, my mother was my greatest fan, and still my best friend! She would come to my concerts even when it seemed like an uneventful time. She was a pillar of righteousness that gave me the strength to overcome my father's death, shortly after we arrived in Canada. Similarly, the Immaculate Conception provided Catholics with pastoral care by manifesting stronger parental bonds. My pastoral relationships are ultimately a fortress, an immortal bond, and a friendship with Christ that never ends in death—my High Tower is God. It is better to try to be perfect than never to try at all. The treatise of Christianity symbolizes the divine power that raises me out of my loneliness, my darkness, my worst fears, and my sadness to place my life in a fortress

of light (Hume)—My sanctuary, and My High Tower of religion. Proverbs 13.20 says, "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." Therefore, at last, I emerge from my seemingly insignificant place in my life, psychologically prepared (Emmons). I am reborn from out of the chaos of bereavement swooping like an orb of despair, broken heartedness, and a political periphery of secularism. All misery has been transplanted with new moral depth, academia, faith, and union through the Holy Spirit.

Unfortunately, my brave new world had been a sinister place of secularism, recrimination, and lifelessness. Government public service had syndicated white-collar crime filling the news with tales of Satanism. The Canadian press misunderstood the old serpent to be a "law-abiding" citizen, shouting in Montreal streets that, "Most Satanists seem law-abiding" when a public building was vandalized with Nazi vs. Jews or Afro-Americans. Hence ignorance led to all manner of ungodly hubris that swarm even the Healthcare public sector with riots, strikes, verbal abuse, vandalism, fraud, and criminal negligence. However, Catholicism has survived even the past decades during the social unrest known as Armageddon from the era of World War II, pitted against Hitler's fascism, sectarianism, holocaust, and slavery, or more recently during organized crime, syndicated crime, immorality, natural disaster, bioterrorism, racism, hunger, famine, and perpetual injustice. Disaster has been transplanted in war, and no longer exists. God has replaced my doubts and tribulations with a seed of sentience, hope, transcendence, and vision. Christ died for my sins to grant the religious rights which are a gift of power from a fortress, and a high tower of Eternal life (Romans 4.25).

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Sipping in Nature

KELLY FITZMAURICE

TO MY eye, summer is the destination on a seasonal journey. Blooms transpire, colour permeates, and breezes bequeath exotic, winged fauna. Celebrated by the convergence of *Archilochus colubris*, the ruby-throated hummingbird, and the nectar of *Cannaceae*, the canna lily, summer is the junction of energy, vibrancy, history, and nature.

Hummingbirds are small, colourful birds with iridescent feathers. Their name comes from the fact that they flap their wings so fast that they make a humming noise.... They have a specialized long and tapered bill that is used to obtain nectar from the centre of long, tubular flowers. ("Basic")

This morning, I cherish a tapered, hand-painted mug decorated with the solitary image of a hummingbird in flight—hovering colour, red-throat in sunlight, an artist's rendition of Beauty-with-wings guarding the nectar—and sip the strong, hot contents. I note how the sunlight shimmers upon the dew and feel the warmth of the day as it eases into my blood. My eagerness to shed winter and indulge its successor, just a few months ago, returns in unencumbered reflection.

Like a map of new beginnings, April tantalizes: each year I unfold it, gently smooth the creases, and wonder if this year's sojourn will be unlike any other. With this in mind, I head for the hall closet at our front entry. Tossing a few craft items, some old winter boots, and a laptop bag aside, I lift the lid off the old, gray tote that has been stashed for the last half-year. Nested between layers of outdated newspapers, the canna rhizomes explode with life. Maroon-tipped buds stretch for daylight while fragile roots angle for soil. A musty earthiness swirls, as if from a tomb, and I inhale: past and present mingle with intent. Old roots, set as withered evidence of previous glory, lay brown and dead, pale against this year's vibrant providers of sustenance and anchorage that burst from stored energy.

Among the long-distance migrants are the ruby-throated hummingbird, which breeds as far north as southern Canada and occasionally reaches western Panama in winter. Some ruby-throats evidently cross the Gulf of Mexico, on a continuous flight of more than 500 miles. (Skutch)

Spring's greeting is generous no matter how tardy its arrival. Sunlight and warmth nudge the wind and the trees as earth climbs out from under the snow. Rain teases on a regular basis, stirring the worms from their beds, while birds gorge on the spoils. Water runs through the forest and in the creek beds like a marathoner through the streets, well-seasoned and prepared for the route ahead. Grass pokes and prods its way to the surface, to pronounce, finally, its hard-fought crowning in light.

With tote in tow, across the yard I stride. Gallon pots, already cleaned and prepared, wait purposefully in the greenhouse. As if on their own, with no help from my brain, my hands tackle each rhizome, breaking it into smaller sections. Rot is cut away with a knife. I place each new section in a pot, cover it with growing medium, and then water it in. Native to tropical and sub-tropical areas, the canna likes it hot and humid. If left in the ground to overwinter, in Eastern Ontario, the rhizomes decay; if planted outdoors too early in spring, the new and tender leaves risk damage from exposure to frost.

Once in North America, migration proceeds at an average rate of about 20 miles per day, generally following the earliest blooming of flowers hummingbirds prefer.... The northward

migration is complete by late May. Banding studies show that each bird tends to return every year to the same place it hatched, even visiting the same feeders. (Chambers)

Transitioning the cannas from pots on benches in a sheltered greenhouse, to roots freely and firmly settled in the garden beds, is caressed with uncertainty; like a farewell hug that asserts all will be well—hopefully. I put them in the same place I put them last year, and the year before that. Close to the tall cedars where the hummingbirds like to nest. Close to the watering hose, in case of drought. Close to the deck where I find myself captive in reminiscence.

The nest is the size of a large thimble, built directly on top of the branch rather than in a fork. It's made of thistle or dandelion down held together with strands of spider silk and sometimes pine resin.... The nest takes 6-10 days to finish and measures about 2 inches across and 1 inch deep. ("Ruby-Throated")

The waiting is the hardest part. Like a silk strand woven with deliberation, time elongates; there is no hurrying the outcome. Dandelions beckon and retreat, chicks uncloak, poppies unfurl, and daylilies wave. Alas, it is the mid-year sun that unfolds the artistry of the cannas—luminous, burgundy giants capped in vermillion-tinged flasks of nectar—form and function, elegance and charm, exposed in concert.

Today is beauty day. It's not just the spikes of bright, red-orange, inflorescences capping the thick, dark stems that are now taller than I am. Nor is it the tiny, darting hummingbirds learning life-long lessons about flight and nectar before tackling the long journey home. Like dappled light in a forest, diffused energy enhances what might otherwise be overlooked. As daylight hours wane, chestnut-like seed pods on the cannas will ripen and split, and the hummingbirds will make their way south again: the cannas will prepare for another winter's sleep and I will retreat from the garden, relinquishing summer's spell in exchange for the promise of another spring to come.

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Bear Stories

KATHLEEN FLEAR

HEARD the first bear story when I was eighteen years old. At the Ltime, I was volunteering for a poorly run wild horse sanctuary in Lake Isabella, from which I ended up having to escape. My rescuers, and the bear storytellers, were an elderly couple named Kathleen and George. They did not only teach me to be wary of bears, they also taught me that life is an adventure composed of various stories that, sometimes, conclude in the most unexpected ways. I met George the day he came to fix a computer at the ranch. I helped him pry a monitor out from a heap of miscellaneous things in the front room. The owner of the ranch, Nadia, was an avid hoarder. Her house consisted of a massive, heaping messes—I had to create a narrow path to my bedroom by shoving aside piles of arcane horse magazines, birdhouses, and unused kitchenware. It was as if she sought to comfort herself by creating a nest of misfit items, but in reality, her messy house was only serving the purpose of burying her alive. When I managed to pry the broken monitor out from under a slouching desk with a crowbar, George handed me a piece of paper with his number on it in exchange for the spoils I had retrieved for him.

"This is a terrible place for a young girl to live," he said as he looked at me. He had a clarity in his eyes and a blunt honesty in his voice that a person can only acquire from age. I didn't know it then, but I had made a friend. I also didn't know that I would use the number he

gave me a lot sooner than intended: I called him a week later after Nadia drunkenly yelled at me for using a Tupperware container.

On my first night at Kathleen and George's house, they tried to take my mind off Nadia, who had been sobbing on her knees beside my half-filled suitcase earlier that morning, by inviting some of their friends over dinner. Bear stories were the subject of the conversation. Kathleen and George told a story about how, many years ago, a bear wandered onto their campsite during a trip in Wyoming. Kathleen was the first one to spot it. She ran into the car shouting: "Bear!" and tried to slam the door behind her, but it was stuck. Terrified for her life, she concentrated all her strength into trying to close the door again. She tried to slam the door multiple times before she realized that it was George who was obstructing her safety, because she had been closing the door on his arm. Once George managed to get in the car and assess his aching arm, the bewildered couple watched the bear listlessly nose around in their fire-pit before meandering off their campsite. As I got to know them better, I discovered that their whole life had been as adventurous as that road-trip to Wyoming. They had met each other in their early twenties and drove from New York to Las Vegas to get married within a month of knowing each other. And the 53 years they have spent together since has been filled with stories they can only tell together.

My bear story did not measure up to the other stories shared that night and, retrospectively, it probably wasn't true. The table continued to share bear stories each wilder than the last, until I eventually chimed in:

"Once my family was driving through Algonquin Park. They were on a road in a forest when an alarm went off on the dash that said 'bear alert." Everyone at the table started to laugh, and Kathleen went and got a little plastic medal she had won in a baking contest and put it around my neck. My bear story is a good representation of the impressionable stage that I was in: my parents were obviously joking about the bear alarm, but I had not only believed their story, I had related it to others as if it were true. During the two months I spent with Nadia, I allowed her to exploit me. I did not leave her ranch sooner because I wanted to believe the lies she told me about wanting to help her horses. After the dinner party, I spent the next two weeks at

Kathleen and George's house before flying home to Canada. In that time, I learned about the exemplary life they had lived together: George was a retired rocket engineer for NASA, and the couple enjoyed past times like going to Burning Man and taking uncharted road trips into the heart of the Midwest. The day I left California, I was torn. I was leaving the horrible ranch behind me, but I was also leaving Kathleen and George: the people I had grown to love. I wasn't sure if my California experience was the best or the worst thing that had ever happened to me.

I was fortunate enough to share my first real bear story with Kathleen and George. Since they rescued me, I have gone back to visit them every year. And in 2014, we went on a life-altering road trip up the coast of California and then back down through the mountainous span of the state's interior. The five days I spent with them on the road made me feel like they had integrated me into the larger road trip of their life. We were a few hours from returning to Lake Isabella when we decided to take a detour through Kennedy Meadows. The spring fields were covered with light green prairie grass that would soon be turned yellow by the summer sun. I was thinking about how amazing our road trip had been, while watching the landscape roll by, when I spotted them: "Bears!" I yelled. George stepped on the brakes and we skidded to a stop on the side of the road. I quickly got out of the car and found myself standing in awe of the large, dark creatures. However, it was not their rugged splendour or their wildness that awed me, it was their placement: both geographically and in time. They were here, at the end of our road trip, as if an omnipotent author had written them into our story, as a gesture to the beginning of our friendship. It seemed like an oddly full-circle moment, a real-life conclusion: our relationship had begun with bear stories and now we had one together.

Coming Home to Avenal

OLIVIA GARCIA

DON'T know if it was the cobble roads, small picket fences, or the vineyards peeking through the tiled roofs and the sun shining in, but it felt like home. The houses on either side of the road were so close it felt like I could stick my arm out of the car and shake someone's hand while they were sitting in their living room. The houses were side by side, but not in the cookie-cutter way. The colours ranged from vibrant blues, to yellows and pinks, to the occasional white. I sat in the back of the van in awe. Passing the run-down and character-filled homes, I noticed a few people standing outside a lovely little tiled place, staring into the car. My dad rolled down his window to say hello. Within moments, the two heftier women in head-to-toe black looked stunned. "Miguel!" they both exclaimed with shock. I looked through the rearview mirror and saw my dad's eyes well up as he smiled.

This was the place I spent my whole life dreaming about coming to: my dad's home town in Avenal, Portugal. My dad, mom, sister, Avó (my dad's mother), and I had come to Portugal for a three-week vacation. As exciting as it was for the rest of us, it was the most moving for my dad. In 1967, at the age of eight, he, his parents, and two older sisters packed up all their belongings and left their quaint little home town of three hundred people for a better life in Canada. He came back a few times after moving, but at this point he hadn't been back in thirty-eight years. I was surprised to discover how short thirty-

eight years could feel. We got to watch him revisit old places, friends, and memories. We got to watch him revisit home.

My mom, sister, and I had all spent a majority of our lives listening to my dad tell stories about when he was a young boy, and all the mischief he got up to. I had this perfect little picture of Avenal in my head, and it exceeded all those expectations.

My dad was already talking to one of the elders in the town by the time I fumbled my way out of our massive rental van. It was astounding to me how they could remember him after all these years. I sheepishly strolled up to them with my sister as he introduced us. "Hello," I said politely, shaking the woman's worked-in hand. She had a rugged yet soft look about her, like any European grandmother does. She and my dad caught up for a little more, but we eventually started to walk towards his old home. It was a ways up the hill as my sister, mom, Avó, dad, and I began our tour of Avenal.

The man pointed out every building and every memory he could think of, fondly reminiscing about being a kid again. As we made our way down from his house, his eye caught a building and started to laugh. It had been abandoned for years: the shingles on the roof were slipping off, and the vines on the white walls were climbing beyond where they could. "This is the infamous roof I fell off of," my dad said with a chuckle while shaking his head. Countless times my sister and I were told about when my dad was ten, he was visiting his aunt and uncle back in Avenal. One day he was helping his uncle clean the tiles when his foot slipped from underneath one, falling two painful storeys to the ground. His next memory was waking up in the hospital the next day. It was a Sunday, and everyone around him was dressed in formal white clothing, and my poor little father thought he had ended up in heaven.

This wasn't even close to the only story my dad had about a neardeath experience. He always told us about how when he was six he fell off a rented bike at the beach, saw his knee bone, but kept on moving because he only had half an hour left to rent. He jumped off walls way too high, slid down railings into concrete, and slipped over grapes when working for his grandfather.

Working for his grandfather was the most important thing for my five-year-old father. He spent his summer days in little shorts,

squishing grapes through his toes for wine for hours on end. "Well, I was a serious part of the business, I would like to say," my dad would always joke about sternly. We knew he was joking, but I truly think five-year-old Miguel thought he was a primary asset to the winemaking business in all of Portugal.

We continued our journey through his town, as he reunited with not old only friends, but old mentors. It was a warm feeling for my whole family. This man we know and loved so dearly was finally able to go back to where he came from, something he never really got to experience before. We all felt so fortunate to get to do this with him.

At one point my father and I split off from the others, and as we were strolling and pointing, we saw a gentleman standing in the street. He looked up from under his dark-brimmed hat at my dad, smiled a toothless yet genuine smile, and hobbled over, a cane in hand. That was the happiest I had seen my dad all day. They reminisced, and as they did, the gentleman pointed to the cobble alleyway to our left, grey and run down, and my dad started to cry. With curiosity and anticipation, I tugged on his shirt in hopes of a translation. "He just told me he still remembers the day my mom and dad were dragging me up this road," he said through sombre eyes, "I was crying and screaming that the last thing I wanted to do was go to Canada."

It was at that moment, after all the stories about him growing up, that I realized how hard it really was for him. I can't imagine being that young, and pulled away from a life of nothing but freedom and fun, in such a small and magical place. Even though I know that when my dad's family immigrated, they were happy and nothing but excited for a better life, a part of me still weeps for an innocent eight year old being told home was no longer home.

Searching for the Real Bangladesh

COREY GOLDBERG

MASSIVE pile of rubble covers the Rana Plaza in Savar, Bangladesh. Thousands of people anxiously watch as uniformed emergency workers struggle to free people from beneath a tomb of concrete and dust. A woman cries, holding a framed photograph of her family against her chest. "The collapse on April 24th, 2013 killed more than 1130 people in what is one of the world's worst industrial accidents to date," says a faceless narrator.

Since well before the country gained independence in 1971, the international media has, for the most part, featured only negative stories about Bangladesh. In fact, with the exception of occasional articles about Bangladesh cricket, nearly every piece of international journalism on Bangladesh from practically every news source around the world focuses on one of the country's many problems.

As a result of this adverse coverage by the media, most of the westerners I have spoken to know very little about the Bangladesh beyond the odd "factoid" about the country's poverty, or notoriously poor labour standards. What is more, these people and their information are often correct. Indeed, living and working conditions can be truly nightmarish for many Bangladeshi people.

When I told my friends last December that my girlfriend Alice and I would be backpacking through Bangladesh for nearly three weeks, it was no surprise that their reactions were less than encouraging. I myself, having conducted some research on Bangladesh, felt highly

apprehensive. My mind was filled with images of the Rana Plaza tragedy. I could see lifeless bodies, swathed in white cloth, and lined up along the muddy streets of Savar. Making travel plans from the distant comfort of my Bangkok apartment, I feared what I might encounter in South Asia. Nevertheless, a passionate seeker of unrestricted truth, I was determined to add a local perspective to my mass-media-based perception of Bangladesh.

On my first day in Dhaka, Bangladesh, I was overpowered by the chaotic meeting of more than nine million individual aspirations. Under the mind-altering influence of Dhaka's typhonic embrace, my senses were simultaneously dulled and magnified by a ceaseless Blitzkrieg of unfamiliar and exotic stimuli. Losing myself in the sheer magnitude of human activity, I found Bangladesh's energetic capital to be as much a psychostimulant as it is a city.

Aside from its massive population, the first thing that stood out to me about Dhaka was the city's peculiar organization. Towed through Dhaka's busy streets like a triumphant roman conqueror by a manpowered rickshaw, I noted that the city's arrangement is more resembling of an exaggerated Costco than a surging metropolis. In fact, like the different aisles of a warehouse store, each individual area of Dhaka seems more or less dedicated to the sale of a specific type of item (bedframes, shoes, books, etc.). This unique municipal arrangement was not something I had ever read about Dhaka.

Home to an array of vibrant colours, mystifying sounds, and unearthly smells both foul and fragrant, Dhaka's Old City is almost certainly the most fascinating area in Bangladesh's capital from the perspective of a tourist. Fruit sellers, cigarette vendors, and consumer goods peddlers line the stone walkways on both sides of Old Dhaka's permanently congested streets. Hidden behind these thrifty merchants, alluring restaurants, and independent shops containing all types of miscellaneous goods occupy the ground floors of countless multi-storey buildings, painted in crayon shades of green, blue, and pink, or proudly displaying colonial stone. A flood of Bengalis endlessly spill from half a million narrow alleyways, and from within the hustling crowd, many people enthusiastically wave at Alice and me, fervently shouting, "How are you?" The restaurants, as well, call to me with rich aromas of chicken and spice.

My first time trying Bangladeshi-style chicken biryani in Dhaka's Old City was an experience of near religious transcendence. After baptizing my hands in the cold water of an exposed pipe, I returned to my table to where a steaming hot dish of tender chicken, succulent gravy, and delicate rice awaited me. Lavishly squeezing lime juice onto my food, I relished in the complementary scents of citrus and spice. Then, in local custom, I used my right hand to mix the Biryani, appreciating the distinct textures of rice, cinnamon bark, and cardamom seeds as they glided through my fingers. Finally, turning my hand into a large spoon, I began my heavenly feast. After completion, I packed my leftovers into a napkin to give to one of Dhaka's many indigent beggars.

I watched the sun set on my first day in Bangladesh from the roof of an abandoned Hindu mansion on the east bank of the Buriganga River. Beside me, arms crossed behind his back, standing with the excessively perfect posture exclusive of some South Asian men, was Zaflul, a Bengali student who had kindly volunteered to guide Alice and me through Dhaka that afternoon.

Zaflul explained to us that nearly all of the buildings we could see across the river were apparel manufacturing facilities. In Canada, we might call them "sweatshops." I observed only shadows beyond the buildings' arched windows. Unnerved, I looked to the many ships that were anchored on the western bank of the Buriganga. Based on the sporadic welding light coming from the ships, I could tell that I was seeing Bangladesh's notoriously deadly ship breaking yards.

As the last remnants of sunlight finally fell beneath the unending row of sweatshops, there was a moment of darkness. Then, one by one, the buildings began to light up. A dreadful thunderstorm of electric light emanated from the ship breaking yards. I felt a surge of emotion. Admittedly, it was a sight to behold, both beautiful and terrible. My naivety had finally converged with the reality of my quest for unrestricted truth. The real Bangladesh is not the eclectic playground I had experienced earlier that day, nor is it entirely the miserable hell I had seen on the news. Bangladesh is an uneasy combination of both these realities. For a long while, the three of us looked on, frozen in silence.

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Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

A Legacy of Mental Illness

FAITH GREEN

Lenter the world as if a twin to my father's mental illness. He is twenty-five, and I am twenty-four weeks' gestation. My family is prepared for neither arrival. I am a secret only recently told, and my father's "problems" are just as hushed. My grandmother hastily names me before I am whisked to Toronto in a wailing ambulance. She will spend years talking to specialist after psychiatrist after case-manager after social worker in an attempt to find a name for whatever ails my father. It has been ten years since his diagnosis, and I still can't spell correctly it on the first try. Schizophrenia.

My childhood is dappled with glorious highs and unendurable gloom, for which the blame can be placed on my spirited temperament. I am a very sensitive child, which seems to be sort of trademark among only children. My grandparents raise me. They navigate their dual responsibilities with grace and demonstrative affection, but I am still puzzled by a marked difference in our family make-up. Where is my dad? Is it a business trip? Is he working abroad? Is he travelling the world attempting to find and reconcile with my mother?

I am five or so when I feel as if I am "big enough" to ask questions. I ask why other families get to see their daddies every day. I get to see mine twice a year while my grandmother watches on with forced cheerfulness that does little to disguise the pinched look on her face. My father sees none of this. His eyes are a startling blue, but

vacant and ghostly. He holds my hand, but never speaks, too lost in himself to remember how to form the words. His mouth quivers as if to say my name, but he squeezes my fingers tighter in his tobacco-stained hands, instead. I learn to read silences just as well as junior chapter books.

I am told that my father is sick, and that he had to go away to get better. First, he lives in Brockville, and then in Ottawa, in a facility full of addicts who have tried to subdue their mental illness with whatever they could get on the streets. Most roam the facility in agitated dazes. I am frightened of many of them, though they are charmed by me, a frizzy-haired and knobby-kneed little thing. Once, one man tells me that I'm a "pretty girl." I blush and shuffle my feet, peeling my sweater away from my t-shirt, on which the sequins are arranged to nearly shout "DADDY'S GIRL" at any passerby. He chuckles. My father doesn't smile when I show him the same trick. "Do you like it, daddy?" I ask, my voice nearly inaudible. His head spasms, and I take it for a nod.

It is only after I start refusing to tell my grandmother when I feel poorly that she elaborates on his condition. Her eyes are solemn, but her mouth is twitching as she offers further explanation, if only to soothe my adamant howls. "I don't *want*—to be sick! I don't *want* to go-o-oooo-ooo away!" I sob. She tells me that I never, never will, but I wonder if the extra "never" was for my benefit, or her own.

Only once do I ask if it is catching, because I had just learned about germs, and they seemed to me a kind of invisible pet. "No," my grandmother answers, with a funny catch in her voice, after a considerable pause. Regardless, we watch and wait vigilantly in careful, measured silences by unspoken agreement, as if the wrong phrase could be some kind of trigger. There are only probable causes for schizophrenia and I am treated as if I am circumstantial evidence.

I'm told that I'm my mother all over again. I have her mouth, her chin, and her figure. But I have my father's eyes, and his obstinately high forehead. We have a cowlick in the same place, and our hair is curly all over, despite whatever we might try and use to tame it. For years, I wonder if that means there will be a broken part in my brain, too. I am nineteen before a mandatory psychology course puts my lingering fears to rest.

As a child, I spend hours amusing myself with whatever I might dream up, scribbling the best of them down on construction paper. One day, my grandmother catches me laughing. "What are you laughing at?" she asks, her voice uncharacteristically sharp. I shrug. She cups her hands under my chin, forcing me to look her in the eyes. Her questions become frantic. "Were you talking to yourself? Why? What were you laughing at?" she repeats, in a tone that I know will soon be followed by the dire pronouncement of my full name. This is the worst sort of scolding imaginable, even to my own ears. I twist, and say, "I was making stuff up in my head. There's the Sarah-girl, and she's funny!" By my own recollection, I court two imaginary friends, called Sarah and Jasmine, for a brief, mischievous period. My grandmother pales. "Don't," she spits. "I don't like it when you do that!" Suitably chastened, I nod. "I won't," I say. It is the first lie I ever tell her.

When my father comes home for Christmas that year, he can do something other grownups can't. He tells me that it is a secret, and that "they're after him for knowing" so I have to "keep it quiet." He tells me in spurts, in sync with the twitches on his face and the tremor in his hands. To this day, I have only told pen and paper. Other grownups seem to have a direct line to Santa Claus, or to the Easter Bunny, and some seem unusually privy to the Tooth Fairy's secrets, although the stories my classmates and I swap about her don't often corroborate. But my father can talk to the Devil. This is not precisely the schoolyard bargaining chip I had hoped for, but I am breathless with suspense and intrigue.

When he does, it sounds like music, a shrieking, and rapid tempo full of unintelligible sounds. It is as if he is playing a scattered ensemble with half-formed exclamations instead of notes. It is a sinister kind of baby talk and my grandmother, as if in response, redoubles her efforts to childproof the house so that she might one day see the man again.

The first thing to go is the alcohol, and crumbling wine bottles are collected with Tuesday's recycling. Next are the razors, and our entire knife-block is stowed away beneath a truly impressive collection of housecoats. We secure piggybanks and separate valuables into unassuming boxes. We pack away the pictures, because my father routinely hoards photo albums full of people I've never met. Deprived

of his usual pursuits, he roams the streets instead, and comes home with a cloying, sweet scent clinging to his skin. It makes my grandmother cry.

I see her cry a handful of times in my life, and am the cause of her tears more than once. But the tears she sheds for my father are not any I have encountered before, or since. Does she cry for her beautiful firstborn? Does she cry for the future he might have had? He was in a gifted program in high school. He went to college, and was one credit short of graduating before my mother begged him to come home, which coincided with the abrupt arrival of his mental illness. Does she cry because of the guilt she carries, having missed the warning signs? She does not cry when she receives word that my father's girlfriend has been smuggling drugs into the facility for his use. My grandmother's face is wooden, but there are tears in her voice when she tells me, defeated, of what has happened. Later, she sobs to the accountant that she cannot afford pay for a better facility, but she can't give up on her son. For him, she begs. It is the loneliest sound I have ever heard.

I beg him, too. I write him letters that I never send. I ask him to quit smoking. I ask him to tell me he is proud of me. They tell us in school about making good choices, and I spend many days wondering if my father may have missed that lesson. I decide that it is a choice, and that I am on the losing side. I ask him if I were to make straight A's, would be enough to make him stop? Please stop, daddy. Daddy, I love you, please come home. I make straight A's, as I always do, and nothing changes. Something inside me hardens, and I swear that I will walk a different path than he has, although I am always afraid that mental illness will sneak up on me, just like it did my father. When there is no one to blame, the blame often shifts inwardly, and so it was in my case.

As a child, I do not understand addiction, and no one is inclined to help me, perhaps believing that ignorance is better than truth. Without guidance, I form my own explanations, mythologizing scenarios in which I am the only one who can save my father. I soon forget that they aren't real. I believe that if I give him enough reasons to love me, he can heal completely. I am naturally inclined to perfectionism, but I become a voracious overachiever as a result, a trait that stays with me all my life. I never fully disavow myself of my responsibility for my

father's mental illness, even when the duty for keeping it in check is passed on to numerous pill bottles lining the kitchen counter.

In truth, it is my father's social worker that helps implement the very necessary life-changing strategies that allow him to return home. He seems smaller there. He gets an apartment, and I grow used to seeing him across the dinner table a few times a week. I marvel at the fact he can remember what I'd said the time before. His eyes are bright and clear, and they always look at me twice, as if making up for lost time. Some weeks, he disappears immediately after pushing his dinner around on his plate. Other times, he eats his fill and then helps me do my math homework.

Recovery does not suggest perfection, nor does it offer any promises, but I find myself yearning for both. My father is functioning, but he will always be co-dependent. Our dynamic will nearly always have the parental roles reversed. I will never know the man my father was before his mental illness. I will never know the gifted student or the college athlete. I will always know my father as a man who has the devil on his shoulder. I will always have half an ear cocked, listening for its return, even while he is gleefully recounting sports scores, or a childhood exploit, or recounting a bit of celebrity gossip.

I have never been particularly coordinated, but I begin to see recovery as a kind of tightrope. The weight of the memories from his unmedicated days nearly bowls me over on several occasions, and there are periods when he is similarly unsettled. I learn that recovery has gains and relapses, and that progress is not a continuous incline, and there are stagnant periods, too, where there are no new gains. My father has been stable for nine years, neither regressing nor progressing by any discernable measure. His listlessness is too close to his prior vacancy for my own comfort, but the resources that are available to him have been rebuffed, or already exhausted, and so am I. I am learning how to be a daughter, rather than a parent, and it is more difficult than I could have imagined. I do not cry when my father tells me that he is proud of me for the first time that I can remember. Instead, I reach over and squeeze his hand.

Memory Box

KARLEY HEYMAN

A LZHEIMER'S DISEASE is the progressive degeneration of brain tissue that leads to the decline in intellectual functions such as memory and comprehension, and causes the deterioration of speech. My maternal grandmother, Gladys Ann Cook (Rodin), at the age of 80, is now experiencing the effects of Alzheimer's. This is a struggle for her and our whole family, as it is tough to see her in this state of frustration. The recent decline in my grandmother's memory has provoked the idea for our family to make her a Memory Box that will hold all the things that are most important to her, and help to bring back some memories. The words that will follow are my personal contribution to the box.

As I sat on the hearth in my grandmother's living room all cozied up by the fire, drinking hot chocolate and eating one of her famous chocolate chip cookies, I noticed her illuminating smile, the joy that these stories of her past brought to the room. I had requested to interview her about her childhood as a school assignment but she did not know that this story will be part of her Memory Box.

As she continued to tell me stories of her childhood, I begin to look around the room. Although the room appears to be full, it is obvious that she lives a very simplistic life, having only a floral couch and matching chair that must exceed fifty years in age, a television for the

evening news, a plant in the corner, as she would say "to bring life to the room," and several pictures of our family, just the necessities.

The gathering place that connected so many homesteading farms in the early 1900s, Trossachs, Saskatchewan. It was a place where people could come together for school, worship, and business, but it is now nothing more than a ghost town. Trossachs was a small hamlet in southern Saskatchewan that was connected to larger towns such as Weyburn and even further north to Regina by the railroad and dirt roads. My grandmother has always liked to talk about her childhood, as this where she learned discipline, a work ethic, and her strong sense of values from her mother, and gained her fun-loving attitude from her father. She was born in 1934, in a two-bedroom farmhouse, being the seventh child to her parents, Agnes and Anton Rodin. As a young child, Gladys had several different chores that had to be done in her day before nightfall would come. This included cleaning everyone's boots and washing out the waste bucket under the sink. They had no plumbing, so the waste bucket would fill up with the dirty dish water, which, in turn, needed to be emptied every day. She also spoke of picking vegetables from the garden. I can remember how my grandma laughed so hard, her eyes started to water as she remembered how she would have to pick the weeds from the garden. She described how one day she went up and down each row. Some she would have to do twice as she would drift away into the clouds and had forgotten where she had left off. There seemed to be two stages of time in her childhood. Initially in her early years there was the constant bustle of a farm with seven children in a two-bedroom farmhouse. Those days consisted of milking, feeding the animals, working the fields, and tending to the garden. This would supply all of their food for the winter. The other stage consisted of shenanigans that took place when the cousins from the next farm over joined their bunch. School in the forties was much different than the present. Gladys attended a three-room school house that taught students from grade one though to twelve. Most of her school years didn't include all of her siblings, as there was a considerable gap in ages. This brings the story to the second stage of her childhood.

When recalling school, Gladys spoke of some of the classmates and the classes she took, but for Gladys her most vivid memory was not of her time at school but instead the journey to get there. The ride to school by horse and wagon took about forty-five minutes, and she cherished this special time with her dad. Gladys recalled conversations with her dad and his kind and gentle spirit. My grandma reminded me of the lessons that her father taught her while on their way to school, that it is the little things in life that are the most important, it is not about money but the love and joy that you share with one another, it's about the your faith and purpose and seeing each day as a blessing.

The prairie winds of change blew, and after Gladys finished high-school she decided to attend bible school where she made friends with a young man named Henry. My grandmother has talked to me about Henry only a few times, as she said "he was a very good friend but when you know, you just know, and I knew he wasn't the one." My grandmother explained to me that Henry had high hopes with their relationship, wanting to marry right out of school. But as soon as she caught wind of this after graduation she decided to leave the province and begin her life in a new town. Begin her life as a woman.

The foundation her childhood in Trossachs gave her the ability to handle the unpredictable adventure ahead. At the age of 23, Gladys moved to Toronto, Ontario to live with her brother and worked several different jobs before she realized her true calling was nursing. My grandma frequently reflected on her independent (some may say stubborn) personality, exclaiming that she needed to try life on her own. The real excitement in her twenties comes when she meets a man named Edward Cook. As I talked to Gladys about her past, she took me back to her former friend Henry, explaining the importance of growth in a relationship. Gladys and Henry grew apart. This set Gladys free to meet the man that she would love for the rest of her life. Edward Cook.

"Never worry about tomorrow, tomorrow will take care of itself"—Gladys Cook.

Rooted

TERENCE HO

In THE backseat of a creaky old van twisting and turning along a mountainous road, I sat in silence. We had just left my family's ancestral village situated in a remote part of Guangdong province. With the sight of trees whizzing before my eyes, I strained to answer my existentialist dilemma: what did it mean to be Chinese-Canadian? The word—the very label that defined me—used to slip off my tongue with ease. But after my visit to the village, the first half of the term came out with a stutter, with hesitation, as if not even present at all.

I remember clearly—dilapidated shacks, the stench of sewage, and a torrential downpour greeted me as I stepped into the village. I felt dizzy, my senses bombarded by sights and sounds, my mind out of place and overwhelmed. For the entire car ride, I had whined about the visit to my great-grandma's old home. This sudden rainstorm must have been divine retribution for my grumbling. To make matters worse, a putrid draft rushed from the nearby pond into my nostrils, now hapless victims of Chinese environmental destruction. Upon hearing our arrival, my relatives rushed out of their homes to greet us. They quickly ushered us into their homes to shelter us from the rain. Inside, a faint ray of light shone from a solitary lamp, exposing the damp dirt floor, the paint-chipped walls, and the metal sheets substituting as roofs. My parents started to chat with my relatives, leaving me to gaze outside while the symphony of raindrops pattered against the metal roof. My eyes fixated on the tree outside towering over the village as

Mother Nature's watchtower. To my surprise, some of the villagers scurried over to the trees to pick fruit in spite of the downpour. Such was life in a village.

Suddenly, one of my cousins clad in a torn sweatshirt and plastic slippers started speaking to me excitedly. But all I could do was reply with a smile and a nod—my ability to speak Chinese had deteriorated rapidly ever since I entered school. From then on, I adopted English not only to communicate but to express myself. As my knowledge of Chinese was left to rot for much of my adolescent life, I now stood mute in front of my relatives. At the same time, I didn't want to look like a fool. Rummaging through the caverns of my mind, I dug up a few words and phrases: Student. Ah. Um. University? Studying. Uh. Thank you. As soon as the words left my mouth, my relatives started to giggle and guffaw. Needless to say, I had butchered the Chinese language, my heavy accent leaving me incomprehensible.

After the chorus of laughter died down, I decided to remain silent. Occasionally, the conversation topic would turn to me: What is he studying? What does he want to do later? He should study medicine instead of history. It's easier to find a job as a doctor. My relatives would then glance and point at me. Meanwhile, I wallowed in linguistic purgatory, trapped between understanding my relatives and my inability to respond. I wanted to add my own voice, to vocalize my thoughts, to partake in the conversation. Yet my desperate search for words came up empty-handed. Before I could think of a response, my relatives had already changed topics; they were telling my parents about the tall tree in the centre of the village. Besides providing fruit, the tree also served as a natural safeguard against flooding. During heavy rains, the tree's thick roots would soak up all the moisture, protecting the village from being swept away. The tree embodied the vitality of the village—an anchor, a provider. If one day the tree somehow became uprooted, so too would the people of the village.

Time elapsed slowly as I sat as a mere observer to the family reunion. Inside, confusion wreaked havoc on my mind. Why couldn't I see the people standing in front of me as my own family? I knew that they were related to me, but I certainly didn't feel any connection to this man, this woman, and their sons and daughters. I ought to have

sensed at least amity, if not the Confucian ideal of filial piety. But no. Guilt and shame filled the space usually reserved for family.

My ineptitude in Chinese didn't help either. Without words or conversations, my relatives and I remained distant, lacking the affinity normally devoted for family. Instead, the hollow, lifeless eyes of my relatives stared at me as if on a *National Geographic* cover. How were my relatives related to me, exactly? A cousin twice removed? An uncle on my mother's side? My grandma's brother? All these questions were left unanswered by the gulf of linguistic difference. Language was key to creating a sense of kinship with relatives, after all. Language was the key to accessing the stories, the memories, and the lives of my ancestors. But some time during the years of my Canadian upbringing, I chose to plant myself in the Anglophone world. The cost of entry: my mother tongue.

In the village, the tree and its well-grounded roots provided food, shade, and protection. The tree gave life. But I was a tree uprooted. After years under the damning effects of acculturation, I had nowhere to put my roots; my Chinese identity was torn away from me. Acculturation—this was not an abstract, academic term read and written about in sociology textbooks. No, acculturation was a monsoon, a torrential downpour, a flash flood. In hindsight, I should have spoken more Chinese at home when I was younger. I should have learned more about my Chinese ancestry, its epicurean delights, its cultural practices—whatever it would take for me to retain who I was. Instead, I had inherited the loss of my language, my culture, and my hopes for a connection with my relatives in that village—my family's ancestral home where my family roots were first laid, and where I could no longer enter.

A shrill blast of the horn jolted me back to the present monotony of a long car ride. But the image still lingered in my mind—a tree, its roots rotten, its bark decayed, its trunk hacked away, and its fall imminent.

At Home in Forest, Lake, and Sky

CATHERINE HOWELL

HOW DO I begin to describe a place that is as much a location as an old friend? It is a place that was separate from my day-to-day life in the city, a place that has shaped me over my young, fragile years, one summer at a time. To fully describe the place itself to an unfamiliar questioner would take hours, if not days, and would likely leave the listener with only a glimmer of the true experience. Glen Bernard Camp (GBC) is a physical place; a girls' summer overnight camp situated on the shores of Lake Bernard in Sundridge, Ontario. It has traditional camp activities such as swimming, canoeing, sailing, horseback riding, crafts, theatre, games, and camp rituals. It is a quintessentially Canadian camp, meaning that it embraces and harnesses the Northern geographical elements of deep forests and lakes as well as First Nations traditions to teach young girls the skills needed to independently navigate and survive the rigours of wilderness canoe tripping. This strong connection to the wilderness developed in me a respect and affinity for the natural world. As I matured over many summers at GBC, I developed a spirituality that I believe is truly Canadian.

I must begin my account of GBC with its history and geography to give a sense of its physical beauty. Glen Bernard was part of an area inhabited by First Nations people who had a close connection to the natural world. The camp honours the First Nations through mysterious rituals and a respect for the land where it is situated. GBC maintains a

close connection to the nature it inhabits. The camp is made up of a complex web of ecologically sensitive buildings, events, relationships, and traditions that supports a simple, unencumbered way of life without many material possessions, electronic devices, or the Internet. In this way, I found that I focused more on the people and world around me, without distraction.

Glen Bernard, the largest freshwater lake in the world without an island, is situated along a kilometre of northern Ontario shoreline. It is comprised of rugged, sandy paths that meander over hills and across streams, connecting cabins to larger structures such as the Dining Hall and several lodges for group gatherings. At the west end of camp the path narrows and is enveloped by a canopy of spruce and maple trees that allow light to dot the path underfoot. I remember every stone and pebble on that path and the way the air was filled with the smell of fallen leaves. The path leads to a place called Vista, which is a clearing at the top of a rocky cliff that overlooks Lake Bernard. Long wooden benches face the rocky stage at the front, and beyond this the glistening water provides a fitting backdrop. During Vista there are songs, skits, and stories that are designed to encourage introspection and contemplation of issues that are often forgotten in the pace of real life, life in the city. I have never been religious; however Vista taught me how to focus my thinking on the small details that make life special and to value the natural world around me. The awe-inspiring surroundings and simple lessons of appreciating the small pleasures and great challenges transformed the way I viewed my potential and place in the world.

Young girls live in this parallel, simple world without parents or any comforts of home, and have to develop self-reliance and resilience. This aspect of Glen Bernard I believe to be crucial in the great personal growth that is like a metamorphosis of the spirit. Canoe tripping and being able to survive in the wilderness play a big role in triggering self-confidence and eventual spiritual growth. I regard overnight camping, or tripping, as the core of camp, and another avenue for a spiritual connection with water, land, and sky. For example, at fifteen years of age, girls are expected to complete the twenty-four hour Solo. Solos are a coming-of-age tradition at Glen Bernard that involve the packing of food, matches, tarp, and rope, and venturing to one of the campsites on

the property to spend twenty-four hours alone. The Solo serves to conquer fear and develop confidence.

My Solo experience was made truly transformational as I had the unexpected opportunity to extricate myself from a potentially lifethreatening encounter. It was an especially bright day and the sun had warmed the flat, Canadian Shield rocks that lined the water's edge. As night fell, I made a fire to cook pasta and created my makeshift sleeping arrangement using a blue tarp and some rope. After hours of lying and apprehensively listening to the sounds of the forest, I huddled into my sleeping bag and began to nod off. I was jolted awake by the snapping of twigs. On high alert, I clambered down to the water and stood stalk-still, my heart pounding, on the still-warm rock face where I had lain so leisurely earlier. At first all I could hear was the soft lapping of water on rock, then a loud growl and a sickening tearing sound came from my campsite. My mind began feverishly thinking through survival options and I quickly decided to abandon the encampment and swim back towards camp. I remember how the moon's reflection shone off the water and lit up the lake as though it was the sun. Much later on, once I had safely returned to camp, I can recall the feeling of having had an extraordinary experience and looking at the world slightly differently, more confidently. In my parallel GBC world I could have such a heightened moment of exhilaration and affirmation that I could survive.

What is the Canadian experience and how did it make me spiritual? The experience of living simply close to the natural environment and experiencing its ruggedness and beauty strikes me as transformational. My spiritual path was always linked to my summers at Glen Bernard Camp. It was the genesis for personal growth and my spiritual connection with the Canadian wilderness. Glen Bernard is a place that provided great challenges, both physical and mental. This parallel northern world is nothing like the structured, frenetic life I experienced in the city. Now I will forever feel at home in forest, lake, and sky.

Getting Away

JESSICA JONKMAN

To SIT there quietly, in a cabin surrounded by mountains, is to surrender to nature, the people around you, and to yourself. It feels good to disengage from the urgency of the world today, a world stimulated by "GIFs" and "Tweets."

The bus driver dropped us off at the path leading to our home for the next four days, rushing to get back to society and leaving us to find our way. The quiet, snowy field in which we crossed to reach our cabin was akin to approaching a barrier between two lives; on the other side laid promises of a more tranquil existence.

I happily accepted the role of female supervisor when a fellow teacher approached me at school. He explained the outdoor education course and its requirements for a high school credit, their upcoming trip to the Adirondack Mountains, and the opportunity to see students in a different setting, to really connect with them. Upon arrival, he asked all students to hand over their devices: cell phones, iPads, even iPods. I was shocked by their readiness to disconnect; are these devices not attached to their very bones? As a teacher in today's world, I had been so sure of it.

A long afternoon of hollowing out winter shelters, properly known as "Quinzhees," left me exhausted and ready for slumber. I spent the evening reading in the common area, as the students surprised me with their endless amounts of energy. Their lack of technology did not seem to present an issue; they scattered to play card games, to make up trivia

games, and to chat about the afternoon. Where I felt unease about the forced quiet, the students thrived. Later, we would hear a small avalanche as the neighbouring mountain settled into milder weather. Surrendering to the wonders of the nature around us, the students could not have seemed more engaged in that moment; they were abuzz with excitement.

The following morning was an early start. A few students woke on their own to prepare breakfast for the group, a sense of camaraderie that would show throughout our trip. We slowly skied our way to the base of Mount Phelps, the male supervisor reminding everyone that we go together, no matter how long it takes. To me it was a subtle reminder that we are often rushed in life, and in that urgency we forget the people around us.

We climbed for hours, and with each step the trees were increasingly shorter, the world became quieter, and all problems seemed smaller. As we reached the summit, I snowshoed ahead on my own. It was only then, I realized, that I had not thought of anything else during that time, but the simplified mantra to "just keep going." I thought of my company on this trip, and I wondered if the students felt the same disconnection from their daily lives and struggles, if they felt the same kind of peace up here. They had, after all, been born into this crazy world where we are constantly connected.

One student in particular was an international student who had signed up for this course having never experienced snow, winter sports, or even nature to this extent. She had pushed herself to scale the mountain, and was now struggling to get back. I had skied ahead to help another student with his equipment, and now she was nowhere in sight. As I stood on the snowy path, calling her name into the quiet nothingness, I began to worry. With no way to contact the outside world, I would have a hard time getting help if this student was injured or just exhausted. Later, with our whole group safely back at the cabin, the other teacher would recount stories of other climbers getting caught in major snowstorms at the summit, with little to no resources. In these moments, to be separated from society meant being on your own to survive. It was the first time on this trip that technology was truly missed.

We exhausted ourselves each day with skiing and all of the fresh air we could possibly manage. When we could do no more, we resigned to the common room. There, life was slow. Life was playing cards, reading, talking, laughing, and just being.

By the last night, we were four to a couch, packed tightly in the common space to play the game of Charades. The students came alive when they played together, each clue acted out with a wealth of knowledge and a profound sense of humour. They covered every topic with confidence, referring to classic movies like *Scarface*, political satire with *Dr Strangelove*, and historical events like the assassination of JFK.

So much research has focused on the idea that technology is ruining child development, studies showing that teenagers become unfocused, antisocial, and unable to process and store information in their brains. In an article about Google, Yale researchers pointed out that when asked a trivia question, subjects could better remember where on their computer the answer was stored than the answer itself. And yet, here I was. I watched students play a trivia game where they themselves had created the clues, I saw them socially engaged and forming important relationships, and I did not see them "Google" any answers. When it came time to hand back their technology, I had the impression that many had forgotten their devices had been taken away in the first place.

In a way, it felt bad to go back. I could already feel my neck tightening as I caught up on missed e-mails. In another way, I felt changed by my time away. Things were clearer now. I was less attached to this technology, and ready to connect with real people. I had developed relationships with students outside of the classroom setting. Most of all, I was given pause to reflect on and enjoy life. But the students, they had done this all along.

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Finding Myself in Florida

JUSTIN KAMINKER

We have to get down in the dirt!" That was my initial reaction when I was told we would be planting a community garden for the day's project with a charity called the Urban Paradise Guild. For many university students, Reading Week is a time of relaxation, of partying with friends on sunny trips to exotic locations; and yes, even studying with the ease of being in your own home being treated like royalty as your mom caters to your every whim because she misses you so much. That's what I assumed my fate would be for Reading Week until I happened upon a unique opportunity: the chance to go to Miami, Florida on a service trip.

We travelled as a group of 20 students and each day there was a different charity project to complete. I was very eager for the opportunity to get away from the frigid Canadian winter that turned my fingers into icicles every time I walked around campus. On this particular day in Florida, however, we were saddled with the drudgery of planting a garden. Such menial, distasteful, and hard labour! Nothing about it appealed to me. I'm not "in touch" with nature. Beaches annoy me with their messy sand, mountains bewilder me with their enormity, and sunsets? Whatever. I also don't consider myself a tree-hugging environmentalist, to say the least. I am neither someone who spends a lot of time outdoors, nor someone who has ever spent time gardening. To add to this, it was an uncharacteristic, bitingly cold day in Hialeah,

Florida. So much for the warm vacation! I suddenly found myself in the sudden odd position of wearing my North Face winter coat in sunny Florida. Even odder, I had a shovel in my hand and I was about to start gardening. The idea of spending the day—a freezing one by Florida's standards—planting a garden seemed highly off-putting to me.

Our project leader was a formidable fellow named Sam Van Leer. A decidedly large presence, he was in his fifties, with graying hair, a stocky build, and armed with a gruff exterior. The man had an extraordinary, near-encyclopaedic knowledge of plant species and for everything environmental. As the founder of the Urban Paradise Guild, Sam has devoted his life to projects like these. You could see the passion building in his eyes and hear it pouring from his voice when he spoke about his work. He was at times imposing and commanding some would even venture to say rude—but he meant well and cared deeply about finishing the project on time. In between ordering us around and working on his own section with his bare hands, he tended to drift off into long-winded envirospeak that no one in our group could comprehend. "These coontie plants are native endangered species," he explained while crassly pounding the soil. "We're repopulating them as we eradicate the invasive exotics that eliminate the coonties in the area through natural selection." Uh, okay Sam.

Sam grumbled at us to do various labour-intensive tasks all morning. We were first handed shovels and pickaxes and instructed to break up the soil. "Don't be afraid to get medieval with the soil," Sam bellowed. I discovered that there was actually something quite fun about pummelling the soil with shovels and pickaxes. Something about beating, thrashing, and pounding the soil enticed me. Peeling off my coat after finally starting to feel warm, I stared into the horizon and spotted Sam pulling up to the site in a pick-up truck carrying dozens of native plant species that our group was to plant. When Sam came around and plopped a plant into my arms, its crisp, jagged branches bit into my fingers and I instantly acquired some semblance of reverence for nature after planting it. "What a glorious example of one of God's finest creations," I thought. By the end of the afternoon, several garden blocks were fully planted. It was tiring work, but at the end of the day I genuinely felt a good sense of purpose and meaning. It was gratifying

to know that I did something very small to help the residents of Hialeah in a big way.

Hialeah, Florida is a highly impoverished area in the Miami-Dade county. At 74 percent of the population, it has the highest percentage of Cuban-American residents of any city in the United States. This important fact wasn't known to me at first, and you can imagine my surprise when at a local McDonald's the cashier asked me for my order in Spanish. After giving her a confused look, she quickly came to the realization that I wasn't from the area and remarked, "Oh, you don't speak Spanish!" as if not speaking Spanish wasn't a normal thing. There were community housing blocks near the park where we planted the garden, and the families that lived there were to be the recipients of the garden. The Urban Paradise Guild, Sam explained, strongly believes in making people self-sufficient rather than handing them food. By donating a garden, the beneficiaries are then tasked with learning how to maintain it to grow their own food. In this way, healthy and sustainable communities are created for the betterment of everyone.

I was never as into nature as some other people are. I never understood the appeal of camping, fishing, gardening, or anything of the like. I always grumbled about the exceedingly cold winters and frankly took for granted the soft, warm breeze of an easy summer's day. Being a city dweller of ample means, I never put much thought into food and sustenance for others. But the real-life experience of holding an assortment of trees and plants in my hands, and planting them for the people of Hialeah gave me a new appreciation for important aspects of life on this planet. Working at creating a garden for the benefit of others taught me to appreciate nature and appreciate the things that I have in my life that have always come so easily to me. What I discovered that day was giving a gift to the community of Hialeah had ended up becoming a precious gift to me. At the end of our time there that day, against the backdrop of the beautiful setting sun, I gazed admiringly at the garden that was to sustain an entire community and thought: "Wow, what a breathtaking view."

A Butterfly, My Wings Reclaimed

LUKE KESSARAM

BUTTERFLY'S existence is a lonely one. Stressful too, I Aimagine, with so much change between birth and maturity. Born of an egg—the only protection its progenitor ever offered—the juvenile butterfly, now called caterpillar, is forsaken to the world's dangers from the dawn of its existence. As with all births, there is no choice in the matter; any hope of return to the sublime unreality of the prenatal condition is as crumpled as the egg, left broken on the leaf. Like all children, it is hungry. It eats. With no bound to its leafy domain, so rich with nourishment, the caterpillar embraces solitude with ease. It is a pest to crops, and a nuisance to those who sow them. Until, by some inexplicable impulse, the caterpillar withdraws, perhaps finding such bliss in solitude that its appetite shifts. Now craving seclusion, it envelops itself in a chrysalis. Observed, the butterfly seems to be in stasis. Time passes, just the right amount, and as the insect finally emerges, so does the truth of its apparent dormancy: from its withdrawal comes beauty, and more. It can fly. With new wings and new purpose, it flutters forth and the cycle continues. The butterfly is one of life's greatest mysteries. Or is it one of life's most blatant truths?

Its lifecycle is one of life's first lessons, taught to small children in school. Once, when I was a child, I observed the butterfly's transformation first-hand. I held one captive in a jar that had been adapted for its temporary habitation. The miracle of its metamorphosis, the beauty of its fragile form, the whole process was captivating to

watch. There is something magic in the emergence of those delicate wings that touches the human soul. Is it that the butterfly's being is so wonderfully disparate from our own as to inspire some form of awe? Or is it rather that our existence is akin to the butterfly's, and that our souls, though separate, run parallel? Is there some aspect of the butterfly that intimately reflects the human experience?

There is a specific butterfly that resonates with me, called *Papilio demoleus*. Known also as the citrus swallowtail or the common lime, it shared its native lands with my paternal ancestors. And like my father's family, this butterfly has dispersed from its ancestral lands, and can today be found in parts of the Caribbean. A scientific paper on the common lime says, "The New World arrival of this vagile lepidopteran pest is a potential threat to citrus industries in the region" (Lewis 4). A loose translation reads, "This pesky butterfly, now free to roam certain geographic areas with transatlantic colonial histories, is bad for the fruit business." The people in the fruit business don't like this butterfly. They want it gone. "No more *Papilio demoleus*," they say.

It seems rather rude. I'm sure *Papilio demoleus* had no more choice in its migration than it did in its initial hatching. Even its name was not its choice. *Papilio demoleus* was first so called in 1758, during the Age of Enlightenment. Carl Linnaeus, reputed father of modern taxonomy, gave the bug this name. Like my name, it is inherited; like yours, passed down through time. Names are sacred utterances; they whisper cryptic histories. Listen and you'll learn. *Papilio*'s name whispers of the colonial story, which finds its roots in the Enlightenment era's European soil. It whispers of the white man's promise, that all life's expressions must be made known, and classified by science. Before 1758, who can say how the common lime was known? Who can say it matters? A butterfly by any other name would still flutter by. Our language is just one means to know the world, limited in the truths that it can bear.

Some butterflies are nameless, yet still they fulfil their purpose, be that pollination, or perhaps simply inspiration. My grandmother, for one, has found much inspiration in butterflies, and has surrounded herself with their image. There is even one tattooed to her shoulder. It doesn't have a name, but a name is just one way in which a butterfly

might be known. My grandmother might know her butterfly in other ways, perhaps in ways that are hers alone.

As far as I know, my grandmother has had that butterfly tattoo on her shoulder forever. There is no moment in my memory in which those wings weren't there; they have simply always been. The same is true of wings I once wore, costume wings, for kids. They were made of a thin nylon material, like pantyhose, stretched over a wire frame. Glued lines of silver glitter accented the sheer fabric. Thin elastic shoulder straps were attached to the bit of material that connected left and right. Without such a pair, the dress-up box that I shared with my siblings would not have been complete. Their presence, I can only assume, can be attributed to my sister, older by four years. Presumably, such fairy wings were as natural to my childhood as a nourishing leaf to a newborn caterpillar, and I took to them as fondly. At least, that is how I imagine it began; before long, I had a pair of my own, if memory serves, such was my affection for them. Now, they remain only in sunsoaked memories, faded by days, by decades gone by. Despite their affect, the only unequivocal proof of these wings' existence manifests as a single photograph. In it, I stand gleefully before the camera in my boyish pyjamas, those magic wings strapped proudly to my back. I can't have been older than five. Aside from that photo, those wings can only be traced in the mingled feelings of nostalgia, the pangs of innocence lost, and the faint echo of joy once had, calling out from the past which engulfs it. All this, sustained in memory alone, or perhaps in even less.

Does a butterfly remember? No one knows for sure. Two months, or less, that's all it takes; *Papilio* matures. And after that, there's not a trace of what it used to be: a caterpillar, lone and lost. That caterpillar: me. My life has been a lonely one, or sometimes so it's seemed. Not to say I lack for love, or kin, or things like these. But who, save I, can really know the life confronting me, the path that I have walked alone to reach maturity? We share a sense among us all of what it means to grow. But words will often fail us here; then how else can we know? Two months, or less, that's all it takes; *Papilio* transforms. Its future is unknown, untold; *Papilio* flies forth. It flies for *now*, for here, this day. Its past is gone, is flown. For days, not weeks, it shares its grace. Short days, and then it's gone. And though it dies, it is not dead; the cycle

still goes on. I have tattooed upon my back, in black ink, centred, strong: *Papilio*, my wings reclaimed, to fly me right from wrong.

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A Humble Chinese New Year Celebration

HONG FEI LIU

In FEBRUARY 2015, I travelled to China to experience, for the first time since I was four years old, Chinese New Year in Fujian City, Fuzhou Province, China. Since I was a child, I have always been very interested in my Chinese roots. Despite my interest, however, it seemed that life always found an excuse to keep me away from my birthplace. Finally, after many years of "you can't leave the country because of school" talks with my parents, I was able to find an opportunity to visit China and explore the daily lives of its citizens. More importantly, I was going to be visiting China during Chinese New Year—a week-long celebration rooted in the spirit of reuniting families.

Our trip started at Toronto Pearson International Airport, where we boarded the 4.20 p.m. flight to Beijing. We then connected to another flight from Beijing to Fuzhou. The entire trip took roughly twenty hours of combined travel time. My mother and I finally landed at Fuzhou airport at around 2.00 a.m. local time. The airport is located roughly forty-five minutes outside the city, so my mom had asked her friend to pick us up. After picking up our luggage from the conveyor belts, we walked out of the security zone where, as expected, her friend was waiting for us in a sea of other people doing the exact same thing. My mother introduced the two of us and, after loading our baggage, we departed for Fuzhou city.

The three of us arrived at my eldest aunt's apartment at roughly 3.00 a.m. China time (that's 2.00 p.m. EST), which was well past

bedtime. Our chauffer helped us unload our luggage and took off, hoping to get home for some sleep. Despite our less-than-ideal timing, my aunt and uncle greet us with warm smiles. My mom was shown her room, and I was shown mine. My aunt offered to prepare a snack for me and my mom, but we declined and insisted we go to sleep, considering the time. They reluctantly agree and the four of us retire to our rooms. While I should have gone to sleep as well, I had just spent eight hours of my thirteen-hour flight sleeping so my body was not particularly interested in going to sleep again. I decided to pass the time until morning by partaking in one of my favourite activities—wasting time on the Internet. I had already asked for the Wi-Fi password before my aunt went to sleep, so I booted up my laptop and got ready for a fun-filled session of exploring the internet. Unfortunately, after an hour or so of fighting the Great Firewall of China, I gave up and just went to sleep.

The night of Chinese New Year's Eve, all the streets were completely empty. This is a completely different experience from New Year's Eve in North America, where the streets are filled with rowdy people excited about the moment it turns 12.00 a.m. on January 1st. However, in China, the New Year is focused on reuniting oneself with one's family. In that sense, the celebration is more comparable to Christmas than New Year. All the small- to medium-sized businesses had shut down, because the owners from out of town returned to their home towns to join their families. Even if you wanted to go out, there were few places one could even go.

The day of Chinese New Year was spent at my third-eldest aunt's place. We arrived for lunch, which consisted of over twelve different communal dishes. The aroma of the tantalizing food filled the air. Some dishes served included wonton, fish ball, and egg soup; crab-steamed noodles; tortoise soup; and braised pork. While the food was incredibly important, it was more of a decoration than the focus of the event. Rather, everyone was more interested in getting people to drink alcohol and talk. I remember particularly enjoying the first meal, because I got to catch up with what all my cousins are doing now that they're grown up and working. One of my cousins, WangSu, got a job as a corporate salesman for Pepsi, which was very exciting for him and his family, since he did not attend university and graduated with very poor marks

in high school. In China, university graduates can rarely find jobs, nonetheless high school graduates.

A couple days later, my trip to China had come to an end. To be honest, the entire week after Chinese New Year was a drunken blur of drinking with family for lunch, followed by drinking with family for dinner, followed by drinking with friends. I was ready to leave, because my body and mind were too exhausted. However, the exhaustion was completely worth it. I had gained so much insight into life in China regarding the world views of average citizens and their lifestyles. I was able to experience the Chinese New Year trifecta of family, food, and alcohol. My only regret was that my Mandarin was not sophisticated enough to have deeper conversations with my family and their friends, as I really enjoyed all the conversations I had with them. Considering the huge socioeconomic advances China has undergone in the past couple decades, I am extremely excited to return in five years to see what Fuzhou is like, especially how the people would adapt to their rapidly developing country.

Weekdays Are for Time Travel

MAURA MACKENZIE

Peterborough County was a long one. It could take days of travelling through forests and around lakes. Yet, it was a journey that many underwent. Early settlers from the old world would arrive in Cobourg and from there make their way into the backwoods of Peterborough County."

I am standing in front of a tiny log cabin and speaking to a group of schoolchildren and their chaperones. I am a historical interpreter at a little pioneer village just east of Peterborough. Today, the students are interested in the story because I have mentioned their home town of Cobourg, Ontario. It is also my home town, and like the students, I journeyed from the shores of Lake Ontario to the backwoods of Peterborough County just this morning. It was an odyssey taking approximately forty-five minutes.

I often wonder, while travelling at speeds that would seem unfathomable to the pioneers, about what changes we have undergone in our quest for progress. We have gained such things as great speed (my morning commute a testament to this progress), medical knowledge, and agricultural efficiency. But as I stand in front of the tiny log cabin, first home of David Fife and his three children, I also feel a great sense of loss. This tiny home was built from the trees on David Fife's property. This one-room cabin sheltered a family of five. Neighbours were lifelines to be relied upon. An early settler's failure or

success was dependent on one's ability to connect with the land and with the surrounding community. I wonder as I speak to the excited students; have we lost these connections as the centuries advance?

As a historical interpreter, my days are full of social interaction with the public and with my fellow interpreters. A typical day at work may involve playing croquet on the village green, or socializing and embroidering handkerchiefs on the porch of the general store. And so I talk and embroider and laugh. I am captivated by how there is never a moment of loneliness in this theatrical representation of community. The visitors stare in wonder at these vignettes. They stare as if they are seeing an artifact whose use is no longer easily recognized.

Yet in my days off, the trappings of modernity surround me. My phone, having been exiled from my presence during working hours, returns to its rightful place in my pocket. I watch Netflix on the television monitor with my laptop open to multiple tabs. I may even attempt to simultaneously read an important document on my tablet. I sit surrounded by these technologies, completely engrossed, and completely alone. It was not until my first summer as a full-time historical interpreter that I recognize the absurdity of my behaviour. I would spend hours representing early settler life and explaining the importance those individuals placed on community and social connection. Yet, when I returned home it was to lifeless and socially disconnected technologies.

Another aspect of working as a historical interpreter is to engage the public in pioneer activities. Children and adults love to carry water with yokes and help pull weeds in the historic gardens. Quickly, there is a realization that such tasks are labour intensive. Conversations naturally turn to a discussion regarding pioneer methods of waste reduction. When personal labour is considered, the connection between resource use and sustainability is simple to understand. There is a finite amount of vegetables in a garden because there is a finite amount of energy an individual can expend tending to this source of food. Water is a precious resource because one must carry it in leaky buckets over bumpy terrain. In light of this information, the act of taking thirty-minute showers or throwing out unused food seems ludicrous. My personal realization of how disconnected I am from my food source came the day the village pigs were taken to the abattoir. It was a jarring

realization that the pigs I had so fondly named Maisy and Rosie were destined for the slaughterhouse. I watched them grow over the summer, voraciously eating their feed and drinking massive amounts of water in the stifling heat. It was shocking to realize that this process was behind every pork chop I had eaten. It was not just that I had grown to like the pigs; it was that there was a summer's worth of feed and water that had gone into their growth. There is an inability to hide from resource use when it is your own hands that feed, water, and tend. Yet, with the advent of modern technologies, it seems that we are becoming better and better at hiding.

One day at the beginning of June, I stand in front of a grade-three class as I interpret the Jacquard loom.

"Hello, children," I begin, the antiquated greeting familiar on my lips, "Welcome to the Samuel Lowry Weaver Shop. Can anyone tell me what would have been made here?"

Hands fly up. They never answer the question. Instead their comments focus on the massive red structure standing about twelve feet high and eight feet wide at the back of the room. This is the Jacquard loom. The children have spotted the Jacquard for its size, but its importance actually lies in its contribution to the computer age. The Jacquard loom technology is the first use of binary code in an industry. In many ways, Jacquard looms are the first computers. At the back of the group of schoolchildren stands a boy. He is filming my interpretation on an iPad. Not once does he look up from the screen; not once does he interact with his classmates or teachers. I continue to discuss how this technology has revolutionized the world. What we would lack without the great contributions of Jacquard and his loom. But when the class shuffles out and I turned to face the imposing structure behind me, I am only saddened. Jacquard set out to make the fastest loom in existence, and we are left in a world where we all, to varying extents, view our reality through the lens of a technological interface. We have become disconnected from ourselves; we have become disconnected from natural world surrounding us.

In Support of Safe Travelling

ERIKA MANASSIS

Voluntourism, A combination of volunteering and tourism, is incredibly popular among young adults. When given the opportunity to travel abroad while also doing "good" for less fortunate people, millennials flock; I do not exclude myself from this group. In August 2011, the summer before my final year of high school, I decided that I would like to help Canadians in need, but that I also wanted to travel to a province I had never before visited. After doing research online, I came across an organization called World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF). I used WWOOF's online database to find an appropriate match for my skill set: a small organic farm in the mountains of British Columbia seeking a farm hand to assist with gardening and tending to the llamas and goats on site. After only a few e-mail exchanges with Amanda, the farm owner, I had arranged a flight to the Fraser Canyon, BC for a two-week voluntourist experience. This is where my troubles began.

WWOOF is a fairly user-friendly Web site. Guests, also called WWOOFers, pay a twenty-dollar fee for one year of unlimited access to the WWOOF database. On the database, farm owners from countries around the world share pictures and basic information about their property, such as their location, how many people live on site, what languages are spoken, and any other notable features of their farm. There is no official screening process to evaluate potential hosts other than an online comments section where WWOOFers can share their

experiences. My host, Amanda, described her non-commercial farm in the Fraser Canyon as picturesque and free range, which allowed her farm animals—many llamas, goats, chickens, and turkeys—to roam as they pleased. There were no negative comments from WWOOFers, and photographs of her property were breathtaking.

I had very high expectations when I arrived in Amanda's mountain home that August evening, after nearly six hours of plane and bus travel. Visions of clean mountain air, organic soil on my hands, and exciting wildlife danced in my head. Cordial hellos and how-do-you-dos helped me quickly realize that Amanda was peculiar. She spoke rather frankly and gestured wildly when she spoke. In only one hour of conversation, she had given me a detailed history of the disintegration of her family, including the deaths of several family members. She transitioned so rapidly through these stories that I barely had time to respond; Amanda put me on edge.

Amanda paused in her storytelling so she could get us both a cool glass of water. I sank quietly into the couch, hoping for a moment of rest in anticipation of a long day of farming tomorrow, but was out of luck. Amanda sat down and leaned forward, eager for more conversation. She released her long white hair from its bun, and began to reflect on the past ten years; apparently this is when her struggles began. She occasionally would hesitate and look down, as though contemplating a memory. Perhaps she was thinking about her disabled husband, who had committed suicide shortly after their infant son had died. Perhaps she was thinking about her children who refused to speak to her ever since she purchased this remote farm. Or perhaps Amanda was simply considering how happy she was to finally have a female companion in her home with whom to share her many personal stories and struggles. Either way, Amanda shared too much information and was acting erratically, which led me to believe that she was mentally unstable. The very thought of working under her authority for the next fourteen days made me nervous.

"My children won't speak to me; they don't like hearing what I have to say."

I didn't reply. How do you respond to that?

"That's why I love having visitors; you remind me of my daughter."

I forced a smile.

"You'll learn a lot while you work here," Amanda chuckled, "a lot about the mountains."

Though they were beautiful, I did not like thinking about the mountains surrounding the Fraser Canyon. They were the largest-imaginable physical barrier between myself and civilization. My thoughts were interrupted.

"You know, I've met aliens in these mountains."

This was the most obvious signal so far that Amanda was strange. My jaw dropped and I choked out a sharp laugh.

"Oh yeah," I responded derisively.

"I'm serious," she insisted, furrowing her brow. I was starting to feel warm.

"I've met aliens in these mountains. They land their UFOs in my field; at least twice this year. Extraterrestrials know that organic farmers sit highest in the human hierarchy—they want me to teach them how to live sustainably on Earth."

I couldn't respond.

"I've gone into space with them! They probed my brain. They trust me. They'll come back soon, you'll see." Amanda paused and looked into my eyes, "I'm happy you're here.... You will never want to leave."

I certainly did want to leave. In fact, the moment my two-week stay with Amanda ended, that is exactly what I did. Ultimately, my stay in the Fraser Canyon was strange and uncomfortable; it is not something that I would ever want to do again. I felt as though I was in danger for the entirety of the stay and I struggled to fall asleep each evening. Amanda's stories became stranger and more disjointed as the days passed. Once I had returned home, my sleep was plagued with nightmares about Amanda and her farm. For months, whenever I awoke in a cold sweat in the middle of the night, I kicked myself for not performing more in-depth research of Amanda's farm and lifestyle. I would hate for other young adults to experience similar post-travel difficulties, especially because they are entirely preventable! If there is anything to be learned from my experience, it is this: when preparing for voluntourism as a young adult, one must perform extensive due diligence. While the opportunity to do good deeds while travelling and

exploring the globe may seem attractive, it is irresponsible to allow that prospect to cloud your judgement.

Finding Our Home

GRAEME MATICHUK

In A storage closet of my parents' suburban Alberta home, I found a scrapbook of my great-grandmother's life. Bound in leather and adorned with a silver-foil cutout of hands clasped in prayer, it holds photos and documents narrating my great-grandmother's stories on crisp pages yellowed with age. The photos show her journey from Norway to North Dakota to Saskatchewan, from growing up in the rolling hills of Norway to raising a family in the flat Saskatchewan plains. My great-grandmother was at home in each of these places because she was always surrounded by the people that she loved.

Home is the link between generations, not just the house where the family was raised. Home is where family stories and geographic location intersect. My mother has always told me that I remind her so much of her father, my grandfather. I've heard stories of my grandfather that have made me realize that I am more like him than anyone else, and this sparked my interest in family history. Learning about family history is like solving a puzzle, but the pieces aren't held by one single person and they certainly aren't all found in the same place. When I connected with my relatives earlier this year, they shared their memories of the ancestors that link us all together, Sigrid and Albert, my grandfather's parents. My relatives shared their pieces of the puzzle. We realized that some of us share quirks with our ancestors from generations ago and that home means something different for each generation of the family.

Sigrid grew up as the daughter of a humble church caretaker in the rolling hills of Norway. Sigrid's parents, their gentle faces wrinkled by hard work characteristic of the difficult economic times in Norway, raised eight children who would later spread their legacy throughout Norway and North America. North America was the land of opportunity, and as a young adult, Sigrid sought a life with new opportunities. She travelled across the ocean to the United States with her friends, moving away from her parents and towards the greener pastures of North Dakota. For several years, Sigrid worked in a hotel in North Dakota with her Norwegian companions; photos of her during these years show her surrounded by people and always enjoying herself. My mother and grandmother told me they remember her as a "warm and nice" lady, and many of my relatives echoed this sentiment. Home was wherever Sigrid was with her loved ones.

Years ago, one of my relatives journeyed to both Norway and North Dakota to document the genealogy of Albert's family, bringing facts to paper and my imagination to life. The facts form the framework of our genealogy, and my relatives' memories of the family, explain what home meant to my ancestors. Albert's childhood farm home in North Dakota was a hub of family gatherings and games. His "Old World" father would sit on his orange rocking chair, discussing weather and crops with the men, while Albert's mother and the women would gather in the sitting room and parlour. The children would play games outside in the fresh countryside breeze, greeting friends, cousins, and neighbours who would stop by the farm for wheat-grain coffee, homemade sandwiches, and warm cookies. Albert's father was one of nine children, and Albert himself had several siblings; family relationships were important to this Norwegian immigrant family. If there ever were a portrait of idyllic farm life, Albert's family in rural North Dakota would have been it.

In the nineteenth century, many Norwegian farmers living in North Dakota headed north, seeking inexpensive farmland in the vast plains of Saskatchewan. Sigrid and Albert met in North Dakota and moved to the Canadian plains to start a family in the next land of opportunity. When they moved to Canada, they secured a homestead at a low cost with the promise that Albert would farm the land and live there with his family. He built a lonely house in an open field and made that house a

home with five children. Sigrid and Albert were both from large families and sought to raise children who would appreciate the value of the family community. Their five children, including my grandfather, grew up in the Saskatchewan plains with their Norwegian parents as their anchor, keeping them grounded but allowing them the freedom to chart their own courses. Their three boys would become men in service to their nation: one son received a medal for bravery in the Canadian Provost Corps, another rode in the Queen's Coronation as a Mountie, and another had his own helicopter base in the Royal Canadian Navy. The sons each raised a family in a different province, while Sigrid and Albert's two daughters raised families in Saskatchewan. Home was where their brave dreams brought them and where they anchored their families to leave a legacy.

Many of Sigrid and Albert's stories illustrate their pioneer lifestyle in the United States and Canada. One of their daughters wrote that Sigrid would kindly make warm clothing for neighbours during the frigid winter months of the "hungry thirties," and they would learn to cure their own meat and dry fruits (*River*). My relatives remember that Albert was an avid gardener and grew the biggest, juiciest carrots in his backyard garden. Mail was delivered to Sigrid and Albert thirty miles from their community, a distance the men would have to walk during the white winters and the sweltering summers (*River*). Their house wasn't built by contractors; it was built by the family. Necessity drove not only the day-to-day responsibilities but also their moves from Norway to the United States to Canada—each step of the way, they sought to anchor their home in a land of opportunity.

In discovering what home meant to my ancestors, I wondered what home means to our family today. To Sigrid, home was where she would spend time with her family. She cared for her family and is remembered fondly as a kind mother. Albert's home was with his family and labouring on the land; he grew up on a farm in North Dakota and homesteaded for many years in Saskatchewan. My relatives and I bring pieces of our genealogical puzzle together, strengthening our understanding of our ancestors and connecting us today. We live many miles apart but share blood and roots, and to us, home means remembering those who have gone before us and appreciating the family that we have today.

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Loving to Learn

ANDREW MAVETY

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION is a privilege to individuals who want to pursue further academic endeavours, but it comes at a cost. At what seems like an ever-increasing price to learn, students try to lighten the financial load through scholarships or bursaries. The Loran Scholar is a prestigious scholarship awarded to the top thirty exceptional graduating high school students across Canada valued at \$100,000 each. With a minimum cumulative average of eighty-five percent throughout high school, the applicants have to demonstrate significant character, service to his or her community, and leadership. With thousands of applicants, Somaya Amiri, an Afghan woman who is a graduating senior from a high school in Vancouver, is a 2015 Loran Scholar recipient. Although similar on paper to the other award recipients, her past is unlike any of the others.

Think about where you were seven years ago. For Somaya Amiri, along with her parents and older brother, they were all living in Afghanistan. Where the Amiri family lived is ruled by several forceful and extreme political groups, most notably the Taliban. Gender inequality in Afghanistan is the greatest in the world, and the Taliban make it their priority to keep it this way ("Life"). There is a deep fear of educating women and narrowing the difference between men and women. Ultimately, the men in Afghanistan dominate, and they do not want it to change. Women have little say in what happens. Women's rights and freedom are night and day compared to that of the men in

Afghanistan. Under the powerful rule and violent enforcement of the Taliban, most private schools have been forced to close in an attempt to prevent the education of girls. As a result, approximately eighty-five percent of Afghan women have had no formal education and are illiterate ("Life"). Somaya was an exception, and was lucky enough to be able to read and write in her native language of Darbi in a nearby modest mosque.

From a young age, Somaya expressed her interest in learning but was saddened by only ever being able to watch her brother get ready and leave for school every day. Somaya's burning desire of attending school became a reality when her family moved to Canada. The move to Canada was her dad's idea, as he feared for the family's safety in Afghanistan while political tension and forceful pressure was increasing. In December 2009, Somaya attended her first day of school by joining a grade nine class, an idea that seemed impossible a couple of years ago. "Coming to school, having my notebook, writing stuff down, holding the pencil, little things, it was so joyful." It is exactly the little things that students take for granted but something as simple as holding a pencil was an honour for Somaya. Everyone can remember his or her first day of school, but imagine being placed in a classroom with a language that you do not speak. The confusion, frustration, and foreign settings would discourage most people. However, Somaya viewed learning as a special gift, not a given right, and pushed herself every day to learn more.

Somaya remembers clearly what it was like growing up without being able to learn. Back in Afghanistan when she was a young, naïve girl unaware of the gender inequality outside her own home, she followed her brother one day to school. Shortly after the two of them had set out for school, Somaya's father noticed that she was missing. Her father frantically set out to find her and searched several different places in order to locate her. It was if they were playing a game of hideand-go-seek, except Somaya was unaware and her life depended on it. When her father found her he had mixed emotions of fury and relief. Somaya's mother and other relatives were all crying when she and her father returned home. Their reactions puzzled Somaya. Her mother had assumed the worst and knew there was a good chance of her being

killed on her way to school because she was a female in Afghanistan trying to become educated.

When Somaya was young and innocent with little exposure to the corrupt, biased ruling of Afghanistan, she did not see harm in trying to go to school. Why should she assume otherwise? Somaya learned on that day that her curiosity and willingness to learn could have had her killed. Reflecting on her past experience puts her present situation into perspective. To say that Somaya is motivated is an understatement because she has seen first-hand what it is like in other parts of the world and realizes now how privileged she truly is. Somaya explains her drive as "When you want something, and it's so hard to have it, it becomes more precious to you." As an example, every morning before school Somaya would memorize forty new English words and try to use them at school that day. She is a sponge for all the new information around her and cannot get enough of learning. Somaya had progressed so well that she earned the highest mark in her class on a social studies exam, after only five months of going to school. Her passion, hard work, and willingness to learn showed that she had a lot of learning potential.

Within a matter of years, Somaya had grown from reading scripts written in Darbi at a local mosque in Afghanistan to accepting the highly sought-after Loran Scholar award. Living conditions and her family's decisions were out of her control, but once she was settled in Canada, Somaya made the most of her opportunities. Somaya knows what it is like in other parts of the world and thankful for her situation. As a result of her past and character, she will be given the opportunity to continue her education at a post-secondary institution.

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Bob and Doug

BILL MEI

THE SHORT, staccato bleating emanating from the backyard interrupted the peaceful melodies of migrating birds. I vaguely remembered my housemates mentioning last week that they wanted to raise a pair of goats, but given how ridiculous the proposal was, I had no reason to believe that they were serious. Now, there were two fluffy white reasons to take them seriously. I carried the same shocked facial expression as any other twenty-year-old told that he is to help raise the two enthusiastic newborns that were running around in the backyard (with shrivelled-up umbilical cords still attached). The goats needed to be washed—badly. If they weren't bleating so loudly the first thing I would have noticed is the smell. They decided to greet the new home we built for them (a refurbished dog house) by rolling around in the muddy October dirt and defecating on the fresh layer of hay we spread inside their home. Even worse, the two-day-old goats had not yet developed the mental ability to understand how to enter their housethey were so perplexed by the flap covering the opening that we finally gave up and decided to demonstrate for them by getting on our hands and knees ourselves and crawling face-first through the flap and into the tangle of hay, mud, and poop that now furnished their living room.

Goats are eager to chew on anything you put in front of their face: weeds, sticks, fingers, drawstrings of jackets, and the scraps from your lunch that you didn't want to finish. They have a childlike curiosity to want to *understand* the mysterious object in front of them—this

tendency is as cute as it is frustrating. When you take them on walks you have to be careful about ensuring that they don't chew on harmful things such as cigarette butts and plastic shopping bags sunbathing on the sidewalk. Their short attention spans mean that you need an inordinate amount of patience to teach them anything that would be blatantly obvious to even the dumbest dog: we kept changing their water every day for the first month as the goats couldn't fathom how it is that peeing in the water bowl could *possibly* make their water taste bad.

As shitty as it is to get yourself covered in poop from cleaning your backyard every week, I quickly learned to like the goats. They became my friends. We gave them names that were fittingly Canadian: Bob and Doug, after Bob and Doug McKenzie, the fictional brothers in the comedy sketch "Great White North" on Second City Television. One day, after a particularly long meeting with a dysfunctional group whose members couldn't agree on how to put together a massive presentation for my marketing class, I was so glad to arrive home and be greeted by two energetic friends that would affectionately nuzzle their faces into my arms and jump around in excitement. The goats were a hit in the neighbourhood, too—every time someone wandered over to try to figure out where the baah baah sounds were coming from, we were easily able to start a conversation and gain another friend whom we could invite to parties. That's not counting the number of neighbours we met every time we took them on walks around the block or let them roam free in Victoria Park.

Of course, you can't walk around with a pair of goats in public and expect to remain anonymous. During an especially heavy snowstorm in December, someone took a picture of one of my friends walking the goats through campus and posted it on Reddit. It instantly shot to the top of the front page and was soon reposted all over Buzzfeed, Tumblr, Twitter, and even the CBC's Facebook page. We were soon swamped with messages from people who wanted to meet the goats and from presidents of campus clubs who wanted to borrow them as mascots to help fundraise for charity events.

Not everyone was as happy with having the goats around as friendly students from campus groups. Bob and Doug's rise to stardom came to an abrupt halt when a bylaw officer from the city of Kingston came by our house and told us that we had forty-eight hours to remove the goats from our property since we weren't allowed to keep farm animals in a residential neighbourhood. I couldn't believe it—our neighbours loved Bob and Doug; it would be awful to say goodbye to my two friends. Surely we could work something out? There's nothing in the bylaws that define pets specifically as dogs or cats. But we quickly found another home for the goats: we donated them to a therapy farm outside Ottawa for children and adults with autism and other special developmental needs.

I miss Bob and Doug from time to time. I have pictures of them waddling around on our back porch the day after they were born, still inexperienced in walking and cautious about their new home. It's been more than two years since that day, and I still remember the frustration of spending several hours that night trying to find the right baby bottle to feed them, as they refused to drink milk from anything that tasted like plastic. At the time, it seemed so important to make sure they were well fed that we ignored everything else that was happening on a Friday night to focus on how to get an energetic animal to suck on a rubber nipple. Moments like these are the ones I miss the most: the moment when they finally drank their milk, or the moment when they finally figured out how to enter their house through the flap—these are the most satisfying moments. Although we needed to endure the stress and frustration, we couldn't help but beam like proud parents who just taught our toddlers how to walk. I can't think of anything more rewarding than the act of caring so deeply about the life of another living being. Even though we couldn't keep them around, I'm glad that Bob and Doug were able to stay at a good home, where they will be able to care for people who need them the most.

Stone Tile Floor

EMILY MILLER

AM ten years old. I've been staring in the bathroom mirror for over an hour, examining my body after ballet class. "Emily, time for bed!" mum yells to me from the kitchen. I turn on the tap and pretend to brush my teeth. While the faucet runs, I weigh myself on the rickety scale and close my eyes to make a wish. "Please don't weigh more than...." I'm ashamed when I look down and see the number has gone up. I freeze, horrified, and tears begin to spill out of my eyes. I lie down on the floor, coiling into the fetal position. With my ear on my wrist, I can hear my pulse: thump ... thump ... thump. I fall asleep on the stone tiles. I have failed.

Ten years have passed, and I'm lying on the stone tile floor in the bathroom, but I'm not asleep. I've passed out. It's a steamy July day and I've just run seven kilometres, as I do every day after work. Today is no different; I've eaten breakfast, sipped black coffee all day, returned home to exercise, and pretended to eat dinner with my family. But before I can guzzle club soda to simulate fullness, I faint on the bathroom floor. No one else is home right now, and even if someone was, the bathroom door is shut. I am completely alone.

I'm confused, but it's not the first time I've passed out after a run. I reach for the edge of the bathtub and pull myself up. I'm not sure how most people feel after they've fainted, but I feel relieved. Relieved that no one is home to know I've passed out, relieved that when I get up, it's time to go to sleep. That's all I think about—sleep, which is funny

because I can never seem to stay asleep. My nights are broken up into vivid nightmares and countless trips to the bathroom. Sometimes, I wake up just as I'm about to wet the bed. I've lost all control.

At work one day, there's a fundraiser for charity. The executives are donning aprons to serve up waffles for the rest of the office, and my role is to help make sure the event runs seamlessly. After everyone has eaten their waffles—and so, I've convinced them, have I—I am left with the task of cleaning the waffle irons. As I lean over the sink, my hipbones graze the counter's edge and my eating disorder commends me: "You're so strong, Emily." I smile to myself, relishing that I have, yet again, taken the high road. "Look at all of them," my eating disorder hisses in my ear, "all of them eating those waffles. You're the only one that said no. You're the only one who knows better."

It feels so good to be told these things, to know that I'm doing what most people can't, or worse, don't know they should. People are stupid. They tell me I should go out and eat sandwiches at lunchtime or put milk in my coffee. Don't they understand that's what makes you fat? I'll balloon if I do that. It's not only my eating that people love to pick on. I'll be wearing a sweater and people will scoff, "aren't you sweltering in that!" They're not even asking; they're just expressing their awe, their ignorant awe. They don't know how I feel. *I feel so cold. All the time*.

On Thursday afternoons, I see Dr Malik. She is naturally thin, and I hate her for it, but I answer her questions anyway.

"What are you thinking when you look at yourself in the mirror?" *I have failed.*

"How do you feel about socializing, your friends, and your relationships?"

I am completely alone.

"How do you feel when you eat?"

I've lost all control.

"You've lost quite a bit of weight recently; do you feel any different?"

I feel so cold. All the time.

Many anorexics experience these symptoms, and yet, while the effects of eating disorders are often the same, the causes are varied and numerous. Social, cultural, and biological factors contribute to this

illness' manifestation. Perfectionism, neuroticism, and low self-esteem are just a few of the traits that make one susceptible to this destructive behaviour ("Eating Disorders"). What may appear to be a vain belief that waffles are the Antichrist, is actually something much more complex.

Those with eating disorders are often clinically depressed and suffer with anxiety; these conditions are both a cause and a byproduct of disordered eating ("Eating Disorders"). Disordered eating is addictive, and many parallels exist between an anorexic's reliance on calorie restriction and an alcoholic's reliance on the bottle. At the very root of the issue lies not waffles, but insecurity, loneliness, and despair.

While it is human to want to change your body, those with eating disorders are held hostage by this desire. Weight, size, and body shape infiltrate one's every thought, often serving to distract one from other painful contemplations. As one's body changes, one's mindset adjusts to accommodate the goal of continued weight loss. Body Dysmorphia commonly occurs among easting-disorder sufferers who cannot accurately perceive their own bodies. Their minds have tricked them into seeing a body that is larger than it is, to further weight loss. As a result, anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric illness, and eating disorders of all types shorten the life spans of their victims ("Statistics").

And yet, one in five women struggles with disordered eating. Beyond those who have been formally diagnosed with an eating disorder, the fear of being fat, of deviating from the rail-thin norm of femininity that has come to define Western culture, is so great, one study found that over fifty percent of women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five would rather be run over by a truck than be fat ("Eating Disorders Statistics" 1).

In a society where half of us would rather die than be fat, is it any wonder we are making ourselves sick to please the mirror? And yet, the fact that we romanticize being dragged by truck tires, when it's that, or extra pounds, is not what perturbs me.

Eighty-one percent of ten-year-olds are afraid of being fat ("Eating Disorders Statistics" 2). That, that is what stirs me. When I think of this statistic I think of my ten-year-old self, curled up in my navy blue ballet leotard on the stone tile floor in the bathroom. And I wonder if

any of them turn on the faucet, and pretend to brush their teeth as they cry.

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Untitled

KEENAN MURRAY

S MY final year of undergraduate studies at Queen's University comes to an end, I have started to reflect upon my life experiences to date. Coincidentally, my final year at Queen's aligns with my final year of competitive junior hockey. Like many Canadian boys, hockey was my primary passion growing up. This passion became a journey spanning over eighteen years, and has molded many of the intangible personality traits that comprise my character today. Hockey has had a significant impact on my life, and I hope this essay will help formally end this chapter of my life.

As my skate blades cut into the ice, and the dry, freezing air whooshed against my face, my imagination would take me from my outdoor rink to the National Hockey League. I was Joe Sakic, or Peter Forsberg—my two favourite hockey players at the time—and I would find myself in dire playoff situations competing for hockey's biggest prize. I was a kid in Canada; I was obsessed with hockey, and more than anything I dreamed of playing in the NHL. From an early age I was a good hockey player. I was almost always captain of the teams I played on, and I usually scored a lot of points. I attribute this early success to my skating ability. In reality, my skating ability was a direct result of many hours dedicated to power skating. For a pre-teen, power skating isn't all that fun. My dad privately rented the ice in two-hour blocks on Fridays after school, and paid a power skating instructor to give lessons to my brothers, my teammates, and myself—two hours, no

pucks, nothing but skating. Every Friday I would ask my dad if we could scrimmage instead of skate, or if I could just skip it all together. Neither option was ever granted, and I can remember him saying, "This will help you later, you just have to put the work in now." This was an early lesson in the importance of developing a work ethic, and the correlation it has to achievement. It was also an important lesson in delaying satisfaction now, to achieve greater satisfaction later. Like a sculptor etches markings into marble, this pattern of thought has been ingrained into my psyche. Soon after, the work paid off, and I began playing AAA minor hockey in Ottawa, and my success in the sport continued. I have thought very critically about where my passion for hockey came from in these younger years. It's a question that often comes up in job interviews, and when you really think about it, describing a passion can be difficult. I believe that the felling of making my parents proud of me was underpinning my passion for hockey. That feeling is truly satisfying, and difficult to replicate.

Junior hockey was the next major phase during my hockey career, and arguably the most important in the development of my character today. After a successful first year of junior hockey in Peterborough and graduating from high school, I decided to take a gap year and play hockey for the Pembroke Lumber Kings, a highly successful junior team near my home town. This was a very challenging time, and a turning point in my life. After four years of boarding school, where I lived with my best friends, and combined high-level hockey with a strong academic record, I found myself living at home with little to do. In a few months my life had completely changed. If you love hockey, why bother doing anything else, right? Quickly, I learned this wasn't for me. I constantly bottled up emotions inside myself like a bottomless pit of poison. Early in the year, I resented my parents, as if my situation was their fault. I even considered quitting, and things got worse before they got better. There was even a brief period of time where I wasn't playing much at all. I went from being a very confident hockey player, to doubting my abilities and questioning my dream. To battle this adversity, I needed to change my attitude. Instead of hating everything around me and blaming others for my predicament, I just focused on taking small steps, and understanding that only I was responsible for where I was and where I could be. I started to take practice very seriously. I competed hard every practice, and soon enough my abilities were demonstrating success. I was able to get myself back into games, and took advantage of the opportunity. I played an important role in what became the most successful hockey season the Pembroke Lumber Kings have ever played. We went on to win the national championship in Canada, known as the Royal Bank Cup.

This turbulent year was well highlighted by feelings I had after the championship run. Winning a national championship is rare, and an impressive feat for anyone, yet after winning I felt more relieved than satisfied. I accomplished pretty much everything a junior hockey player seeks to accomplish, but it didn't feel as good as you would think. After the season, I got accepted to the commerce program at Queen's University, and had to decide whether to continue to follow my dream in hockey, or leave it behind and pursue a new future in business. The decision was very difficult, stressful, and overpowering at times. It was like a cloud of anguish that rained over me all summer. After the year in Pembroke it was clear to me that I was not passionate enough about hockey to enjoy another year playing junior hockey. This entire year taught me a long list of invaluable lessons, some that I taught myself, and others that were thrust upon me. Most importantly, I learned to believe in myself, and believe in my ability to preserve and achieve. I am confident that whatever my future will entail, it will not always be smooth sailing. However, I can rely on my experiences in Pembroke, and truly know that I have the ability to dig myself out of holes, and that success is never that far away.

Four years later, and I am about to leave Queen's behind. I have very much enjoyed my time at the University, and have never regretted the decision I made. I have found a new primary passion in finance, specifically investment management. Unlike hockey, finance meshes better with my personality. It is highly demanding; highly competitive; takes a confluence of ability, knowledge, and mental strength; and is a profession mastered by few. My passion for the work was validated through my experience as a summer investment analyst. Still, I feel like I have let my childhood self down. The kid who dreamed of the NHL never made it. But that's okay. This serves as my single largest source of motivation, and allows me to close the book on my final year of hockey, looking forward to what the future beholds. I am more hungry

than sad, and I continue to strive for greatness. One day, I know I will make that kid who dreamed of the NHL proud, because I won't stop until I do.

The Gift of Literacy

LYNN NGUYEN

TAP. TAP. Tap. All I could think about was the sound of my feet on the ground. I felt nervous. It was my first university lecture. I thought to myself, "What were people going to think of me? How do I feel about this?" Coincidentally, I was sitting in first-year psychology. When I moved across the country for university, I couldn't help but revel in the nostalgia; it was grade one again. I sat in the front row of the lecture hall, but instead of twenty students around me, there were four hundred. I remembered how I had a tough time making friends in elementary school. Everything was unfamiliar and foreign, just like university was to me now. I made eye contact with the girl who sat next to me and said the first English word I knew: "Hi."

It was September 2000, my first year of elementary school. I was sitting in the classroom waiting for my teacher to arrive. Kids laughed and ran in circles in the play area. It was as if they could sense that I was a foreigner. As a child of Vietnamese immigrants, I stuck out like a sore thumb; the colour of my skin a light shade of gold and my hair straight and jet black. It struck a stark comparison to the fair complexion of my classmates.

I sat quietly tapping my feet on the ground. *Tap. Tap. Tap.* I was anxiously waiting to make friends, but when I tried to come up with something to say, all that came out of my mouth was "Hi." As I watched the hands move around the face of the clock above me, the only thoughts in my head were how big and scary everything was. Then

she walked in: Mrs Erickson. She was tall and her hair was short, curly, and slightly greying. Her demeanour was modest. She grabbed our attention in a calm tone. *Everybody froze*, rushing to sit down at a desk so as to not get into trouble. I sat in the front row smiling to myself. Mrs Erickson started to walk around the classroom and said something to each student. One by one, each student mumbled something. Everything was incoherent to me. *Tap. Tap. Tap.* It was my turn. She looked at me. I had no idea what to do. Then, a little voice came out of me whispering, "Hi." She spoke once more. Again, I said, "Hi." The whole class snickered. Thoughts echoed in my head, "Was she going to be mad at me? How was I going to make friends?" To my surprise, she smiled at me. She had a warm grin and deep blue eyes full of wisdom. Then she moved onto the next student. Little did I know that she would play an integral role in my life years down the road.

Every day at elementary school, recess was at 10.00 a.m. The first time the bell rang, I didn't know what to do. I looked at my feet but they didn't want to move for some reason. I felt ashamed that all the kids laughed at me. Mrs Erickson approached me and spoke. She began to enunciate each word slowly to me. I could not understand her, but it sounded like the same thing over and over again. Then with all of my courage, I moved my mouth, copied every syllable, and uttered the same thing she said—not having a single clue what it meant. She pointed at me, pulled out a sheet of paper and wrote in big block letters, "L-Y-N-N." I was startled that she knew my name. She wrote down something else on the sheet of paper and gave me my first pencil. I didn't know what it said but I copied the same thing down in clumsy chicken-scratch. It looked nothing like her beautiful rounded letters. I wanted to make it look just as pretty as hers, so I practised over and over again. That afternoon when I came back from school I kept the sheet of paper and pencil in my backpack, beaming proud with my new gift from my teacher.

I learned new words with Mrs Erickson every recess, gradually working my way to larger phrases. I spent all my free time at home practising cursive. Eventually, when I wrote, it felt like the pencil would move on its own, dancing to its own beat as it glided down the page in a smooth and elegant fashion. As grade one merged into grades two, three, four, and five, I became a better speaker and a faster learner.

By grade two I knew how to speak and write full sentences in English. More importantly, I knew what the sentences meant! By grade three, I could say words in French. By grade four, I wrote paragraphs and formed my own ideas. By grade five, I wrote my first essay. Every year started out the same. I would sit at the front of the class, smiling to myself, clicking my feet on the floor. Tap. Tap. Tap. I loved learning new things. I ventured into unknown territory in second grade by raising my hand. Once I started, I couldn't stop. I loved asking questions and answering them. Literacy is like the wheels of a moving bicycle: a small push can easily propel you forward into your next destination. Just like Laura would attend to her glass figurines in The Glass Menagerie, essays and written prose were my glory pieces. I would sit around and polish my writing by editing in meticulous detail. Everything I learned in high school was shaped by literacy. While writing my personal essays for applications to post-secondary schools, I was asked why I wanted to attend university. The answer was simple: I wanted to learn more about the world and meet people like Mrs Erickson who would give me the opportunity to accomplish something meaningful in life.

What I didn't know back then was that one small gift from my teacher would eventually become the biggest and most important gift in my life: the gift of literacy. In the same way that a light bulb cannot shine without electricity, I could not get to where I am today without pencil and paper. As the lecture ended, I raised my hand and quipped, "Professor, how do you *feel* about that?" Everybody laughed. I smiled. Mrs Erickson would be proud.

Untitled

JAMIE OLSON

That you may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the darkness. (Philippians 2.15)

AVE YOU ever met one of those people who make you want to be a better person? One of those people who is so full of life that you can't help but feel inspired to dream bigger, set higher goals, and to live each day as if you're invincible and can achieve anything? My grandma is that kind of person. She has a laugh that contagiously spreads across an entire room, even if nothing was particularly funny. She has this way about her that allows her to become friends with anyone. No matter where we are, I'll often find her talking with a stranger, but not just talking; she gets into meaningful conversations, digging deep into matters of the heart. She is who she is largely because she is so strongly grounded in and passionate about her beliefs. She lives a life that is motivated by her relationship with her God. It's incredible because when people meet her, they are drawn to her and know that there's something different about that Lillian Nobert. When I'm around my grandma, it's impossible not to believe in God.

Back when she was my age, she wasn't always so strong in her beliefs. When she was twenty-one, she found out she was pregnant. Her family was conservative, traditional, and deeply rooted in their Christian faith and values; she was the only girl among seven brothers. A pregnancy out of wedlock in her family brought along with it an overwhelming burden. Whenever she reflects back on this time in her life and shares her story, I can feel the emotion in her voice resonate through my whole being as she expresses her turmoil. "I didn't know what to do. I was lost and so overcome with shame and guilt that I was numb; I couldn't confess the truth to my family. So I ran away ... an already lost girl running away." I've heard the story so many times that I can echo her version word for word, yet it never fails to awe me and leave me with a chill running through my body.

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. (Deuteronomy 31.8)

Why?! Why did you let this happen?! Her heart screamed at God. If there was a God who loved her, why was she alone in a big city with a newborn baby? No direction, no resources, yet an abundance of fear and uncertainty. She was like a lost sheep with no shepherd to guide her. The Bible makes reference to something like that, doesn't it? Pfft.

She was befriended by a group of people who were sympathetic to her challenging circumstances. Their company was comforting, and they made her feel a sense of support and connection in absence of any sort of family or friend in this new foreign place. They offered her a job delivering packages, and she quickly agreed because finances were running low and now she had a baby to provide for. Things were starting to look more hopeful. *Maybe I am going to be okay*, she thought to herself. And things were okay for a while. She made some money and finally had some people around her, which was relieving as a new mom, a lost soul, and a woman trying to survive.

Please, God. Please, God. Please, God. Please just don't let her cry. She prayed, consumed in desperation, as she held her baby close to her chest. She rocked back and forth, partly to keep the baby calm and partly in fear. They were locked in a hotel room. "Don't call the cops, don't make a noise, and don't leave this room or we'll kill you both" were the last words she heard as her "friends" and "coworkers" shoved her into the room. The packages she had been naively delivering were

drugs. The friends she had made were unknowingly drug lords. And something had gone wrong. For hours and hours she rocked in the hotel closet in fear, praying relentlessly to a God as distant as her home and family.

So do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous hand. (Isaiah 41.10)

Days before, because of an unexplainable and unavoidable drive. grandma's brother had left their home in Saskatchewan to look for his sister. No one had heard from her for months; they didn't know her whereabouts or if she was even alive, but he had a strong urge to go after her that he could not ignore. He prayed unceasingly for guidance and was obedient to the promptings placed on his heart. He got in his car and started to drive until days later, he ended up in the big city of Vancouver, almost two thousand kilometres away from home. With no clues as to where she could be, no technology to reach her, and only divine guidance, by some miracle, he found her and her baby in that hotel room, trembling in fear. Some may hear this part of the story and not believe it, others may give credit to the universe or coincidence or following gut feelings, but if you hear it from my grandma, you too will have a hard time doubting for a minute that this miracle was not orchestrated by the God whom she has unwavering peace and confidence in. "When I heard my brother's voice outside the hotel door, I burst into tears. My mind and heart were overflowing with thoughts and emotion. I didn't understand how or why he was there, but the weight of a million years lifted from my shoulders as he embraced me with loving arms. God used my brother; God spoke to my brother in a miraculous way, and thankfully my faithful brother listened. I know with every ounce of my body that God saved me that night." And whenever my mom is around she always ends with a smile at my mom that exudes a delicate, tender, and resilient love, "God saved us that night."

Everything I prophesied has come true, and now I will prophesy again. I will tell you the future before it happens. (Isaiah 42.9)

A Condo Grows in Brooklyn

ERIK PETERSEN

S 2005 began I was entrenched in the stronghold of the East Village. A neighbourhood in lower Manhattan, the East Village had clearly defined itself in the 1980s and 1990s from its western, northern, and southern equivalents. Without much mass transit service, the East Village can feel both secluded and secure, yet, as my sublease ran out and I began to search for a new apartment, it was clear that the neighbourhood was neither. As I stood in line with throngs of other apartment seekers waiting to inspect cubicles acting as apartments, I quickly abandoned the fortification of the East Village and became a quick convert to the potential of Brooklyn. The day before I had to move I found an apartment in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

Arguably, no other neighbourhood in New York City has changed as much as Williamsburg. The neighbourhood was once an industrial powerhouse with large factories surrounded by walk-ups, and while they may be aesthetically pleasing to our modern eyes, they still reek with stories of toil, hardship, and death. In 2005, the neighbourhood was rezoned from largely industrial to residential. This action enacted physical changes in the neighbourhood, obliterating many signs of its past, as well as catapulting an endless public debate over the ills of gentrification.

Before there was the bridge, there was the view. Perhaps lost in the history of the rapid development and industrialization, and then deindustrialization, of the neighbourhood is the fact that there has always

been an amazing view of Manhattan. The view must have always served as a source of endless optimism. I would sit for hours engulfed in the vision of Manhattan as the sun reflected off its towers like some modern-day Camelot. For the past hundred years the value of the view has been lost to pure proximity. Williamsburg is just one subway stop away from the East Village, but before there was the subway, and the tunnel that carries it, there was the Williamsburg Bridge. The bridge spawned the expansion of the neighbourhood and made it a viable location for working families to live and commute. The bridge meant that factories could easily move their people and products to and from the kingdom across the river. Yet, certainly it is this view of Manhattan that has kindled the desire and drive of developers to manifest the sweeping changes of late.

Williamsburg has been the source of endless non-fiction accounts lamenting the loss of the past, yet the heart of the neighbourhood can be found in its most celebrated work of fiction, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn by Betty Smith. A story of perseverance and change released amid World War Two, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn continues to represent a deeper spirit of the neighbourhood. The tree referenced in the title, A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, is a species known as Ailanthus altissima, or tree of heaven. The tree had a position of prominence and advantage in the empty lots of Williamsburg during the time when the idyllic and pragmatic Mary Frances Nolan, the novel's protagonist, lived in the neighbourhood. Certainly this species of tree was well regarded by Betty Smith, yet now, fittingly, it is considered an invasive species to be removed. Removal is the source for much contention in the neighbourhood.

Today, Williamsburg is nearly indistinguishable, not only from the time when Mary Frances Nolan lived in the neighbourhood, but even from just a few years ago. The bulwark, once formed by the river, and later by poverty, has collapsed. Boutique hotels and condos have risen far higher than the bridge. International brands have replaced bodegas and bagel shops. The industrial waterfront is dotted with development and green space. 345, 343, 340, 335, 333, 325, 320, 315, 310, 305, and 300 are the addresses of properties being developed within just a two-block stretch of Kent Avenue. When I first moved to Williamsburg, Kent Avenue felt like the Wild West. To the north I even stumbled

upon one the last remaining wooden sidewalks in the city, and probably the country. If there had been more people in the neighbourhood, this industrial wasteland on the East River likely would have been as unsafe as it looked, but then, one could walk the largely unlit streets at night without much human interaction like a walk in the woods. The moon provided guidance and wildlife (i.e., rats) was abundant.

The spiritual walls of Williamsburg were never as impenetrable as they seemed. The seclusion and security that the river offered in the 1800s was quickly thwarted with the construction of the bridge. Yet, poverty and industry limited those who entered the neighbourhood for nearly another hundred years. Whatever walls remained were destroyed with the rezoning of the area, yet the story of the neighbourhood is arguably in its infancy as it enters this new phase. The perseverance and idealism found in A Tree Grows in Brooklyn are still essential criteria to carving one's path in the city. Crime is not as rampant, but it is still lurking, even though iPhone theft far outnumbers murders. Perhaps most importantly, throngs of children are once again growing up in the neighbourhood just as Mary Frances Nolan did. There circumstances may be astronomically different, but the children of post-2005 Williamsburg are bound to mythologize the neighbourhood in their own way. Several of the new parks which dot the Williamsburg waterfront are composed of remnants of land that once surrounded large industrial complexes. In these new parks, usually off in the corners, are trees of heaven.

The Barefoot Boy's Mother

SHANNON RYAN

Y EYES were still glued to the window when our van pulled off to the side of the road, rolling to a stop. As the dirt and dust settled, my eyes fixated on a little sheet metal and wood structure. It looked as if a tornado had just run through the house, ripping off the doors and windows, and leaving a trail of dirt throughout. The paint-chipped walls revealed small patches of bright green paint: survivors of tragedy who refused to stop shining.

"This must be their house," I thought, and felt a smile take over my face.

I was in a small, poverty-stricken community on the western coast of Nicaragua, and I was staring at the reason for my visit. I was on a Global Village trip with Habitat for Humanity, and I was sent to relieve the poor family that lived in this structure by building them a new house. These people were living in such intense poverty, and I was sent here to save them.

My smile grew stronger as the family members began to walk out of the house. There was an elderly woman, a young woman, and a boy who wasn't wearing any shoes. His feet were dirtier than a pig's hoofs after a mud bath. What was his mother thinking, letting him walk around like that? They're so lucky that we had arrived.

On Monday morning I was ready to get my hands dirty and feel a real sense of accomplishment. The scene hadn't changed since I was there the previous day. The garbage owned the land and took up

residence wherever it pleased while that little boy ran around it, a guest in his bare feet.

The day started with us moving bricks off of trucks and placing them inside of what would eventually be the four walls of the house. We were a human conveyer belt, sweating in the hot, hot sun. It didn't take long before I started to lose my drive and needed a break in the shade. Sitting down, I saw a woman shovelling dirt. She was the young woman from yesterday. I let my icy-cold red Gatorade drip into my mouth as I watched little beads of sweat drop off of her forehead and hit the ground. I felt bad. I got up and made my way over to where she was, motioning for her to hand me the shovel so that I could relieve her from the task. She smiled while she muttered a few words in Spanish, wiped her forehead, and handed me the shovel before she walked away. I smiled back, thinking that I had just done her such a great service, and started to shovel the dirt.

Ten minutes later I was already sweating. The dirt was heavy and my arms were jelly. I put the shovel down and wiped the sweat off my face. I noticed that the woman hadn't gone and sat down in the shade like I thought. She was on the other side of the worksite, mixing mortar by hand. I couldn't believe it.

I asked our coordinator about this woman. He told me that her name was Amelia and that she was the mother of the barefoot boy and the daughter of the elderly woman. She was twenty-one years old.

The families that Habitat for Humanity builds for are responsible for covering part of the expenses of the house by putting in hours of manual labour. Since Amelia's husband is at the factory all day and her mother is elderly, she is responsible for putting in these hours.

I couldn't believe it. Amelia was only two years older than me and she already cared for a child and had a husband. She worked all morning and didn't take a single break until lunchtime. She was so strong and happy. I just didn't understand how this could be. But what kind of a mother lets her little boy run around barefoot in the dirt all day?

"Little Jorge is so cute," said one of my friends as we got on the van at the end of the day.

"Yeah, but he's always barefoot. I can't believe Amelia just lets him run around like that. He's always so dirty and he probably gets hurt a lot," I replied.

"He doesn't wear shoes because he doesn't have any. Not because Amelia doesn't want him to," offered my friend as she put in her headphones and looked out the window.

"Oh my God," I thought. How could I have been so ignorant? How did I not realize that the reason this little boy wasn't wearing shoes was because the family couldn't afford any? How could I have thought this was Amelia's fault? I had gotten on the van that morning ready to work hard and feel accomplished; little did I know that I would go back to the hotel that night and cry in the shower.

The next day, Amelia greeted me on the worksite with a smile. I spent the entire day working alongside her. We sweated, we hurt, and we laughed. When we were leaving the worksite that day, Amelia was nowhere to be seen. Someone told me that she went to get water so that she could bathe Jorge, and I felt my eyes beginning to fill. I had the utmost respect for this woman. She was everything that I aspired to be, and so, so much more.

I came to Nicaragua to make a difference, change lives, and build houses. It says so right on the back of our custom-made team t-shirts. I expected to build a house from start to finish. I expected to change lives and to change my own. I expected to make a difference in the lives of this family. But what I didn't expect was to find a role model amid poverty. That was my first mistake: thinking that I was the one coming to be a role model and not the other way around.

After spending a week with this family, we had successfully built them a house and were preparing to leave the worksite. As I made my way over to say goodbye to Amelia, she pulled me into a hug and looked at me with teary eyes that said, "Thank you." She looked at me as if I was her saviour. I wrapped my arms around her and stared back with mirrored emotions as Jorge ran by smiling in his bare feet.

The Ticking Clock

JOY SCHNITTKER

Spring

HEN I was a little girl, I used to spend time out in my grandparents' garden, collecting bouquets of forget-me-nots. I remember how someone had once told me that these tiny blue flowers could plague a flowerbed, emerging ever so slowly and then all at once infecting the garden. It's curious to think that as time goes on, these flowers will only continue to spread, erasing the existence of all the former plants. Our once diverse garden will lie hidden under a cerulean haze, truly causing us to forget-it-not.

The flowers act similar to Alzheimer's, as it slowly takes over. As time goes on, the disease continues to spread, taking memories and replacing them with a haunting awareness of its true ascendancy. This disease has already stolen one of my loved ones, and has begun to steal another. Through my grandfather's battle with the disease, I cannot help but be reminded of those tiny blue flowers. Maybe it was because I had picked them at my grandparents' house a mere ten years before, or perhaps it is aching desire to look my grandfather in the eye and say, "Forget-me-not."

Summer

I have learned from experience that Alzheimer's sometimes takes a while to show its effects. My mother once told me that one day my Nanny was fine, and the next day she forgot to turn off the faucet in the bathtub, and flooded her apartment. It is small moments like these that begin to appear; yet, we all casually brush them off because accepting the future is too much to handle. It is this stage of Alzheimer's that we act as if we are on summer vacation, disregarding all responsibilities and spending time smiling and laughing at old memories. We refuse to acknowledge how school is imminent, and put on facades to subdue our inner anxieties. It's hard to admit to ourselves that the person in front of us now may no longer be there in the immediate future, so we pretend that we are not watching the clock, anticipating the moment when the arms come to a halt.

But until the moment that the breeze up and takes our loved ones away from us, we bask in the sun that is our memories. My grandfather shares with us all that he can remember, stories from his childhood and from my own. He told me recently, "Do not be sad if I forget your name," and I could not help but crumble into myself. It was those words that woke me from my reverie, and forced me to feel the cool breeze moving in. I know all too well what is to come, and I can't help but understand that summer does not last forever.

Fall

Their minds are like trees in the fall; as time resumes, each memory falls from the branches and drifts away in the cool autumn breeze. No matter how hard we try raking them neatly into a pile, the wind will return and throw them into the sky, scattering them in every direction. We lay there hopelessly trying to reassemble each fallen piece as if it was a puzzle, only to show the true futility of the endeavour. Regardless of how much we beg and plead with the heavens, time will fail to rewind, and we will continue to wish that they were an evergreen, instead of an elm tree.

It starts with names, my grandfather stated to me. He explained to me that he could recognize the faces of people he once knew, but cannot seem to conjure up their names. Those memories have fallen from his consciousness, leaving a barren branch that whistles in the breeze. Likewise, my aunt told me a story about my Nanny, and how as the disease began to overwhelm her brain she had looked at her own daughter and said, "You look so familiar." Alzheimer's is relentless; it does not erase memories according to importance, but instead follows its own agenda. It does not take into account our remorse, sorrow, or our past. It forces us to our knees, reddened with guilt, and discloses the true reality of our predicament. As time progresses, the leaves will continue to descend, finding their final resting place beneath our feet.

Winter

As autumn comes to an end, a frigid arctic squall arrives, and buries the fallen leaves beneath a blanket of cold, white snow. Life becomes a challenge, a constant fight with the weather. It seems as if their minds are snowed in, as if they have reached an impasse and the snow is too deep to get through. We can stare into their eyes, but we will see nothing but a hollow gaze, an empty consciousness that once possessed such vivacity and affection. We try not to become discouraged, and dream of the day where the clouds disperse and the sun begins to shine. But alas, those days become few and far between.

I wish I could say that it gets better; that the snow melts, and the leaves begin to blossom on the branches once again. Unfortunately, once the leaves have fallen they are gone. They become part of the earth itself, and turn into fertilizer that feeds the life of other trees. Their memories become our memories, which we pass from generation to generation, and they continue to live through us. Their time may have expired as Alzheimer's watched the last grain of sand fall through the hourglass, but that does not mean they have left us completely. I will hold their memories close to me, and remember the good days with the bad. I will never let them become a side note to their disease, and although they may forget me, I will forget-them-not.

My Song A Memoir of Love

ARTHUR SHOU

T IS a beautiful ballad.

The song was synthesized twenty-one years ago. The composer is a well-mannered lady. Her long, black, straight hair is always shiny clean. Her beautifully shaped mouth, with thin lips and lovely dimples on her cheeks, always wears a smile. Arched eyebrows, a well-shaped nose, and white teeth match perfectly with her wrinkleless skin. She seldom has make-up to complement her natural beauty. Her sparkling, dark-brown eyes are her most compelling feature, which always have a look both soft and penetrating at the same time. "Your eyes speak," I admitted to her more than once. She has a slim, graceful body, but a huge brain and a large heart—a brain so huge that she knows everything, and a heart so large that she cares for everyone she knows. She is the most important person in my life. She is the most influential person who inspires me. Most of all, she is my well-loved mother.

The ballad starts with a mid-tempo piano duet, performed by an ensemble that consisted of a pianist, a flutist, and a violinist. The duet features moderate dynamics, thinner textures, and cantabile melody, offering a peaceful and calm feel.

In the second year of their marriage, my parents immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong, searching for a golden future—not for them, but for their next generation. My late grandmother used to tell me about my mother's surgery taken eight months before my birth. My mother was the one who had suffered to bring me into this world. She was my saviour. My childhood was packed with moments of laughter, pride, and intimacy. I was also told about the accident that left an indented scar on my forehead. At the age of two, I fell clumsily and hit the door frame, and was rushed to the emergency to have stitches on the bleeding gash on my forehead. My mother stayed awake all night in the children's ward, sitting at my bedside, holding my little hand. The charming blemish was a constant reminder of my clumsiness and my mother's love.

The song provides variety in sound, tempo, and texture. The composer's innovative harmonic mode is followed by rhythmic scales and chords. The tempo is allegro for most parts and the melody is romantic.

My mother was one of the most knowledgeable people I knew, but cooking had never been her forte. She joked that she was never like Jamie Oliver. She had, however, an enormous appetite for learning. Earnestly, she followed the step-by-step recipes on the television cooking episodes or cookbooks, but quite frankly, the products were barely better than edible. Fortunately, neither my father nor I had ever been a picky consumer of food, not even of well-done steaks or cardboard-like homemade bread. Except cooking and housework, my mother made me solve problems independently and feel confident in my ability to meet the challenges in my life. Every day, every night, in every moment, my home was filled with warmth and laughter. If every mother was God-sent, I should be most grateful that my mother was sent to guide me and show me the path—a path carpeted with blossoms of love and trust.

The lyric narrates the sad story of a doomed twenty-year marriage. The lyrical content begins clichéd, perhaps, but touching in its faith and passion. The slow and sombre rhythms reveal a wistful and emotional atmosphere.

When I was sixteen years old, I was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder. My mother never gave up on me. She never let me be a source of frustration and exasperation. Whenever I was desperate and on the edge of giving up, I always found my mother at my back. She resigned from her uprising career and took great care of

me. Soon after, my family broke up. My father left us for another woman. It took me nineteen years to realize how deceitful my old man was. House, without the master, did not feel warm; flowers, without the gardener, did not smell sweet; food, without the admirer, did not taste luscious; not anymore. Since then, family photos had vaporized from the sitting room, and gloomily, they walked off with those sweet memories. The idling bread maker had long been covered in dust. Pain, real pain, pain of being cheated on, took time to be cured. The divorce broke my mother's heart, but she seldom let her sorrow get the better of her. She patiently dispersed the angry clouds in the hateful sky over my head. She had not said a spiteful word or a bad word about my father; not even now.

The whole feel of the song shifts from peace and tenderness, to melancholy, and back again, with very effective dynamic changes; after a short flute solo, the melody finishes in a brass fanfare. The ending chorus displays a lively spirit and upbeat tempo.

At the crossroads of continuing my postgraduate study, my mother's unlimited faith in me makes me believe I can always succeed in whatever I strive for. I cannot forget how many times she has helped me to get the fuel pump back on during my down days. I cannot forget how many times I have given her very difficult moments that brought bitter tears to her eyes. I look forward to seeing her tears again—tears of joy and pride. Please stay strong, dear mom, please stay healthy. We will get together at my convocation to share the sweet smell of a golden future.

The three-note motive gradually changes to two-note vivaciously rhythmic, which brings the work to a mellow ending. The lyrical content of the composer's masterpiece is so powerful and passionate, with a message of hope, faith, and comfort. The diction is so precise and touching, making the song drill into everyone's heart.

My mother is always in my heart. I love you, mom.

Adrift

ERIC SMITH

HAVE always had a tendency to veer off sideways during canoe **⊥** races. The only times I'm bothered to canoe at all is at my cottage, during our annual Regatta on the shores of Lake Huron. It is both so rewarding and immediately gratifying to propel a canoe forward with nothing but your sheer strength and determination. You witness water break and split before you, bowing before the power you yield, left to churn and froth in agony as your wake. With every passing stroke, the boat shoots forward, gliding effortlessly upon the face of the water. It gives you the feeling that you can only gain pace, that you are infinitely gathering momentum; a torpedo with no target, a bullet with a rocket booster. Your path is limited not by what you can see but by what you can imagine; setting across the expanse of water before you, any route becomes possible. Each stroke is not just a renewal of the power that can break water to your will, but of the vision of the places you will visit, of the memories you will make, of the glory of mastering the river, or the lake, or the ocean.

The spectacle that water provides on its surface is the perfect deceit to complement its own mighty undercurrents, where streams of warm water converge into streams of cold water, creating a dance held in eternal tension, more powerful than any single man could ever dream of mastering. Yet there we are, on the surface, in our boats, convincing ourselves otherwise. I don't think we can be blamed for it. It is only in the depths of the water that its master is revealed, so how could we

possibly see it for what it is when we can only float on its surface. How could a man know of its presence until after he stops rowing and realizes that he had veered off course, so submerged in his effort to reach his destination that he hadn't noticed the current pulling him astray.

How anyone could see past the flurry of activity at the surface level alone was beyond me. That was my problem in canoe races: I would get so focused on paddling as powerfully as I could that I would lose track of the direction I was taking the boat. My habit of careening into other racers even crept into my swimming races, since my right arm was naturally stronger than my left. Front-crawl sprints had a high chance of my face ending up in someone's foot, yet I'd still instinctually blame the other for my own deviation. Surrounded by water, I had no way of knowing it was my fault until after it was over, where I could stand and see the fading crescent of foam tracing my path from start to finish.

I had stopped participating in the Regatta as seriously as I used to right around the time that I was going off to university. I was entering my undergraduate career in a headlong sprint, my spirits buoyed by the prospect of getting a job-securing diploma. My life seemed to be less like a story I wrote and more like a collection of checkpoints that I needed to pass. Grade school? Check. High school? Check. University? It seemed like the obvious next stop in the well-worn career path that I had learned in class. I had no real field of study in mind, but that didn't seem like such a big deal. University seemed like the place to find your vocation as much as honing it. All I needed to do was get there and the rest would take care of itself.

It's inevitable for life to turn into a rat race at some point. The process of striving and achieving a career goal is long and tiresome. The usually bureaucratic nature of work supplies an endless obstacle course of hoops to jump through, obscuring the finish line. It seems fitting that the problems I had in canoe races are the same problems I had in my rat race. I was focused on racing to the checkpoint to the point where I had lost sight of where it was supposed to lead me.

The way I approached university reminds me of an old physics problem, where a man needs to swim across a river that has a heavy current to get to a safe zone on the other side. The right way to get across the river requires the foresight to calculate the correct angle at which to swim to ensure landing in the safe zone. I had no such foresight. I dove into university with the idea that simply taking classes would lead me to my vocation, and all I had to do was make sure that I was still moving and learning. I was adrift, not lost but not driven, floating through a haze of new experiences and fields of study, only stopping for a moment to gaze at a possible future career before moving on.

In hindsight, it's clear to me that I should have taken a year off to steady myself, to see the end goal before I enter university instead of letting it decide for me. It was a misguided risk based on an increasingly archaic career path that envisions high job prospects from an increasingly insufficient degree. Yet I do not regret taking that risk. There is so much beyond the surface of life to be able to see every possible outcome and chart a secure path. The best we can do is to convince ourselves otherwise, that we can control what we can control and to believe in the strength of our resolve to see us through the murky depths of the future. The path upon which we travel is fluid and subject to change at any moment—as the saying goes, even the best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry. Sometimes the best way to counter that is not to have a plan at all. After all, you can only plan within the parameters of your knowledge. Opening up yourself to risky, uncharted territory can lead you to places you had never dreamed possible, that you could only discover once you've let go of controlling your life and gone adrift.

Fighting the Injustice

CHRIS SONG

FTER WATCHING the first season finale of *Suits* in my father's office in the hospital, I pondered what the future had in store for me. The protagonists in this TV show are corporate lawyers who work for the best law firm in New York City. Not only do they earn a thousand dollars an hour, but they also receive bonuses in six figures. I had always wanted to become a criminal lawyer. I would be defending criminals, but I would be earning more money than I could spend.

Whenever I travel to Korea, I always visit my father, a thoracic surgeon, in his hospital. He used to tell me stories of his residency days when he had to deal with drunkards creating chaos in his hospital. When I travelled to Korea in July 2012, I wanted to stay overnight at the hospital with my father to experience such chaos in the ER at night and to protect my father from drunkards.

It was the third night that week over at the hospital, and I had yet to witness a memorable event. So far, a sixteen-year-old male came in with a broken his finger; a thirty-three-year-old male with a severe case of food poisoning; and a twenty-year-old drunk male with a broken hand. Whenever I walked around watching these pitiful patients, I could not help but to think, "Pathetic."

Around two in the morning, I heard the ER door burst open, accompanied by rushing feet and wheels. Hearing the commotion and the action outside, I ran out the office and caught a glimpse of my

father and his team wheeling the patient into the operating room. With my thrilled heart, I asked another ER doctor about the patient.

This was not the kind of chaos I hoped to witness.

The patient's name was Da-Hae, and she was nineteen years old. According to the police report, she was walking northbound on the sidewalk on Jung-ang Road when a black Audi hit her. The driver was a twenty-five-year-old male, who had a blood alcohol level of 0.192. Da-Hae's ribs were broken, lungs punctured, stomach ruptured, left arm broken. It was a miracle she did not die at the scene of the accident.

After three long hours in desperate anticipation and curiosity to learn more, I finally saw my father walk out of the OR and nurses taking Da-Hae to the ICU. His face showed a hint of relief, but the anxiety and pain overshadowed it all. He explained to me that she was fortunately stabilizing. Whenever he did his rounds, I cautiously followed them to check up on Da-Hae. It had been two hours since the surgery, and she seemed to be at rest. She had a ventilator hooked up to help her breathe, and IVs pumping medicine into her veins. Even with all the tubes, she seemed to be at peace. Her eyes were quietly shut, and her chest shyly rising and falling with the help of the ventilator. I just hoped her mind did not drift too far away.

I followed my father during his last rounds before his shift ended in the morning. When we arrived at Da-hae's room, she was enjoying her hospital breakfast. After his team moved on to the next room, I stayed behind and introduced myself. I expressed my remorse for her accident and my openness to provide her company until her family members visit. She welcomed my company and explained to me that her parents are away on a business trip to China. During our conversation, a police officer came to question her about the accident. Before he left the hospital, I asked him about the perpetrator, and he answered, "I can't share much, but all I can say is that he will get off the case pretty easily, knowing his father's wealth." It was only later that I found out his father's name was on the list of Forbes' "Korea's Fifty Richest People."

My time with Da-Hae came to a halt when my father was ready to go home after his long shift. Whereas my father fell asleep the moment we got home, I could not fall asleep. The thought of the perpetrator, the victim, and the justice that was about to take place woke me up. The thought of the perpetrator's flashing his father's wealth and walking away free haunted me.

Later that evening when I went to see her, she was still stable. None of her family members visited her; I took this opportunity to get to know her more. Her smile gave off such a courageous and confident vibe that everything was going to be fine, but it barely soothed my heart. Even after I told her about the perpetrator, she smiled and told me that in the end, justice will prevail. My heart broke even more seeing her laugh and smile while suffering through this physical pain that I could never fathom. Suppressing my outrage and sorrow, I stayed with Da-Hae and tried my best to be good company.

Around two in the morning, my father was paged to urgently attend Da-Hae's ICU room: she had started to code. My dad's screaming voice, busy hands flying everywhere, and shocked eyes staring hopefully at the heart monitor all started to slowly fade away before my eyes as I stood numbly outside her ICU room. As my legs slowly grew weaker, I felt as if my own heart synced with Da-Hae's heart monitor. As the beeping sound of the heart monitor grew longer, my prayers became more desperate.

While I was hopelessly waiting for them to finish in the OR, I promised myself that if she survives, by a work of miracle, I would dedicate my studies and my career to protect those like Da-Hae who suffer because of this flawed legal system. I promised to make sure guilty criminals like this perpetrator would face righteous justice. But when my father walked out of the OR with a trail of sorrow, my hopes evaporated and tears consumed my face.

In the end, no one dared to fight for Da-Hae in the court of law. In the end, the perpetrator was exonerated according to the eyes of this flawed judicial system. But in the end, I learned to stand for justice and to fight to see it prevail. Honouring this regretfully short friendship with Da-Hae, and remembering her reassuring smile in suffering, I vowed help those facing injustice one friendship at a time, one life at a time.

Airports

KEGAN TURCOTTE

POR A long time now, I've enjoyed the simple but satisfying act of observing the experiences that happen around me. Likes, dislikes, moods, intentions; these are all things people can notice if they take a quick look around. In my years of observations, something that has always interested me is that many people have a heavy distaste for airports. People find airports chaotic, confusing, annoying, uncomfortable, invasive. In the past, I too would've classified airports as places I'd like to spend as little time in as possible.

When I was very young, my dad was always yelling at my sisters and me to shut up and be still while he drove around trying to find an empty spot in the airport parking lot. Eventually we would become too much for him to handle and he'd drop us all off at the curb while he finished parking. From there, I would always feel bad for the check-in agents as they would be berated and belittled for trying to do their jobs effectively. I recall my parents never being organized, instead seemingly preferring to blame everything else they could for why we were always rushing to the airport gate right before the departure time instead of simply preparing beforehand. Back then, I thought this was just how airports were: chaotic and confusing.

These days, the media consistently questions and scrutinizes airport procedures, and the typical complaints I hear usually refer to the utter invasion of privacy that airport security apparently entails, or the long, snaking lines that one must endure multiple times before arriving

at their gate. Within airports, I often hear people audibly frustrated about the poor signage or the lack of information that employees are able to provide. It has become so common to think of airports negatively that even those who love to travel will commonly say that the airport is the one negative aspect of a trip.

Personally, in the past five years I have been travelling far more often than I previously have. I have been to airports in many places around the world: Los Angeles, Sydney, London, and Paris, among others. What I've discovered is that though the feeling of negativity towards airports is prevalent throughout the world, it is by no means the only way that one can experience an airport. Travel companions, airport layout, destination, and time of travel all have strong connections to the way one feels about airports, but more than any of those, I believe that a traveller's attitude is what really leads to a positive or a negative view.

In the past, airports were exciting places; the first stop on an adventure to anywhere in the world. But, over time, the addition of rules and regulations, more thorough security measures, and continued growth in the number of travellers has led to a more serious and tense environment. Happy and exciting moments still happen; when I arrived home from an extended trip to Australia to the smiling faces of my mom, sister, and girlfriend at the beautiful Vancouver arrivals gate, I was surprised and elated. At these times, when airports represent home, love, and family, it is easy to forget about all the inconveniences and annoyances that transpired beforehand, but these moments don't seem to come often enough.

The idea that airports can be stressful places at certain times is an undeniable fact, but to say that they are always this way is very far from the truth. My fixation with airports has grown so immensely throughout my travels that I now relish the time I spend within them. I look forward to going through security and then waiting at my gate. I enjoy watching how people interact and react to different situations. Noticing the misery grow on faces as travellers realize they are only half way through the line, and watching them take off and unpack every unnecessary item they have because they believe it is required by law or something (it's not). It reminds me of an aquarium, peering in and

viewing every fish without them really noticing, seeing every detail, the whole picture.

Airports are strange places because unlike anywhere else, the vast majority of the occupants have nothing to do. They are not there to enjoy the entertainment, they are not there to work, they are simply there to wait. Because of this lack of activity, a calming, serene atmosphere is created. It is like being in an office waiting room for an extended period of time, but on a much larger scale. A time and place to relax and enjoy yourself for a short while before having to figure out or act upon the next thing in the endless schedule of life.

One of the more concrete observations I've made is that travellers strongly resent being told what to do, but following the rules is probably the quickest way to start enjoying airports. Being prepared, not impatient, at check-in usually leads to less frustration, while being smart, not a smart-ass, at security helps reduce those long waiting times. Relax, enjoy, observe; these are the things that allow me to have amazing airport experiences. The ability to replace the negative aspects of airports with positive ones has led me to no longer view an airport as a place I have to endure in order to get to my destination, but more as another enjoyable experience along the way.

Untitled

ADAM UHRYNUK

Y GRANDFATHER, Walter Patyk, is one of the strongest men I have ever met. He is not strong in the literal meaning of the word: I doubt he could bench-press much, he needs a pacemaker to regulate his heartbeat, and the aches and pains he has from age sometimes give off the impression he is about to fall apart at the seams. His strength is not of his body, but of his heart. He has persevered through countless trials and tribulations that I can scarcely imagine, even having heard these stories from childhood. His tale is one of losing everything at the beginning, and gaining it all back, if not more, by the end.

The first struggle came when he was seventeen, in 1939. His family was living in East Poland on a farm given to his father for his services in the First World War. In September of 1939, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union split Poland, and my grandfather was trapped on the Soviet side. He, his family, and everyone else were crammed into cattle cars and promptly shipped off to Siberia. As any history book will tell you, the Russian people hardly had enough food to get by, so you can imagine how bad it was for the Polish and other people the government in Moscow didn't care about. The tale only got worse when he was hauling logs and through miscommunication, his work partner nearly killed him by crushing his foot under a wagon hauling logs back to their work camp. I can't even imagine that kind of pain, because I know for a fact I would have whited out instantly. My

grandfather not only managed to stay conscious, but also managed to alert his partner soon enough to that the damage to his foot was less than it could have been. The damage had been done, and he was unable to walk for weeks. He first gave me this tale when I was eight, with a fractured ankle. I was in a sour mood since my winter was essentially shot because of that. So my mom, sick of me, sent me for a week up to my grandparents. My grandma's sternness from being a former teacher got me to shut up finally, but my grandpa's story is what actually start to turn my attitude around. If my kind old grandfather could handle a worse injury and deal with it, then so could I.

In 1942, his suffering in Russian oppression was ended thanks to Winston Churchill promising to train the Polish men and return them to Russia as a veritable fighting force. He and the other men in the labour camp left the claws of (what my family has come to know as) the most evil man to ever live, and they trained in Iraq and Palestine. The first time he saw action was in Italy, where an artillery shell sent shards of shrapnel into his leg. The field medic, upon examination, was ready to amputate. At this point, my grandfather was crying, begging, and pleading to keep his leg. His steadfast resistance was so much that another man was sent to fetch a real doctor, who managed to extract the shrapnel and bandage him up. It took them ten days before the doctor deemed my grandfather able to walk again, but once he could, he was put on a boat and sent to Edinburgh, Scotland to fully recover. Once he arrived, he couldn't speak a word of English, but everyone kept trying to talk to him. While this speaks to the friendly nature of Scottish people, the culture shock must have been staggering. They also collectively renamed him Johnny, because no one could understand him through the language barrier. This story is what made me want to become a doctor and is what I set my goals on ... until I realized I had zero ability in math and chemistry. So that was a short-lived dream, but my sister has nicknamed my grandpa Johnny after she heard this story, and when she calls him that, everyone smiles.

Once the war ended, he and many of the other displaced Polish people had two options. Head back to the U.S.S.R. where Stalin hid his devil horns under his stupid hat, or go to one of the British colonies. My grandfather made the only sensible choice and signed a list for both Canada and Australia, and the higher-ups gave him papers to come to

Canada. It was actually at the Canadian border where he was named Walter. I can't type out his given name with the English alphabet (since English is a Germanic language and Polish is Slavic), but it was the Polish equivalent to Valerie. The immigrations officer was just lazy and possibly slightly racist and just gave him a new identity the second he came to Canada. Given the information any history textbook would tell you about 1945, I'm positive it was a racism thing. It was a different time. In a predominantly English country, he should have an English name, right? But I digress. He was assigned to do farm work out in Guelph with other people he had served with, so he had a small network of friends, and he had the fortune of working under a very kind farmer who helped him adapt and gave him meals and a place to sleep. The farmer also went out of his way to take him into town on weekends to socialize and learn about Canada. In 1947, he was able to reestablish connections with his mother, sister, and youngest brother who were all still in Poland thanks to the British services that were responsible for the well-being of the Polish veterans. With their help, he was able to send letters and, later on, e-mail them. Over his time as a farmhand, he managed to learn English, and once he was adjusted, he was able to search for other jobs that paid better. While neither of my grandparents recall how he met my grandmother, Joy, they were wed in July 1952 and are still going strong. The rest, as they say, is history.

Walter Patyk has been one of the biggest influences on my life, teaching me valuable life lessons from his own experiences, so I don't make any mistakes he made. He got my grandmother to make his story into a picture book, so it's also partially thanks to him that I learned to read and am such an avid reader today. He's come close to losing limbs, and even lost his identity at s point, and still he always has a smile on his face. It's because of his adversity and good heart that I'm even here, and even though he may be falling apart at ninety-one, I can help support him as long as he needs me.

Unconditionally

ALYSSA VERRE

WE LEARN more from pain then we ever do from pleasure. I couldn't tell you the exact moment I discovered that specific phrase, but what I can tell you is that it means more to me as I get older. It's powerful, it's deep, and it's the truth.

I watched this video in a mandatory high school health class once. It was about a toxic relationship; one where you see a girl with potential and grace being corrupted by her abusive boyfriend. He would belittle her, control her, hit her, then apologize. This vicious cycle of manipulative acts is a reality that each and every girl in that health class was exposed too. I focused on the relationship depicted, constantly telling myself that I would never be a part of such an unhealthy relationship; I would be the girl strong enough to leave without hesitation. The film ended and I went back into my blissful reality of genuine happiness and excitement for my future.

That video was never a memorable part of my life, until it did, unimaginably, happen to me.

An abusive man does not have "Narcissist" tattooed on his right arm. There is no waving red flag. His evils are hidden behind his exterior, completely buried from sight. He dressed in confidence and charm, excelled in every class, and was *that* popular senior whom everyone graciously knew. You can say, in my defence, that those qualities would have enticed anyone. It wouldn't matter if I were a naive freshman or a brilliant sophomore, because no one, no mater how

evidently smart or strong, could be prepared for an abusive relationship. He soon became my whole world, coercing his way into my emotions, my dreams, and my passion for life. Like a tick that attaches onto flesh when the opportunity arises, he latched onto me with no intent of ever letting go, helping me realize that certain types of evil do not die willingly.

I signed an imaginary contract when we started dating; the title read, "To Stay a Happy Couple." I didn't read the fine print, however. Those terms included nothing but giving up who I was. I began to sign it when I deleted all of my male friends off of my contact lists, when I started dedicating every ounce of free time to him, and when I threw out every article of clothing that he claimed to be slutty. Slowly but surely, I dotted the signature with permanent ink without ever asking how to revoke the agreement.

His family life was not as picturesque as I had quite imagined it would be. When I first visited his rented-out apartment, I was exposed to the smell of cheap potpourri covering up the smell of pot. There was a collection of dusted china plates enveloped in a light brown cupboard, seemingly disregarded since many Christmases ago. I made the assumption that his mom was an alcoholic, as she met me smelling like whisky and Coke, barely able to offer me a handshake at two o'clock on a Tuesday. He and his mother did not have a familiar or typical relationship. It took one more drink for the intoxication to trigger her built-up anger and result in her slapping him. She acted as if I was a part of their furniture, not a visible bystander frozen in place and unable to fully understand how a mother is capable of abusing her own son. Right in that moment, overcome by sympathetic pity, I became someone more to him than his girlfriend. I saw myself as his angelic saviour, someone to save him from his corrupted household. From then on, I volunteered myself to be his mom, his supporter, and his unconditional love.

I was eight months in and I felt like a tethered puppet. I was fully isolated from my friends and family, no longer excited about my life, but anxious. I walked on eggshells everywhere I went, with every word I said to him. On some days, I was the perfect girl for him, the love of his life. On others, I was fat, a piece of shit; he could do better. The quick moments of happiness fooled me into believing that the

intolerable times were worth it. He had valid excuses for treating me badly, right?

My confidence was plummeting, my insecurity was rising, and the only person who could change that in a matter of moments was him. He was the problem, and I acted like he was the solution.

When he felt a loss of control he would strike back physically, like his mother did. I soon realized that I had become the spitting image of the girl that I had watched on the screen in health class. I was alone, I did not know how to break free, and I did not know how to tell anyone what was happening behind closed doors. No one would believe me, and those who did wouldn't understand why I stayed. Nobody knew that I was trapped behind a soundproof glass wall, watching who I used to be travel further and further away because no one could hear me to stop her.

It was not until two years later that I found the strength inside of me to put the abuse to rest. It was not until I woke up one morning, unable to get out of bed in fear that I no longer knew how to live without him. That morning, I gazed at a picture on my nightstand. The picture portrayed my five-year-old self in a torn soccer jersey and oversized shin pads. I was wearing the most mesmerizing of smiles. Where had that carefree, innocent girl gone?

I started to answer that question day by day, when I finally left him. He left me with the most haunting eight words: "I'll kill myself if you are not around." It echoed repetitively in my head, bound to shower me with guilt, until I realized the truth: his words were only strategic phrases that attempted to lure me back into hell. I proceeded to answer the question when I found support through my friends and family who all had unconditional patience. I answered it when I began to laugh again, and the emotional scars disappeared one by one. I answered it when I deleted the last photo I had of us, which captured my artificial happiness I unknowingly created while with him. The carefree and innocent self I truly lost came back when I finally felt free. After recovering for six months, a new photo of me was taken. I was in my graduation gown, holding up an acceptance letter to a prestigious university, with the most genuine of smiles across my face.

I not only found out who I was again, I found out who I wanted to be.

Immigrants of the Educated Economy

YIN WEI

SYRACUSE, AS I remembered it from childhood, was a rundown American city in New York. A settlement left behind by the industrial era, its economy held together by two universities and Wegmans (a Walmart competitor chain store). Driving downtown on Interstate 81, one would pass through hordes of factory buildings stained with decades-old dust—industrial beasts whose owners had long left.

The poor lived in the far east, on the other side of the highway along East Lafayette Street. Government-funded apartments lined up in cubicle-like rows, where the interiors reeked of urine, stale cigarettes, and cleaning agents that desperately tried to mask one another's smell. "We were so poor that the government paid us to live there," my mom would joke. Mom used to be an engineer, and dad was an associate law professor in China before immigrating to Syracuse. There was an unspoken understanding between immigrants that the language and cultural barriers of the west could undermine any credentials earned back home. And as such, many educated immigrants started from scratch.

My parents worked odd hours for odd jobs: restaurant server, driver, baby-sitter, house-cleaner. My dad once carried a sack of flour up an eight-storey building for a few dollars of change. Wrinkled bills from hard-earned tips that we carefully counted around the dining table held a special promise of happiness and privilege.

When I told my favourite teacher in middle school, Mr Wilson, that I wanted to be an artist, "but not a starving artist, absolutely not!", he offered me my earliest non-parental career advice. "Look," he explained, "don't worry about money, do what you love and the money will follow." I showed him paintings in my sketchbook. I chewed over his words. They sounded liberating and absurd at the same time. Mr Wilson probably saw a piece of himself in every curious student, after all he had quit a high-paying job to teach middle school kids. At the end of the school year, I had turned down an offer letter from an expensive, prestigious private arts high school in favour of a public school with an exceptional math and sciences program.

Sorry, Mr Wilson.

My high school days felt like driving down a highway of dizzying possibilities with the occasional decision to keep left or right, and Mr Wilson's advice was suddenly everywhere like a nagging billboard ad. "Chase your dreams! Do what you love! Follow your *passion.*" Sometimes they were phrases plastered on the doors of guidance counsellors' offices. Sometimes they were the motivational speaker's fearless monologue as the speaker paced back and forth on the stage. Those colourful, inspiring words made me distraught, because I sensed a growing rift between the indulgent joy of creating art and the sobering need to be financially independent as soon as possible. It was as if the highway ahead was about to fork, heading off in two completely different directions, and I hadn't decided which way to go.

I stumbled upon the Web marketplace in an effort to make extra cash in high school, and with a pirated version of Photoshop, Flash, and self-taught Web programming, I managed to get strangers to pay me to design logos and build Web pages. It was a creative endeavour I enjoyed, and I gorged myself in the intoxicating playground of the Web. The Internet industry in 2006 had just recovered from the dotcom burst: e-commerce was exploding, and while new standards were established as the way people used the Web changed, Facebook took over MySpace as the predominant social network that same year. Web contractors, for the most part, did not care whether self-declared professionals were twenty-six or sixteen, as long as the quality of work was indistinguishable.

In the digital economy, monetary value was measured by a constantly shifting demand. To be in demand, one had to put forth brilliant, impactful, and memorable output that no one else could easily replace in a reasonable amount of time, and be known for said output. Or one could offer less specialized labour, but do it much faster and cheaper than the next person—just like new immigrants of my parents' generation. It was through these obsessive extracurricular expeditions into the digital playground that I had gained a deep appreciation for education. Suddenly it became clear why the nagging, collective voices that told me to follow my passion were so quixotic: passion could be put to work, daily and in between bouts of inspiration. It could be researched, scrutinized, held out to the world and asked "Am I brilliant? Am I impactful? Am I wanted?", among other questions. But passion should never be simply *followed*.

For a long time until the industrial revolution, young people who desired to become experts in an industry sought apprenticeship under practising specialists in their respective fields, while the university was an isolated holy ground for life-long academic pursuits. In this decade, however, the flooded gates of university admission inadvertently produced industry professionals the same way factories churned out canned goods—in large batches, ready to be stocked to shelves of the job market. Without a conscious effort to evaluate and take control of one's education, a traditionally insulated environment could provide a false sense of security as the market outside shifts. As many as forty-four percent of university graduates were unemployed or underemployed four months after their graduation. New graduates are the immigrants of the educated economy.

But where could one look for answers when expensive, hardearned majors became like abandoned factories in a rundown city? Who was at fault when degree-holding, privileged men and women retreated to over-educated ghettos of Starbucks and golf courses and shitty dead-end internships ... if they even managed to find one, and worked away precious hours of youth to pay off the indebted promise of "Follow your passion and money will fall into place"? There exists a deep rift, occupied by a \$28.3 billion student debt, between a glorious university education and a not-so-glorious reality in the industry. While dreams do need to be pursued, and universities will continue to reform, we ought to stop spoon-feeding students and younger peers every feel-good advice about the future. Following blind optimism is a practice that lacks thoughtfulness and respect for the vast economy at work. If not careful, one could end up paying too much attention to the attractive, colourful billboards, and not enough to navigating the unexpected road ahead.

Grandpa Weidhaas

Nazi or Not?

SANDRA WHITE

WAS a Nazi!" Grandpa Weidhaas said to me when we first met. He liked to shock people. He said it showed a person's character by their reaction to such a horrific statement. But mostly he just liked to irritate his uptight daughter-in-law. Her reaction to his statement was visceral, and that made him laugh. He never talked about the war. He liked to keep people guessing. Was he a Nazi? Was he not? I never got to ask because my mother-in-law gasped so loudly at that moment it sounded as if she was on fire. Grandpa Weidhaas had opened the door with his willy hanging out of his pyjama pants and a pornographic movie on pause in his VCR. That was Grandpa Weidhass: an eccentric, kind, porno-loving old man. But a Nazi?

With a twist of his pants his willy was no longer free, and he invited us into his home without the slightest embarrassment or shame despite the horrified faces of his son and daughter-in-law. They were embarrassed that Grandpa Weidhaas still had sexual urges at eighty-two, and the scene that greeted us didn't fit into the Norman Rockwell image his daughter-in-law had been trying to sell me of their family. She glanced at me, checking to see my reaction, and was angry when she saw the smirk on my face; her Normal Rockwell image was turning into an Addam's Family portrait in front of her. Grandpa Weidhaas was non-plussed by the whole scene and busied himself making tea.

"Now, sweetheart," he smiled at me as he brought tea into the living room, "tell me how you met my grandson." He asked me about my life, my work, and about our upcoming wedding. He never stopped smiling at me and patting my hand gently as we spoke, all while his family sat staring at the paused image on the television. Grandpa Weidhaas looked at their twisted faces, truly disgusted by his porno habits, and winked at me slyly.

"If I had of known you were coming I would have made sure I was decent," he shrugged, and continued his conversation with me. I loved him at that moment; he didn't care what anyone thought of him and his porn habits. It was his house after all.

While his family sat judging Grandpa Weidhass like Puritans during a watch trial, I couldn't stop wondering if he were a Nazi or not. It would make sense because he was a German immigrant, he was the right age to have fought, and he lived in Northern Ontario. Living in Northern Ontario may not seem like a clue, but there was a large German POW camp hidden in the wilderness. It all fit. Of course, that didn't mean he was a Nazi. I wanted to ask Grandpa Weidhaas, but his daughter-in-law, who was sitting uncomfortably close to the paused porno movie, huffed and sighed like a tire running out of air that I couldn't ask. I would have to wait to find the answers to my questions.

Grandpa's refusal to be contrite and embarrassed about watching porn put everyone but me in a foul mood, and the visit was hurried. I wanted to stay. I wanted to curl up on the sofa with my cup of tea and listen to this old man's life story. I wanted to scream at my mother-in-law's incessant huffing to SHUT UP. It was only a porno movie; he was in his eighties, so what harm could it do? I kept a civil tongue and sadly stood at the doorway saying goodbye. I hated them at that moment, hated them for acting like prudes and for not allowing me to ask Grandpa Weidhaas if he was a Nazi or not.

I peppered everyone with questions on the drive home, but to my surprise they knew nothing about Grandpa Weidhaas' time in Germany or his time as a POW. All they wanted to talk about was how horrifying it was that he watched pornography. He had announced that he was a Nazi during the war, and all they wanted to discuss was his porn habits. The real sin was that they didn't care enough about this man or his life to have asked questions. His son told me he never thought to ask about

his father's life in Germany. "Never thought to ask?" What a strange statement to make about your father. I wanted to know everything about him and he was only going to be my Grandfather-in-law.

Grandpa Weidhaas made the long trip from Kirkland Lake to be at his grandson's wedding, and I was thrilled to see him again, hoping to find out if he was a Nazi or not. But the overly choreographed wedding weekend meant that I would not get my questions answered. Anytime I got close to him, his daughter-in-law pulled me away on some wedding pretext, trying to keep me from finding out if he was a Nazi, I could only assume. Twice I found myself out of her sight and headed straight towards Grandpa, barely able to contain my excitement. The first time I found him surrounded by my family, sitting like a King holding court, telling stories of his life. My disappointment was not easily hid, but at least someone heard his stories, and I knew they wouldn't keep them secret from me. The second time I found myself free of my mother-inlaw, I spotted Grandpa sitting at a long table during the wedding reception with my great-aunt Jenny. To my surprise, he was holding her hand and whispering softly into her ear. I stood there watching happily as the eighty-two-year-old man put the moves on my ninety-year-old great-aunt. Their happiness was short lived as my mother-in-law caught them. What I saw as cute she saw as grotesque, and she quickly pulled him away, and like a fishwife loudly scolded him for embarrassing his grandson (who hadn't seen anything). She didn't see the irony that the only one embarrassing us was her.

Grandpa Weidhaas passed away two months after our wedding, and I never got the chance to talk to him. I regret never having asked my questions, but more importantly I never got to tell him how much I loved him. I never got to hear the story of his life from his lips, but through my family (who had listened intently to his every word) and hours spent at the National Archives in Ottawa I learned he was not a Nazi. He hadn't volunteered to fight in World War II, but because the war was going so badly for Hitler by 1944, SS soldiers were forcing boys of sixteen and seventeen into uniform. Three SS soldiers had walked into his school one day, asked for volunteers, and took the only three boys not to have raised their hands. Grandpa had told my father that he was marched out of school and onto the back of an army truck. He didn't believe in the Nazi ideology, he didn't join the army out of

nationalistic pride; he was afraid of the SS and Hitler, and put the uniform on because he knew he would be shot if he didn't. Grandpa's son and daughter-in-law had spent their lives avoiding the question of whether he was a Nazi or not, and I think even they would have been proud to learn that he fought because he was forced to and not for a belief in the Nazi ideology.

Veritate Stamus et Crescimus

DAVID WILLIAMS

ETWEEN THE Northeast corner of Little Hawk Lake and the Southwest arm of Lake Kennisis is a swath of two-hundred-yearold hemlock trees. These old growth hemlocks are unique; most of the old conifers—hemlock, white pine, and red pine—were removed during the logging boom of the 1860s-1890s. During those years of destruction, the 150-foot tall conifers were felled with eight-foot saws. Their limbs lopped off with sharpened steel, the trees were thrown into lakes and rivers to be taken by current and pole to the lumber mill. In their wake of destruction, the lumbermen left a tinderbox of limbs, trunks, and sawdust. Fire was not far behind. If a tree managed to avoid the saw and axe, it burned in the fires that followed. A 1930 report on the forest resources of Ontario states that of the 10,216,000 acres of the Ottawa-Huron region (now known as cottage country) only twenty-two percent of the forest is mature. A bush road runs through the hemlocks between Little Hawk Lake and Lake Kennisis, giving easy access to a small portion of this twenty-two percent. If you travel the bush road you can see a portion of the forest that hasn't changed in hundreds of years.

The beginning of the road is wide and sunny. A tangle of raspberry bushes and poison ivy follow the path on either side, discouraging travellers from wandering. Beyond, the foliage is dense and chaotic. Birch, maple, striped bass, dogwood, and poplar saplings crane their stalks, limbs, and trunks for a speck of sunlight, for a morsel of food.

Underground, their roots shoot long and far in every direction, searching for water. The battle of life and death is omnipresent. Dead saplings stand among the living, leafless arms outstretched, gawking at their own mortality. Trees survive by throwing leaves high above the canopy, or rudely in front of their piers, thieves. In this forest, the effort of subsistence leaves trees gaunt and rickety.

The trail narrows slightly as we enter the hemlock stand. Sunlight gives way to shade, leaves give way to pine needles, and chaos gives way to order. Large trunks bolster the canopy above like the pillars of a cathedral. A hundred feet overhead, pine needles form a living roof. The latticework of needles opens and closes with the wind, sending light dancing over trunks and limbs below. No light reaches the ground, no food for newcomers. There is no competition between trees; hemlocks take all of the sun and water and share it among themselves. The trees stand a respectful distance away from each other, straight and proud. Only in the canopy do the young branches tickle and dance with one another. At our level, there are no branches and no undergrowth, our view between the pillars is unimpeded. The forest is grand, majestic, comforting, and awe-inspiring; it invites us to walk among its open floor but we follow the trail out of reverence.

Back at the cottage, familiar trees and saplings look strange and out of place. They squawk among each other for food, they are petty. The grandeur of nature is being undersold.

The primary target of nineteenth-century loggers was white pine. It was numerous, strong, tall, light, and could be moved in huge quantities by water without sinking or being damaged. The director of my old summer camp, Jon, uses the white pine as a metaphor in his chapel service. It goes something like this:

There used to be a lot of white pine here; they were the only tree. Mother nature was happy and so was everyone else; things were good. The settlers came and cut down the white pines. Mother Nature is less happy and things are less good.

His implication is that the removal of the white pine is symbolic of our wilful disconnection with nature and the resultant chaotic forest is symbolic of the existential turmoil that results from not living in harmony with nature. His story is grandiose but it's consistent with my own beliefs and experience.

Sometimes, I try to recreate Jon's vision. With difficulty, I superimpose the old hemlock stand onto modern cottage country, but there is always a topographical feature or piece of infrastructure that doesn't fit with the rest of the image.

In the nineteenth century, loggers removed most of the white pine, hemlock, and red pine from cottage country. Roughly seventy-eight percent of the forests have been either been logged or burnt in the last 150 years. But the forests were never exclusively white pine (as Jon insists) or hemlock (as I like to pretend). To think otherwise defies both ecology and logic. Ecologically, the forests could not have been virile or sustainable without considerable biodiversity. Logically, the hemlock and white pine would have regrown in the last 150 years, if there were not indigenous, faster-growing species already in the forest. In reality, only "as the lower elevations are approached does the forest composition gradually change to one of a higher coniferous content." Most of these conifers are gone and will not grow back for hundreds of years, if at all. We may never see them again, but the old conifers were never as grand in reality as they were in the imagination.

The old conifers are majestic, reassuring, and powerful. It's disappointing that, even in their heyday, they were minor players in the forest ecosystem, and more disappointing to know that the ecosystem will recover and thrive without them. At the same time, the insignificance of the conifers helps us to forgive the men who cut them down years ago. The truth of the forest is bittersweet.

The forests of Ontario tell two messages.

The old conifers: Sometimes, the world is a beautiful, ordered, and patient place.

The surrounding forest: *Often, it is not.*

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Ignorance Is Bliss

LAUREN WINKLER

THEY SAY "ignorance is bliss." This is something I have recently found to be true. Oh, how I would love to parade around the classroom as a child sharing that I was, what I called, "Native American." It felt like I had just won an award; none of my peers were Aboriginal—I was unique. Here I was, a girl whose ancestors were native to this land, going to a school in York Region where most of my classmates were white. I have always taken pride in my ancestry but not always for the same reasons. It was not until I came to Queen's University that I became exposed to the implications that come with being part of a minority group. It was also at this point in my life that I became conscious of the fact that my European background was more physically prominent than my Indigenous background. This becomes obvious when my face disappears in the white-dominated crowd at Queen's.

In my elementary and high school years it was easy to introduce myself as having Aboriginal ancestry, seeing that many aspects of First Nations cultures were being romanticised in the media. Moccasins, feathers, and dream catchers were new trends being adopted by a white North American society. It was easy to adopt the attractive aspects of First Nations cultures while ignoring the issues that came with being Indigenous. I know this is true because it is something I have done. How foolish I now feel to know I would brag to my friends, feeling empowered by the fact that I was different and they were adopting the

culture of "my people." It is unfortunate, but this is the thought process that dominated my mind throughout most of life.

In elementary school I learned that the white man is the hero and that the Indians who built tepees and fires and wore animal skins became friends with and fought alongside the white man. It was not until university that I was able to venture into the dark shadows of Canada's past relationship between its Indigenous people and the European settlers. Suddenly I felt as though the fast pace I had held up throughout my education was compromised; I had fallen and I was not sure whose hand I would take to help me up: the coloniser or the colonised. I have been taught Canadian history in the way that, as white people, we should feel guilt for what our ancestors did and that we are still responsible for all of the suffering of Aboriginal people. It is like a game of tug-of-war where guilt is on the left side, resentment on the right, and I am being torn apart in search for the answer.

Like Viola from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, my true identity is disguised, which, like Viola, puts me in a better position than if I was a visible minority. Just as Viola pretended to be a man to avoid being discriminated against as a woman, I am able to pretend that I am completely white in order to avoid being discriminated against as an Aboriginal woman. This thought haunts me every day. Why is it that I get to hide behind a white mask that acts as a repellent for racism, when others have more identifiable features that attract discrimination? Each racist comment that I hear or discriminatory action that I see against Aboriginal people in Canada deepens the hole that has been dug out of my chest. I feel like a child who got away with a wicked prank as my peers were not so lucky and got sent to the principal's office.

The missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada may or may not be a familiar issue with many people, seeing that it is not an issue that is being widely addressed in our society. As with a lot of other blemishes that Canada hides behind its peacekeeping makeup, I first became aware of the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada in my second year of university. A recent report released by the RCMP states that 1,181 Indigenous women in Canada have gone missing or have been murdered between 1980 and 2012. I have to tell myself over and over again: this is your reality. The very real, very disturbing fact that Aboriginal women are being targeted is

something that I have to be aware of and live with. Again, a mirror is held up in front of me and I am introduced to my white skin. I am bombarded with questions. Why do I get to hide behind my white skin? Why do so many women *have* to live in fear of being kidnapped and killed when I *get* to be protected by privileged white crowd? I tug and tear at the skin trying to find the Aboriginal girl that I identify so strongly with, but she only appears through my actions and through my words.

You know that feeling you would get when you were home alone for the first time and someone knocked on the door, or the floors creaked? It is almost as if your organs share your fear; your heart is desperate to escape through your chest, and your stomach tries to drop down and slide out of your body through your feet. This is how I feel when I think about the reality that my mother, my sister, my cousin, or my aunt could be taken away. This is how I feel when I think about the reality that I am Aboriginal, and by identifying myself as so, I could be kidnapped, murdered, or both. Not a day goes by since learning about the seriousness of this racism that I do not feel both grateful and guilty that my white skin acts as a shield against potential racist attacks. Unless I tell them, many people are unaware that I am Indigenous, and the fact that I look white and am perceived as being only white is shoved in my face every time I hear that another woman or girl has gone missing. I understand the first impressions of people when they meet me, the impression that I am of a strictly white background, every time I look in the mirror.

It is with everything that I have learned about Canada's past as well as current issues that have changed my opinion of Canada, and of me. I have finally been let in on the joke: Canada is not as safe and peaceful as I had been fooled into believing. This realisation has left me feeling like I have just found out my best friend has secretly hated me throughout the whole relationship; never have I felt more vulnerable. Although I am grateful to have been made aware of all of these issues—for now I have the knowledge to produce change—I am also nostalgic of the days when I thought I was related to Pocahontas; when I knew very little of all the complexities that come with being mixed race.