THE WALRUS

MARCH 2020 • THEWALRUS.CA

# Disappeared

Where did more than 1,200 Indigenous women go? One community's six-year quest to find just one

WE NEED MORE LGBTQ HEALTH DATA

HOW TO TAKE YOUR GOLDFISH ON A PLANE

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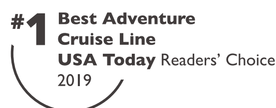

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# Congratulations to Corey Mintz, recipient of the 2019 Allan Slaight Prize for Journalism.

Made possible by a generous gift
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**The $10,000 Allan Slaight Prize for Journalism** is awarded to Corey Mintz for his April 2019 story "Land of Plenty," an exploration of Canada's long history of destroying Indigenous food systems and what it would take to restore them.

Read Corey's latest contribution to The Walrus on page 38.

Visit ***thewalrus.ca/allan-slaight-prize*** to read the other exceptional stories that were shortlisted for the award.

**Allan Slaight** is one of Canada's preeminent entrepreneurs and philanthropists. As a former radio-news director, Allan is pleased to support serious journalism through the Allan Slaight Writers' Fund at The Walrus and the Allan Slaight Prize for Journalism.

THE WALRUS | CANADA'S CONVERSATION

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THE WALRUS
VOLUME 17 • NUMBER 2
MARCH 2020


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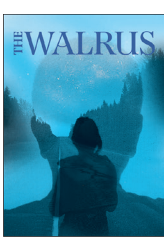


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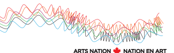

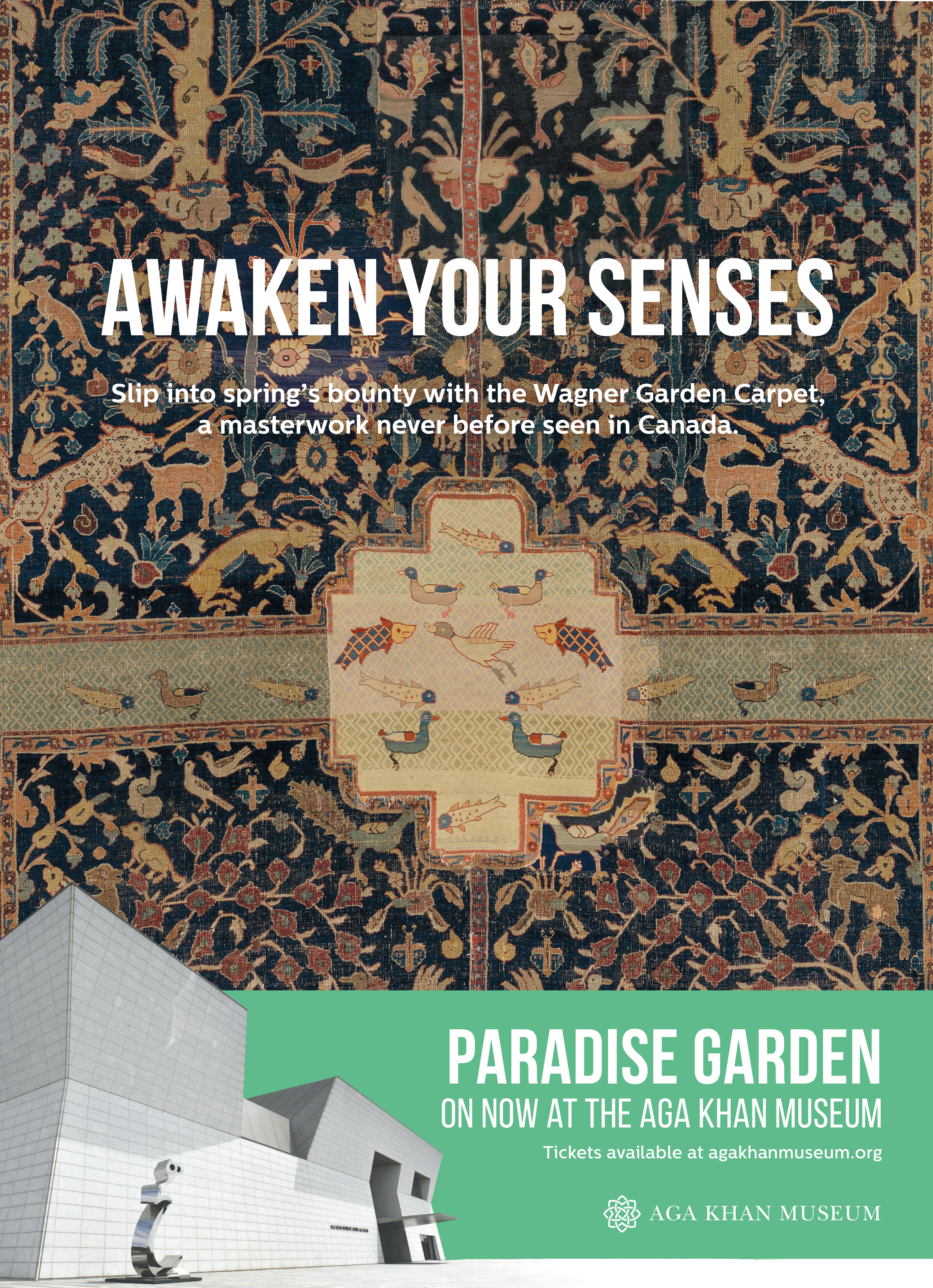
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# Editor's Letter

LAST FALL, journalist and author Anne Kingston and I taught a new course at the University of Toronto titled "#MeToo and the Media." Through a series of weekly two-hour lectures, we discussed the roles of both professional journalism and social media in advancing #MeToo, the cultural movement that went viral, in 2017, in the wake of allegations of sexual assault and harassment by Harvey Weinstein. (In the first year after it became popularized, the hashtag was used more than 19 million times on Twitter.) We're all still taking the measure of #MeToo: Does it represent a cultural movement as consequential as the civil rights movement of the 1960s? What would "redemption" and healing from these crimes actually look like? #MeToo may have thrown more questions at society than it answered, but it demonstrates the speed at which we, especially in the digital era, can change our ways of thinking.

In class, our lectures covered topics such as power dynamics, celebrity, gender, and the legal system—but one of the most telling lessons for me was about the media industry itself. The decimation of traditional news outlets over the past decade is well known—partly the result of consolidation but largely because of competition (for users and revenue) from tech platforms like Facebook and Google. We've heard a lot about the rise of fake news, clickbait, and inaccurate reporting. But the journalism that spurred #MeToo has also underscored the effectiveness of professional investigative journalism: this past January, just over two years after the *New York Times* and *The New Yorker* published assault allegations against Weinstein, the former film producer appeared at his first criminal trial for these allegations.

Here at The Walrus, the #MeToo era has led to an evolution in our reporting. Based on feedback from sources and outside experts, we refined our guidelines for writing and fact-checking stories about sexual assault, which involve bringing special sensitivity to interviews with survivors. In one sense, publishing #MeToo stories requires the same values that good journalists have always brought to their profession, such as the pursuit of accuracy with an understanding of one's own limitations and biases. But the degree to which this kind of reporting affects sources and subjects has raised the stakes.

Last June, the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was published. It includes a seven-page section that critiques media representation of Indigenous people—the report notes that, "on average, missing or murdered white women received three times more coverage than Indigenous women did." It also includes a set of calls for justice that urges media outlets to avoid stereotypes and, above all, to cover Indigenous communities in a nuanced and culturally sensitive way. We have sought to provide more in-depth coverage of the crisis with this month's cover story, our first editorial collaboration with *Longreads*, an online publication with an international readership for narrative nonfiction. The story, "Searching for Mackie," which Annie Hylton spent many months reporting and writing, details the efforts of one family to find Immaculate "Mackie" Mary Basil, a woman from the interior of BC who left for a party one night almost seven years ago and has never returned. In chronicling the efforts of a family that has not stopped looking for one of its own, Hylton introduces the people affected by the crisis while also exposing its broadly connected roots.

In 2014, when criminal accusations against CBC host Jian Ghomeshi first came to light, I was working in another industry. I wrote an essay for this magazine, about the conversation that arose out of Ghomeshi's high-profile trial, that led to more writing for The Walrus and, eventually, to the job I have now. I didn't want to be pigeonholed into writing about feminism; to me, real equality would mean not having to centre my work around my own gender. With time, I have come to see the opportunity to produce journalism on these issues as a form of privilege, one that many others don't currently have. One of the biggest motivations to continue to do this work is so that others—like my students, who can have a hard time understanding why justice isn't automatic for everyone—will not have to.

—*Jessica Johnson*

ILLUSTRATION BY GRAHAM ROUMIEU

# Contributors' Notes

**KAIE KELLOUGH**
*"Witness," p. 54*

—

"I was in Guyana, which is the country that my maternal family's from, in 2015. My brother went out one day and came back and told me a story. It was on the eve of an election, so there was a kind of electricity there. There's a way, especially in a charged time like that, in which human affairs acquire a kind of importance, speed, intensity, and a total trajectory of their own with a disregard for anything else in their path. That's the genesis of this short story."

*Kaie Kellough is a poet, novelist, and sound performer.* Dominoes at the Crossroads, *his new book of short fiction, was published this February by Esplanade Books/Véhicule Press.*

**ANNIE HYLTON**
*"Searching for Mackie," p. 24*

—

"While researching the story of Mackie Basil, who disappeared nearly seven years ago, I got to go through some of her personal effects, including a playlist she'd made. Her family told me she loved blaring music from the porch. The playlist had a lot of the same songs I grew up with—tracks by Rihanna, Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, and one of my favourite songs ever: 'Beast of Burden' by the Rolling Stones. She seemed like a beautiful person."

*Annie Hylton's work has been published by* Harper's, The New Republic, *and* The New Yorker.

**ELLEN HIMELFARB**
*"The Age of Alpacas," p. 17*

—

"Last summer, my family and I went camping in the south of England, on these cliffs overlooking the ocean, and in a field behind us, there was a little hobby farm with a bunch of alpacas. We had all of the Atlantic Ocean at our fingertips, but we spent most of our time sitting in this little field, watching the alpacas fold over onto their knees and enjoying the funny way that they chew. My kids couldn't get enough of them. What I later learned—and find irresistible—is how these ancient animals have been bred away from their original incarnation over thousands of years."

*Ellen Himelfarb is a London-based writer who regularly contributes to the* Globe and Mail, Wallpaper, *and the* Sunday Times.

**BRIANNA SHARPE**
*"Count Me In," p. 21*

—

"There is no reliable figure for the population of LGBTQ people in Canada because these minorities haven't been meaningfully accounted for in federal surveys. As a queer person, I'd never really thought about the fact that my own identity hadn't been captured in any national survey I'd ever filled out. I think the pursuit of equity needs to go into these seemingly banal spots. Data isn't a sexy issue, but it's a really important one."

*Brianna Sharpe is an Alberta-based journalist. Her work has appeared in* Xtra, Huffpost Canada, *and the* Globe and Mail.

**COREY MINTZ**
*"The End of Grocery Shopping," p. 38*

—

"When my wife, Victoria, and I sent out our wedding invitations, I think people who knew me said, 'Of course Corey's getting married in a grocery store.' Some of Victoria's friends and family probably said something more like, 'What? Why?' Until they came to the wedding and saw the space, and it was beautiful—we had twinkly lights and everything. The fact that we had a party at a place that was about connecting people with food was very special. And the opportunity to return to our wedding venue on a regular basis is a treat."

*Corey Mintz has written for the* Globe and Mail, *the* Toronto Star, *and the* New York Times.

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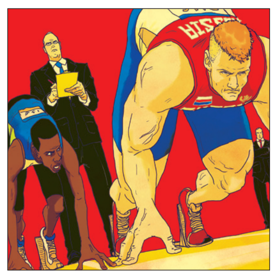
# Letters



**SKIN IN THE GAMES**

Curtis Gillespie's article on WADA and the Russian doping scandal ("WADA Mess," December) is very insightful. It's time to rewrite part of the WADA constitution to ensure that no one who may have a conflict of interest with another sporting body can attain a position of power. Also, just as countries insisted on having 50 percent of the voting rights, a large percentage of voting rights should be given to a few exemplary athletes. We must do everything in our power to elevate the voices of the many honest, clean athletes who sacrifice so much to achieve excellence in their fields.

*Matthew Marosszeky*
*Aurora, ON*

It's a pity Gillespie didn't present his analysis of the World Anti-Doping Agency in a more balanced way. To suggest that WADA does not side with athletes is an insult to our 130-plus experts, who do more than anyone else to protect clean sport. That Gillespie chose to ignore their work and instead focus on a small number of vocal critics in North America is, at best, unfortunate. The sanctions WADA imposed on Russia in December show a very different side of the agency from the one portrayed in these pages.

*James Fitzgerald*
*Senior manager of media relations and communications*
*World Anti-Doping Agency*
*Montreal, QC*

**CULTURE SHOCK**

Étienne Lajoie's article on the decline of small towns in Quebec ("Small Towns, Big Hopes," December) brought to mind how, at a time when Quebec needs more people, the provincial government appears to be doing everything it can to make newcomers feel unwelcome. In its first year in office, the Coalition Avenir Québec threw out 18,000 pending immigration files involving about 50,000 people, some of whom may have to leave the province after losing their ability to work and their hopes of receiving permanent-resident status. I grew up respecting the idea of Quebec's unique culture, but now, when it seems as if so many Quebecers fear "the other," I question my support.

*Rajiv Kalsi*
*Ottawa, ON*

**TESTING MY PATIENTS**

I agree with Carine Abouseif's piece on the costs of unnecessary medical testing ("Not What the Doctor Ordered," December), but as a retired pediatrician, I think it misses part of the problem: the ever-expanding layers of medical administration. Doctors whose diagnoses are not confirmed by tests may not be supported by health authorities should something go wrong. This can compel physicians to request, for example, a superfluous X-ray to confirm the diagnosis of an obvious fracture. Much overtesting stems from administrators who do not always respect clinically based decisions.

*Lionel Traverse*
*Victoria, BC*

**VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE**

Both Canada's first-past-the-post election system and instant-runoff voting, Max Fawcett's preferred alternative ("How Ranked Ballots Could Strengthen Our Democracy," *thewalrus.ca*), offer the same values trade-off: we should accept both disproportionate election results that ignore the popular vote and parliaments that lack diversity in exchange for stable majority governments and moderate political parties. These voting systems, however, often fail to deliver on their purported strengths. If we're going to get minority governments and belligerent parties anyway, we might as well hold elections under a proportional system that would accurately reflect how we vote.

*Devon Rowcliffe*
*Toronto, ON*

**TUSK, TUSK**

In the December issue, the article "The Right to Rest" stated that Johnny Lee has lived on and off the streets for thirty years. In fact, he has lived on and off the streets for twenty years. In the same issue, the article "WADA Mess" stated that Rob Koehler is an Olympic gold medallist. In fact, he is not. In the January/February issue, the article "Hacking Diabetes" stated that Frederick Banting discovered insulin. In fact, Banting led the team responsible for the discovery. That article also stated that, in creating Loop, Nate Racklyeft and Pete Schwamb improved the user interface of work released by other developers. In fact, they created their own insulin-dosing algorithm. The Walrus regrets the errors.

"The time has come," The Walrus said, "to talk of many things." Send us a letter, email (letters@thewalrus.ca), or tweet, or post on our Facebook page. Comments may be published in any medium and edited for length, clarity, and accuracy.

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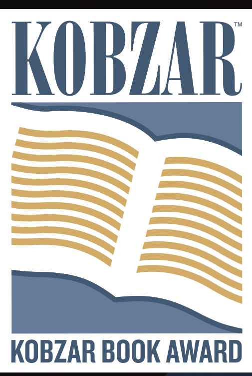


# 2020 KOBZAR™ BOOK AWARD SHORTLIST

**JURORS:** Nino Ricci, Matt Bowes, Lindy Ledohowski
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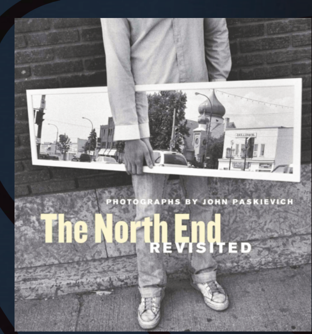
*The Bone Mother*
**by David Demchuk**
(ChiZine Publications, 2017)




*The North End Revisited*
**by John Paskievich**
(University of Manitoba Press, 2017)

*Our Familiar Hunger*
**by Laisha Rosnau**
(Nightwood Editions, 2019)

*The Stories Were Not Told: Canada's First World War Internment Camps*
**by Sandra Semchuk**
(University of Alberta Press, 2019)

*We All Need to Eat*
**by Alex Leslie**
(Book*hug Press, 2018)

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BUSINESS

# The Age of Alpacas

*A farmer in England is seeking to design the perfect wool*

BY ELLEN HIMELFARB
ILLUSTRATION BY HAYDEN MAYNARD

FEW THINGS about British country life are more certain than finding a sprinkling of sheep on a pasture. But, if you're lucky, those furry dots bouncing toward you will reveal themselves to be not Cheviot rams or Romney ewes but Huacaya and Suri alpacas. Likely, their top-heavy forms will circle you curiously, ears perked, necks angling forward as if to steal a kiss.

This is the scene I recently wandered into at Bozedown Farm, in Oxfordshire, before holding court to dozens of four-foot shag-pile wonders, lips curved upward in apparent smiles. They looked less like camelids than like Muppets or something Matt Groening might doodle on a greeting card. An hour surrounded by alpacas is like a month on Prozac, yet the cuteness of the alpaca belies its potential as a disruptor of fine knitwear. In fact, Bozedown's resident breeder, Mary-Jo Smith, thinks hers could play a part in solving the fashion industry's environmental problem.

Alpaca fleece is the world's only truly sustainable luxury fibre: naturally plentiful, easy on the landscape, kind to water supplies, and generally low maintenance. Where it takes the hair of four cashmere goats to knit a single sweater, it takes the fleece of a single alpaca to knit four sweaters. Where the harsh hooves of cashmere goats scrape their grazing land to bits, alpacas' cushioned feet maintain theirs. Take one home—it won't ruin your lawn like a sheep, which pulls grass up from the root, will. Alpacas' razor-sharp teeth chomp grass cleanly, meaning it can grow back. The thermal, breathable, flame-resistant, hypoallergenic, and super-soft qualities of alpaca wool put traditional wools to shame. Without the natural lanolin, sometimes called "wool grease," of other fleece, alpaca doesn't require harsh washing during processing. And its wide range of natural tones often makes dyeing moot. For these reasons and more, fleece from the world's 4 million alpacas is key to replacing our destructive penchant for Asian-raised cashmere and embracing "nearshoring," the practice of bringing industries closer to home.

But there's a catch. Nearly all alpacas today are mutts, and their mixed-up family trees go back to Spain's colonization of Peru. Breeding programs like Bozedown's are trying to resurrect a better class of alpaca, from tufted head to cloven hoof. Raising a "purer" alpaca with more uniform distribution of the animals' finest fleece, currently found only on the so-called saddle region, between the legs, will produce a more superior textile, which could become a salve for the $2.5 trillion (US) global fashion industry, which generates 1.2 billion tons of greenhouse gases annually and is responsible for one-fifth of global water pollution. The way forward, it seems, is to look back. Resurrecting precolonial alpacas and preindustrial manufacturing might reverse some of the havoc wreaked by humans on the earth, its animals, and its environment.

Time is running out. As populations grow, so will demand for goods. Resource consumption is set to double by 2050, according to the UN. If we want to start slowing down our consumption and curbing water usage and pollution, we have to start taking alpaca seriously—more seriously, at least, than the sexy synthetic fibres we can't seem to quit.

IN THE sixteenth century, Spanish Conquistadors decimated Peru's alpaca population, slaughtering them to deprive the Incas of food, wool, and livelihood. Indigenous farmers took the few that remained—the Suri breed,

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known for its silky dreadlocks, and the more plentiful, bushy-tailed Huacaya breed—and crossbred them, valuing thicker, heftier wool over delicate fleece for short-term economic gain. Owing to rampant hybridization, less than 10 percent of alpacas have "pure" blood and their original baby-soft fleece. With their camelid cousins, the vicuña, guanaco, and llama, they're the reason we associate Peruvian knitwear with bulky, scratchy antifashion.

Peru still dominates the alpaca industry, raising over 80 percent of all the animals. And the Michell Group, the world's leading alpaca-wool exporter, dominates Peruvian production. The company's lore goes back nearly a century, to 1922, when British ex–Royal Navy pilot Frank Michell fell for an aristocratic woman's chinchilla coat. Upon learning it came from Peru, he sailed to the seaport of Mollendo in hot pursuit of a coat of his own. He never found the chinchillas, but he was introduced to Peru's most common camelid. Michell saw an opportunity to capitalize on a fur alternative. By the thirties, he'd established his own company to industrialize the production of alpaca fibre.

Today, the Michell Group exports 3,000 tonnes of alpaca fleece (what insiders call "tops") annually to over thirty-five countries, and it shows at prestigious fashion fairs like Florence's Pitti Filati. Still, alpaca could stand a bit more love. While designers praise what one called its "exaggerated softness," according to a 2001 report to the Australian Alpaca Association, alpaca accounted for less than 1 percent of all natural fibre on the world market. In Canada, where most alpaca farmers are semiretired hobbyists, the most ambitious operations knit for farmers' markets—and only to help finance what's considered a lifestyle.

When alpaca enjoys a fashion "moment"—2014, 2015, and 2018 were its best years yet—a slow period inevitably follows as prices skyrocket. Breaking the cycle will take a village: brands with cachet, marketing networks, and consumers putting their money where their mouths are.

With Peruvian farmers too fragmented to take the lead, China has emerged. After a ten-year feasibility study into alpaca farming, an antidote to dependency on cashmere, the country recently announced plans to grow its national herd to 6 million. That's had a knock-on effect on Australia, which supplies China from its herds and hopes to grow the industry beyond the "hobby" domain to a million animals.

But making over alpaca's image runs into a Catch-22: critical mass requires more pedigree breeding à la Bozedown; pedigree breeding requires demand. "Peru's annual production is 6 to 7 million kilos," says Juan Pepper, commercial manager for Michell. "Compare this to 500 million kilos of wool." The ratio is similar in Canada, where there are 14,000 alpacas to about a million sheep, and the gap is even wider in Britain, with around 45,000 alpacas to 23 million sheep.

Mainstreaming alpaca would also require designers to embrace it. With the exception of cardigan queen Eileen Fisher, you're unlikely to have heard of the labels espousing alpaca in a big way. "You brush it and it becomes very fuzzy," says Olivia Rubens, a London-based sustainable-knitwear designer from Ottawa. "And, compared to wools, it has a much earthier look in terms of how the dyes render."

Peggy Sue Deaven-Smiltnieks, of the Milton, Ontario, sustainable-fashion label Peggy Sue, admires alpaca's looseness. "It's excellent for suiting," she says. "A skilled artisan will produce exquisite drape with alpaca, whereas sheep's wool is springier. Imagine going on vacation somewhere with hard water and your hair goes flat. It'll have more drape than if it's tightly curled."

Yet the drape is precisely what drives many designers to use it less. "It's not very crimpy compared to wool and therefore not very elastic," says Sue Blacker, managing director of the Natural Fibre Company, a spinner and dyer based in the UK. "That means you get a mixture of capability from easy to…less easy," and it's why brands like Max Mara sex up their alpaca coats with wool or polyester. Even eco-warrior Stella McCartney blends her alpaca with virgin sheep's wool.

Blacker doubts alpaca will ever rival cashmere's fineness. "You can only change the density so much. It's like saying you can change your hair."

TWO DECADES AGO, archaeozoologist Jane Wheeler made a game-changing discovery, unearthing 1,000-year-old mummified alpacas from the pre-Columbian village El Yaral. Analyzing skin samples, she encountered an exceptionally delicate fleece measuring 17.9 microns (a unit equal to one millionth of a metre) with a standard deviation of one. The finest cashmere measures fourteen to fifteen microns. Unlike contemporary alpacas, the mummy's fine fleece grew all over, not just in the saddle region.

Rewinding the clock falls to breeders like Mary-Jo Smith, the alpaca whisperer of Bozedown Farm. Smith has got her herd of 600 down to fourteen microns with a standard deviation of 2.3—far beyond the average "SD" of six. Her next mission is blanket coverage. "I want those alpacas again," she says, referring to the mummies. "The neck, the leg, the tummy…all the same." In 2001, a few years after arriving from Worsley, Alberta, to help tend what was then her aunt's herd, Smith met Wheeler on a buying trip to the Peruvian Altiplano. They became friends, and Smith developed a talent for spotting potential in animals she could breed into a commercially viable alternative to cashmere.

Scientists haven't fully mapped the alpaca genome as they've done for dogs and sheep, so Smith's breeding routine is "a tiny bit of science and a lot of art." She runs a tight ship, recording every twitch and surveying copulations like must-binge TV. Within three weeks of birthing her baby, or "cria," each female returns to the dating pool.

At this rate, Smith admits, a herd with full-coverage, fourteen-micron fleece could take more than a century. "Successive generations are at least three years apart, so breeding for improvement is a very long game. I won't see it. My kids won't see it." But baby steps are afoot.

**ELLEN HIMELFARB** regularly contributes to the *Globe and Mail*, *Wallpaper*, and the *Sunday Times*.

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Eva Stenram, *Per Pulverem Ad Astra* (detail), 2007, chromogenic prints made from negatives exposed to dust. Courtesy of the artist, source image courtesy of NASA/JPL-Caltech

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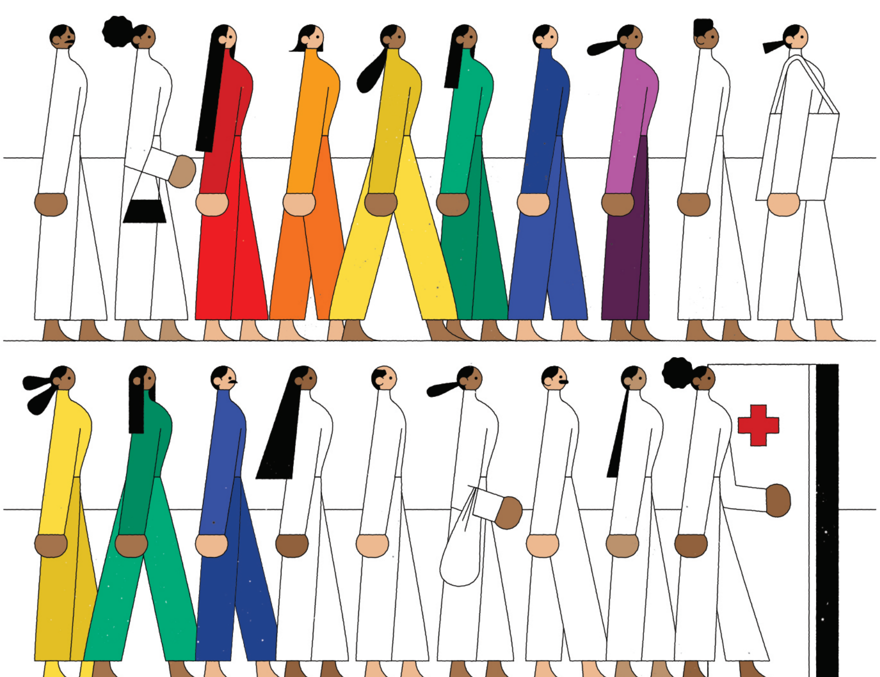
HEALTH

# Count Me In

*Why we need more health data on LGBTQ communities*

BY BRIANNA SHARPE
ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTYNA STASIK



EARLY one October, Nick North arrived at a Calgary hospital feeling a mix of fear and excitement. He had long felt that his body did not match who he was inside: he had been assigned female at birth but did not identify as a woman, and the day had finally come for his gender-affirming top surgery, a procedure to masculinize his chest. But, he recalls, when he handed his paperwork to staff, he had to repeatedly request they call him Nick, not the name on his birth certificate. "If I already know you can't figure out my pronouns and call me the right name, then how do I trust you with my unconscious body?" North says. "How do I go into that not terrified?"

North remembers hospital staff telling him not to take it personally, but "you always take it personally," he says. It had felt just as personal when his psychiatrist told him to wear a swim top to feel more comfortable at the pool with his kids, leaving North to educate him on why having a body he feels comfortable in—not a swim top—would help his dysphoria.

North believes a federal survey on transgender identity could improve services for men like him. "There are so many more of us than you know, and we're not getting the proper health care."

Research has suggested that gender and sexual minorities experience worse health outcomes than the rest of the population. Until recently, agencies like Statistics Canada have faced challenges in trying to collect health data on LGBTQ individuals in a manner that is both precise and culturally sensitive. Increasing the amount of publicly available data on the national level could allow health care practitioners to make more-informed decisions about patients. "If you can't be counted," says Lori Ross, a professor of public health at the University of Toronto, "then you don't count in terms of policy."

LAST JUNE, the federal standing committee on health, a small group of MPs with a key role in crafting legislation, produced a landmark report on LGBTQ health in Canada. Tasked with examining the numerous health inequalities for gender and sexual minorities, the committee collected evidence of disparities: bisexual women and lesbians are at greater risk of chronic illnesses such as arthritis, for instance, and LGBTQ individuals in general have disproportionate rates of mental illness. The report emphasized that discrimination and the stress of being a minority affect these health outcomes. In other words, the health care system marginalizes LGBTQ people because it isn't designed to acknowledge them. Experts like Ross say that simply counting sexual and gender minorities in population-based data would help the health system respond better.

The report made several recommendations relating to data collection. It suggested Statistics Canada change its practices to increase the number of LGBTQ respondents, improve its questions on sexual orientation, and include sexual-orientation and gender-identity questions on all surveys.

As a queer nonbinary person, Brent Saccucci's sexual and gender identities are integral to understanding their health needs (Saccucci uses he and their pronouns). A PhD student and instructor at the University of Alberta, Saccucci

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researches queer mental health and social justice. They trace their experiences with mental illness to widespread social stigma around queerness, “which makes me nervous of sex with men.” They are also anxious about getting HIV and have to take pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, a preventative drug. “It’s all intertwined: the sex, the sexual health, the mental health—all are deeply affected by being queer and trans.”

Saccucci has struggled to find affirming, queer-competent health professionals. “I remember one time I was at the doctor and asked, ‘What else can I do to mitigate the risk of getting HIV?’ The doctor was like, ‘I guess you could have fewer sexual partners.’” This didn’t sit right, and instead it was Saccucci’s therapist who calmed their fears.

**The Canadian census counts only sexual minorities who are married or living together.**

Jody Jollimore, the executive director of the Community Based Research Centre, a nonprofit that promotes the health of gay men, says that the federal government must prioritize LGBTQ health, which could include gathering more public-health data. Federal surveys can help set health priorities: census data is used to make recommendations on long-term care for seniors, for example. According to Jollimore, “there’s a real gap between what’s getting funded and where the actual issues are” for queer and trans Canadians. For instance, access to PrEP still varies by province; Saccucci could not get it in Ontario but can in Alberta. More data on the experiences of those like Saccucci would make it easier to develop health standards across the country.

Alex Abramovich, a scientist with the Institute for Mental Health Policy Research at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, spent over a decade sharing with city council the concerns he heard from homeless LGBTQ youth, who often experience discrimination in the shelter system. In 2013, Abramovich was put in charge of a working group that advised the city to add questions about gender identity and sexual orientation to that year’s Street Needs Assessment.

According to that assessment, at least 20 percent of youth in the shelter system are LGBTQ—and that was a conservative estimate. Without this kind of data, says Abramovich, government and decision makers can “say there isn’t a problem or that we don’t really have an issue of LGBTQ people being overrepresented in, for example, homelessness.” Evidence from those new questions helped create Canada’s first transitional housing program for LGBTQ youth. Similar data sets at the federal level could have equally profound implications for services and funding.

Over the past two decades, Statistics Canada has begun addressing the data gaps on sexual minorities. In 2001, the census began collecting data on same-sex common-law relationships. In 2003, the annual Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) began asking respondents about sexual orientation, with the General Social Survey (GSS) following suit the next year.

These measures, however, still fall a few colours short of a full rainbow. Travis Salway, a professor of health sciences at Simon Fraser University, counts around nine publicly available federal data sets from the US on sexual and/or gender minorities that are useful to researchers: these government-run national surveys include a drug-use survey and a questionnaire on aging. To Salway, the only comparable resource in Canada is the CCHS. Researchers, he adds, depend on these data sets to conduct their work. And any increased data sets must be matched by funding for research and services; data alone can’t fix the problem.

Salway’s research shows that sexual-minority adults are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts; to identify whether these kinds of disparities are getting better or worse (and for whom), accurate and nuanced federal-survey data is crucial, he says. The Canadian census counts only sexual minorities who are married or living together. Additionally, the GSS and the CCHS are done by phone. “You can imagine, being asked over the phone by a government interviewer about sexual orientation, that it would be sensitive,” says Lori Ross. This discomfort could affect the survey’s ability to provide accurate population estimates.

Statistics Canada is working to address the problem of insufficient data on trans people as well. It has created two new questions that could be used in various surveys: one asks for sex assigned at birth, and another asks about current gender identity. The latter question allows for write-in answers that let respondents identify beyond the male-female binary. It has been launched on social surveys such as the GSS and CCHS, and Canadians may even see it on the 2021 national census.

Meanwhile, many in the LGBTQ community are finding their own ways to bend the health care system toward equity and healing. Trans Pulse Canada, for instance, is a national, community-based survey with the tagline, “In this census, trans and non-binary people count!”

Nick North has created a community of other trans people and allies that offers support, advice, and commiseration. North experienced complications in his top surgery, so he needs a revision, which recent changes at Alberta Health and a system under pressure have delayed for months. At times, he says, he felt like the surgery would never come, but it has now been scheduled for this spring.

For Brent Saccucci, creating a supportive health team has involved enduring many uncomfortable appointments with uneducated or insensitive service providers. Saccucci worries about whether Alberta’s United Conservative Party government will remove universal coverage of PrEP, which would make it inaccessible to them and those without private insurance. Ultimately, however, in spite of a health system they describe as “exhausting at times,” Saccucci has created their own path to wellness. They’ve even found a therapist with whom “my queer identity seems to fit.” ✚

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**BRIANNA SHARPE** has had her work published in *Xtra*, *HuffPost Canada*, and the *Globe and Mail*.

SOCIETY

# SEARCHING FOR MACKIE

*Seven years ago, a young woman from Tache, BC, went to a party and never came back. Her family won't stop looking for her*

BY ANNIE HYLTON
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW LICHTENSTEIN

✦ ✦ ✦

THE WEEK leading up to Father's Day, in June 2013, began like any other, as Peter Basil remembers it; he's since replayed the events in his mind like a recurring bad dream. Peter recalls standing in the kitchen of his modest split-level home in Tache, a First Nations village that lies deep in the wilderness of northern interior British Columbia. His younger sister Mackie, then in her late twenties, followed him around as he made a pot of coffee.

"Promise me you'll take care of my baby," Mackie asked Peter, referring to her five-year-old son.

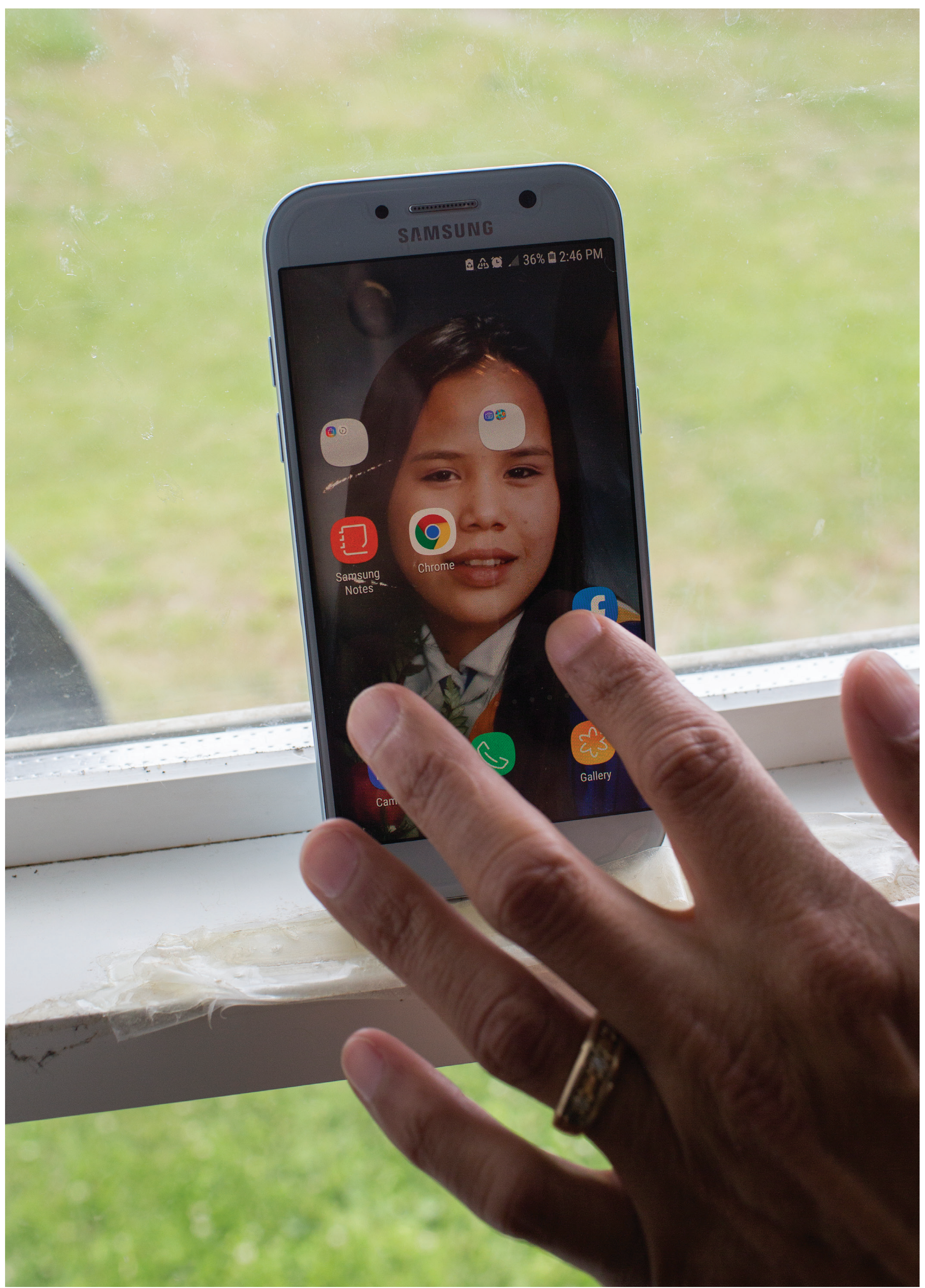
"Yup," he replied.

Mackie trailed Peter to the living room and sat next to him on the L-shaped couch, under high school graduation photos of her and her sisters.

"Promise me you'll take care of my baby," Mackie repeated to Peter.

"Yeah, geez," he responded. "Should I be worried? Are you coming back?"

"I'll be back," Mackie promised.




THIS ARTICLE WAS PRODUCED IN COLLABORATION WITH *LONGREADS*.

Although Mackie seemed troubled, Peter didn't think much of the exchange at the time. A few days later, Mackie, Peter, and Peter's wife, Vivian, went to a nearby community to buy a cake. "Thank You Dads," it read, next to the image of an eagle. They picked up a few groceries and stopped to check for mail. Because she had lost her ID, Mackie asked Peter to purchase two bottles of vodka for a party later that night, and then they went home. Mackie showered and sat next to Vivian. She rolled on her grey "stretchies," Vivian said of Mackie's leggings, and pulled on a blue T-shirt and a black hoodie with a little maple leaf logo. In photos from the time, she has black hair that fell neatly below her shoulders, a youthful face, and a playful smile.

Mackie, who went nowhere without her music, grabbed her iPod and a bottle of vodka. She promised Vivian she would be back by the next day; she planned to take her son and nephew to the park. She left before dusk and later walked to where locals were having a party. When Mackie came home a few hours later, she took the second bottle of vodka and headed up a trail, next to the house, that led out of town. Peter cracked the front door open and looked out.

"Goodbye, bro. I love you," Mackie called back to him.

In that moment, now frozen in his memory, Peter watched Mackie walk away, lingering at the door as she climbed the path. He spotted a man waiting for her farther up the trail. Something was not quite right, though. Why, Peter asked himself, would Mackie have said goodbye in such a way if she were coming home? Then he wondered if, perhaps, this would be the last time he'd see her.

THE VILLAGE of Tache, belonging to Mackie's people of the Tl'azt'en Nation, has one road in and one road out. To get there, you can drive or hitchhike along a seemingly endless tree-lined road, past wild roses, bald eagles, and black bears. You'll then descend into a community that lies at the rim of a pristine, glass-like lake called Nak'alBun, where, on a sunny day, the clouds reflect off the water. The roughly 400 people who live there refer to themselves as Dakelh, people who travel upon water. In winter, most of them warm their houses with wood stoves while waiting for summer. When summer comes, they fish salmon, pick soapberries up in the mountains, and preserve food for the cold months. But, year after year, the Basil family mostly searches for Mackie.

The truth of what happened to Immaculate Mary Basil, or Mackie, that night Peter last saw her nearly seven years ago is elusive. Did she hitchhike with a logger who abducted her? Was she killed by someone she knew, who disposed of her body in the hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of wilderness?

Down the road toward Old Tache, where Mackie attended the party before she came home, Sharon Joseph lives a few houses past the rustic old church. Her sister, Bonnie, went missing in 2007; like Peter, she has been unable to ascertain her sister's fate. "What I heard is that she was trying to hitchhike to Prince George, and I'm not sure what really happened," Sharon explained. Sharon said the RCMP have no answers on Bonnie's whereabouts. "I pray to her every night and day," she told me. When I asked if she thought Bonnie heard her, she said, "Yes, I feel she's with me, I just don't know where. I just miss her so much—I'm the only one left, and I don't want to be alone." She began to cry. "I just wish that she can just come home."

British Columbia's Highway 16 is a remote belt that stretches across the province to Haida Gwaii. Part of that protracted highway—724 kilometres of it—is often called the Highway of Tears for the countless women, mostly Indigenous, who have disappeared or been murdered near it. Dozens of families who live around Highway 16 have been left to grapple with the pain of loved ones vanishing with no trace, several of them in recent years.

In December 2018, fifty-year-old Cynthia (Cindy) Martin went missing near the Gitanmaax reserve, northwest of Tache along Highway 16. The car she was driving was found locked with her belongings inside in the dead of winter, and footprints could be seen tracking away from the vehicle and back, said Cindy's sister, Faye. No sign of Cindy, though. To find answers, the family began looking for clues on their territory. Time has seemed to stand still since Cindy disappeared, Faye told me from her mother's home in Gitanmaax, roughly six months after she'd last seen her sister. "One night, I dreamt of this little bird just sitting on a branch, and I could actually feel and smell the snow," Faye said. "I just felt then that Cindy had passed." When I asked Faye what she wanted people to understand about her family's grief, she said, "The whole population of Canada needs to be brought to justice—they need to be brought to their knees to understand what we're dealing with."

For decades, the Canadian government has appeared indifferent to murdered and missing Indigenous women like Mackie, Bonnie, and Cynthia. (In 2014, on the question of a public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women, then prime minister Stephen Harper said, "It isn't really high on our radar, to be honest.") Even the numbers are hard to quantify. The most comprehensive toll, which accounts for all police jurisdictions in Canada, was published in 2014 by the RCMP and identified nearly 1,200 "police-recorded incidents of Aboriginal female homicides and unresolved missing Aboriginal females" between 1980 and 2012.

Activists, however, suspect higher numbers. Several factors could contribute to this discrepancy: the RCMP, which controls the National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains, does not systematically collect race-based data, including data on missing Indigenous women across the country; police have also failed to investigate deaths that occurred under suspicious circumstances. An enduring mistrust of law enforcement means Indigenous communities do not always report crimes. "Most of the time, when people get victimized, they don't want to call [the RCMP]," Peter said. In the Dakelh language, often called Carrier in English, the word *police* translates to "those who take us away."

Meggie Cywink, from Whitefish River First Nation, in Ontario, has been compiling a database of missing and murdered Indigenous women that stretches back to the 1800s and contains over 1,500 cases. Cywink, whose sister Sonya was murdered while pregnant more than twenty-five years ago, said, "There's a number of women and young girls who were with child when they were murdered, and nowhere does it statistically take into account that, in Indigenous ways and being, those are two souls that have been lost and taken."

In 2015, decades of advocacy by families and survivors culminated in the Canadian government announcing the creation of a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The inquiry was mandated to examine the underlying social, economic, cultural, institutional, and historical causes of systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls. The commissioners held hearings and gathered statements across the country and could also issue subpoenas for testimonies and documents. But, from its inception, the inquiry was marred with controversy. High-level staff quit because of internal dysfunction, and family members and survivors called it a colonial-led process instead of an Indigenous-led one. In 2017, Cywink, along with a group of families, had discussions with the leadership of the inquiry, but she later told me that they felt their concerns had not been taken seriously. It was "a huge disrespect to families, to the voices of families," Cywink said. "They are perpetuating, in my opinion, this very thing that they're trying to stop, which is violence."

That summer, Cywink and more than 100 family members sent an open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau asking for a "hard reset" of the inquiry. The commissioners, they said in the letter, "have maintained a deeply misguided approach that imposes a harmful, colonial process on us." "There was never a response," Cywink told me. The group sent another letter, in October of that year, this time with more than 180 family members signing on. No response then either, Cywink said.

Marilyn Poitras, a Métis constitutional and Aboriginal law expert, who stepped down as a commissioner of the inquiry less than a year into the role, told me she, too, was troubled by the process. "Why was this left as an [Indigenous] issue? If thousands or hundreds of Indigenous women, girls, transgender, and two-spirit people are going missing, either to human trafficking, murder, or domestic violence, isn't that a public safety issue? Why is that an Indian issue?" she said. "That blows me away because, if it was white women, where would you put it?...I was seeing we were headed in a direction I couldn't live with. Throwing millions of dollars at it and getting people to study us is a well-worn path."

**"The RCMP and investigators can't just put the missing people's files on the shelf and forget about them."**

Last June, after hearing from more than 2,300 people across the country, the four commissioners presented their final report to the Trudeau government. They found that persistent violence and human rights violations against Indigenous peoples, "which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people," amounted to a race-based genocide.

For Poitras, the framing of it is the issue: If Canada is responsible for genocide against Indigenous people, which Trudeau admitted soon after the final report, why do Indigenous people continue to be examined and probed? "What needs to happen to say this comes from somewhere? Who is Mr. Pickton?" Poitras said, referring to Canada's most prolific serial killer, Robert Pickton, many of whose victims were Indigenous women from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. "This is not an Indian problem in terms of we do this to ourselves. We're merely the side effect," she added. "What are the roots of white supremacy? Because that's where colonization and domination and violence and all of this disenfranchisement comes from.... This is a white supremacy issue."

While some welcomed the outcome of the inquiry, others were concerned that nothing would change. "What do we get?" Cywink asked. "We get a bunch of paper...but there's no fucking action on any of this." Suzan Fraser, a lawyer who represented twenty families, including Cywink's, before the federal court in a petition to get them standing at the inquiry's hearings, told me that the families she worked with are left wondering, "What was that for? What happens next?" Those still waiting for their loved ones to come home want to know "what happened," she said. "The key thing they want is to make sure that this was not in vain, that something must be different, and that they get answers." The assaults on Indigenous women's identity are "constant and pervasive," Fraser said. "We have a lot of work to do. All Canadians have to look at the way in which they've benefited, either directly or indirectly, from the destruction of Indigenous populations."

Following the report's release, I reached out to Trudeau's office to set up an interview to discuss the government's plan to implement the inquiry's recommendations. His team responded that he wouldn't be available in the coming months due to his "packed schedule" and put me in touch with the office of Carolyn Bennett, the minister of Crown-Indigenous relations. Her office responded with an email statement and, after months of attempts to set up an interview, was unable to provide any additional comments. The statement read, in part, that the "government is committed to ending the ongoing national tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people" and that it has "accepted" the report and respects its conclusions and is "taking the time to fully review the report."

In June, the same month the inquiry held its closing ceremony, which also happened to mark the six-year anniversary of Mackie's disappearance, I, along with photographer Andrew Lichtenstein, visited Tache. The use of the word "genocide" to describe the situation seemed to hold little significance to Mackie's family. Peter thought maybe the finding could help them convince the RCMP not to let Mackie's case go cold. "That word that they're saying now—the RCMP and investigators can't just put the missing people's files on the shelf and forget about them," he said. Now, at least, Peter said, "the government has to pass things and recognize things that weren't getting recognized before." The question remains, though, whether this $92.3 million process will help them "get proper justice," as Peter says, for their loved one. "The only thing I would like to honour my sister is for the people who did it to come forward and give her back to us," Peter said. "It's tearing my family apart."

Violence against women is rooted in Canada's founding. While First Nations across Canada differ significantly, historians generally agree that, prior to European contact in the sixteenth century, Indigenous women played powerful roles and were the backbones of their communities and families. Some peoples, like the Gitxsan, Haida, and Tsimshian, were also matrilineal—the mother passed on wealth, power, and inheritance to new generations.

The way that colonization has affected Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit, and LGBTQ people over the course of centuries cannot be divorced from broader patterns of gender-based violence, the national inquiry concluded in its final report. Practices that denied women legal and property rights in Europe were replicated in Canada. Furthermore, colonialism imposed gender binaries onto Indigenous societies that had been mostly fluid and had revered multiple gender identities. US-based researcher and scholar Will Roscoe identified "alternative gender roles for males in over 150 tribes in North America. About a third had comparable roles for females," he notes on his website. In an article for Indigenous Nationhood Movement, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer and academic, noted, "How do you infuse a society with the heteropatriarchy necessary in order to carry out your capitalist dreams when Indigenous men aren't actively engaged in upholding a system designed to exploit women? Well, the introduction of gender violence is one answer. Destroying and then reconstructing sexuality and gender identity is another."

The patriarchal system through which Canada was created was later written into policies and legislation. The Indian Act, first enacted by the federal government

in 1876, regulates many areas of Indigenous life, including whether one qualifies as a "status Indian" and is therefore registered as a ward of the Canadian government, a paternalistic relationship through which rights are conferred. Those with status are granted access to lands and provided government benefits. For over a century, various iterations of the act legislated that women were unequal to men: if husbands abandoned them, women and their children were stripped of their status and forced to leave their homes. This legacy has affected thousands of women and their children, who continue to suffer the consequences. "Sex discrimination in the Act has been cited as one of the root causes of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls in Canada," Pamela Palmater, a Mi'kmaq lawyer and chair in Indigenous governance at Ryerson University, wrote in *Maclean's*. "Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls are connected to this act. If you want people to disappear, don't give them full membership," Sandra Lockhart, an Indigenous activist, told the Yellowknife-based magazine *EdgeYK* in 2016. (Lockhart died last year.) Until 1985, provisions in the act legislated that Indigenous women lost their status if they married non-Indigenous men; the same was not true for Indigenous men who married non-Indigenous women.

Dust from logging-truck traffic obscures the road where Mackie Basil was last seen, forty minutes outside Tache.

Though examples of reserves exist from as early as the seventeenth century, the federal government officially established the reserve system through the Indian Act and treaty agreements, imposing borders and displacing communities to areas that were, in many cases, away from ceremonial sites and traditional territories used for generations. Lands were divided, houses were built, resources were extracted, and poverty rose. Today, reserves can be isolated and can segregate Indigenous people from educational and economic opportunities. "We've been put into a corner on a postage-stamp reserve," Ron Winser, Mackie's cousin and the Indigenous Justice Program coordinator of Tl'azt'en Nation, said of Tache. Often, Winser explained, there's one road connecting communities to urban centres or main highways, and "that little string to town, well, people can target that." Despite signs dotted along Highway 16 warning women not to hitchhike and that a killer may be on the loose, for many there's no choice. "You have a lot of Indigenous women trying to hitchhike to urban centres to try to create a life for themselves, and on the way there, they're targeted."

Chrystal, Mackie's younger sister, does "odd jobs here and there," she said, and hitchhikes when she has no alternative. Her resemblance to Mackie in photos is

uncanny. She described her sister, simply, as "a good person," and said, "Talking about [what happened] every day helps us process it." Because of Mackie, whose presence is at once permeating and no longer perceptible, Chrystal has observed a gendered shift in her community. "Over the years, I noticed since Mackie's been missing, the women have been taking power," she said. "They don't let men control them no more."

One day, we drove the forty-five minutes from Tache to Fort St. James, a former fur-trade post. The family doesn't have a car, and a private transportation service costs them $60 that they could put toward food for the four-person household. Sometimes, they travel by community bus to the neighbouring reserve, Binche, to the gas-station shop where they can get coffee, chips, and beef jerky. On this day, though, they wanted to stock up at Save-On-Foods and order takeout from the Chinese restaurant that also serves fries and hamburgers. Chrystal had recently broken up with her boyfriend and needed a ride to town. She planned to meet up with some friends for the night. On the drive, we got to talking about her relationship. "Is he a nice guy?" I asked. "No."

Chrystal wasn't sure how she'd be getting back to Tache later that night and said she would likely hitchhike. I suggested she call us if she got stuck, but she didn't have a phone plan. Plus, even if she did need to contact someone, most of the route from Fort St. James to Tache doesn't have cell service. She would be fine, she urged. Before leaving, she described once hitching a ride with two men in a pickup truck after a night out. The drive back to Tache took hours, she said, because they took her along a back road. She heard them saying, "Let's take her over here." To which she replied, "I may be drunk, but I know what you're saying. Are you going to kill me?"

WHEN Immaculate Mary Basil was born, on a cold December day in 1985, her father named her in honour of the Virgin Mary. Mackie was one of eight siblings—Peter, now forty-one years old, is the eldest. Chrystal is a year younger than Mackie, and Ida, who currently lives in Prince George, is a year older. The family has since lost two siblings. Three if you count Mackie.

Their mother attended the Lejac residential school, in Fraser Lake, where generations of Dakelh children, as well as Gitxsan, Wet'suwet'en, and Sekani children, were taken from neighbouring reserves. The school, which was open from 1922 to 1976, was part of the government-mandated and church-run system that stripped children from their cultures, traditions, and families, and whose goal was to "kill the Indian in the child," a phrase that's been widely attributed to civil servant and acclaimed literary figure Duncan Campbell Scott. (Whether the provenance of that phrase came from Scott was called into question in a 2013 book by Mark Abley; what's clear, though, is that, during Scott's tenure as deputy superintendent at the Department of Indian Affairs, from 1913 to 1932, he oversaw the expansion and brutality of the residential school system. In 1920, before a parliamentary committee, Scott said, "Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic.") The last residential school didn't close until 1996. In 2006, the Canadian government approved a settlement agreement to pay reparations to survivors, and it officially apologized in 2008. Several churches involved in physical, sexual, and emotional abuse offered formal apologies in the 1980s and '90s, but the Catholic Church, which was responsible for more than half of all residential schools in Canada, including Lejac, has yet to issue a formal apology. During a visit to the Vatican in 2017, Trudeau personally asked Pope Francis to make a gesture, but the pope ultimately declined.

**Mackie adored kids and became a foster parent to some on the reserve.**

"The available information suggests a devastating link between the large numbers of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and the many harmful background factors in their lives," the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)'s final report, released in 2015, found, citing the multigenerational trauma of residential schools as one of the main factors. "It should not be surprising that those who were sexually abused in the schools as children sometimes perpetuated sexual violence later in their lives. It should not be surprising that those who were taken from their parents and exposed to harsh and regimented discipline in the schools and disparagement of their culture and families often became poor and sometimes violent parents later in their lives," the report stated.

The day I visited the Lejac site, the clouds hung low. Few physical signs of the school remained, as if to erase any remembrance of it; today, it is the site of a pilgrimage, bestrewn with Catholic symbolism. Down the road, a construction site for the 670-kilometre Coastal GasLink pipeline project is underway. The Lejac camp, which will house hundreds of workers, is to be built on reserve land. TransCanada, which owns the pipeline, said it signed agreements with all First Nations along the proposed route, but it was met in some cases with fierce resistance. Hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, west of Fraser Lake, oppose the pipeline crossing their traditional territory. Last year, the Wet'suwet'en Nation and its supporters occupied two camps, asserting its title and rights to that land. Heavily armed RCMP moved into a checkpoint and made arrests, and protests erupted across the nation.

One of the reasons the Wet'suwet'en continue to oppose the pipeline is that it would bring a "man camp," or industrial work camp, to their territory. These camps are temporary housing facilities that bring in hundreds of men for industrial work near or in Indigenous communities. "There are linear relationships between the highly paid shadow populations at industrial camps, the hyper-masculine culture, and a rise

in crime, sexual violence, and trafficking of Indigenous women," a 2017 report funded by the BC Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation stated. The authors cited a 2014 report by scholars at the University of Victoria and University of British Columbia examining the consequences of a local mine's construction: RCMP data showed a 38 percent increase in sexual assaults and a 37 percent increase in missing people during the first full year. They also found that a rise in sex work coincided with industrial activity.

Near the proposed Lejac camp and former residential school site, a man named Norman Charlie chopped wood with his son. When I asked if he could share more about the Lejac school, he responded that, yes, in fact, he could—he is a residential school survivor. "For a long time, I was trying to get back at the world because of this place," he said. Many other survivors, he said, "are probably all underground."

Charlie said his mother had attended the school and was used as a labourer to build the place. Along with the other children, she farmed the land and tended to livestock; the fruits of their work—carrots, corn, turnips—however, were not for the students' consumption. When Charlie was taken, at the age of six or seven, in the mid-1960s, he remembers entering the school with long, thick black hair. Administrators called him a girl and tried to make him wear a dress until they eventually forced him to cut off his hair. "There's a big stool—they slammed me on it and shaved my head," he said. Staff beat him on the ears, hands, and back with a yardstick and hit him with a strap made from a conveyor belt. And, he said, a supervisor molested him. "I went to the front lines," he said. "I went there to sacrifice my life and body so you don't have to go through what I went through," he sometimes tells younger generations. Charlie declined to name the supervisor who had molested him, as he said he's made peace with the past.

Mary Teegee, the executive director of child and family services of Carrier Sekani Family Services, said the stories she's heard about Lejac from close family members and Elders illustrate that it was a violent residential school. Teegee described the amount of sexual abuse as "horrific" and said that, if you magnify what happened in the rest of Canada, "that was Lejac." (According to TRC chief commissioner Murray Sinclair, more than 6,000 children died because of residential schools. The TRC found that this number includes several from Lejac.) Students were deprived of their cultural identities, and some then went on to continue the cycle of abuse—within the family, the community, or internally, with addiction. "One of the biggest impacts is the loss of human potential—that we've had all these people who knew the land and culture who could never get there because of the hurt, the trauma," Teegee said. "These people should have been leaders of this country."

Many people of Mackie's generation have parents or grandparents who attended Lejac and still live in Tache. "When people started opening up about it, they started drinking more," Chrystal said when I asked about the impact of residential schools on the community.

In February 2018, Peter, Vivian, and Vivian's father, Daniel Alexis, travelled the roughly two-and-a-half hours from Tache to Prince George. They were given an appointment to share a statement about Mackie's life with the national inquiry, and the question of residential schools came up. What is common among the families speaking to the commissioners, the questioner said, is the trauma sustained in residential schools, which continues through the generations. Peter, whose unassuming, quiet presence belies his doggedness and abiding devotion to finding closure, shared that his mother was a survivor of Lejac. She passed away when a vehicle struck her in Prince George, in 2006, he said.

"Was there a police investigation around that?" the statement gatherer asked.

"Yeah," Peter replied.

"And what was the result of it?"

"They were telling me that her head was stuck between the tractor-trailer tires and she was in the ICU for maybe a couple hours and then, after that, they just had to unplug her, I guess," Peter said.

"I'm so sorry that happened. That is awful."

"Yeah, it's pretty hard to deal with things like that…now I'm kind of learning from all the past history of what happened like and trying to fit it all together," Peter said.

"Was the driver ever charged for hitting her?"

"No. I think he took his own life."

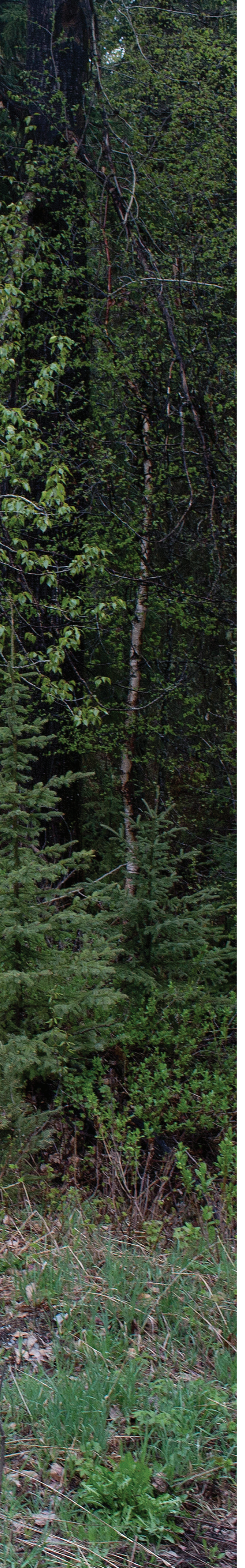
Later in the statement, Peter shared that his mother had begun to open up about her experience at Lejac and was speaking with lawyers about requesting a settlement from the government. But, he said, "Her history died with her."

IN HER earliest years, Mackie had a stable life: her parents worked steady jobs and always had food on the table. But, when her father had an affair with another woman and left the family, things deteriorated. "From there, my mom turned to alcohol and kind of just left us behind," Peter said. In the early '90s, Peter, a teenager at the time, remembers caring for his siblings, "but, somewhere along the line, the welfare got involved with them, with us, and took them." Seven of the eight siblings were placed in foster care. The three youngest girls—Chrystal, Mackie, and Ida, who were about four, five, and six, respectively, bounced around to different foster and group homes, mostly with non-Indigenous parents.

Around that time, Canadian provinces had been carrying out a decades-long practice that later became known as the Sixties Scoop, during which child welfare authorities "scooped" up Indigenous children, some at birth, from their homes and communities, placed them in foster homes, and adopted them into white families across Canada, the US, and in some cases, Europe and New Zealand. The process dispossessed Indigenous children of their cultures and languages; some never learned of their Indigenous roots, and many suffered physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

In 2017, the Canadian government announced a settlement to compensate some survivors of the Sixties Scoop who were taken between 1951 and 1991, and

AIELAH AUGER



**ABOVE**
A private investigator's notebook on murdered and missing women in Canada.

**LEFT**
A small memorial on the side of Highway 16 marks the spot where the body of Aielah Saric-Auger was discovered. Saric-Auger is one of countless women who have disappeared along the highway.

payouts for those found eligible are slated to begin this year. Ida and Chrystal have applied for a settlement, as they consider themselves survivors along with Mackie, but they have yet to hear from the government if they qualify.

A public Facebook group set up to share information about the claims process is full of survivors describing immense sadness and loss. Star Nayea, with whom I spoke, wrote that, as a newborn, she was wrapped in a blanket and placed in a boot box with ventilation holes, put on a prop plane, and flown to the US to be adopted by a white family that later abused her. She recalled her father, who had been told he was getting a white baby, scrubbing her with a Brillo pad during bath time, repeating that the dirt wouldn't come off. Her skin, she told me, was as dark as tree bark and "was left raw and nearly bleeding from his attempt to wash off my brown skin." For the first eighteen years of her life, she thought she was of German, Scottish, and Irish descent (or, she says, that's what the adoption agency had told her father), until a customer at a restaurant where she'd been working as a teenager told her otherwise. "What's Native American?" she asked. Nayea has yet to obtain documentation about her birth family or place of origin, but she's since been adopted into Anishinaabe tribes. "It all happened for a purpose," she told me. "Part of my spiritual walk is coming to terms with it." (Nayea has since withdrawn her application for compensation, as she does not believe the settlement will change the past.)

When Mackie and her sisters were taken into care, at first they were kept together. Their foster parents served them sour milk and would "just treat us wrong" and were "just in it for the money," Chrystal said. After they finished playing outside, if they got wet, "our foster mom made us strip down in public," Chrystal said. At some point, Mackie was placed on her own. But the girls would see one another at school, which is how they remained connected. Mackie's foster parents would dress her in "really tacky clothes, like from the 1970s," Ida recalled. A typical outfit included white stockings, a green turtleneck, and a lime-green plaid pleated skirt. Those outfits, in addition to Mackie talking with a thick Carrier accent, provided fodder for other kids to bully her.

Eventually, as they aged, the three of them were placed together in group homes around Vanderhoof and Fort St. James. "We lived out of hotel rooms as

well because they couldn't find a place for us, and so we'd stay in hotel rooms for weeks at a time," Ida recalled. As Chrystal remembers it, the girls would gather their allowances for the week for bus tickets or hitchhike back to the reserve to see Peter, who, by this point, was too old to be put in foster care, and Vivian. "Because we didn't get to grow up in an Indigenous home, Mackie always said she wanted to go back home and get to know our family and get to know the community," Ida said.

It wasn't until later in life that Chrystal learned Mackie and Ida had sacrificed their bodies to spare her. "All that time, they were getting sexually abused by our foster parents to save me," Chrystal said. As Ida remembers it, Mackie "got most of it," including physical, sexual, and verbal abuse, in different homes. "It happened to both of us, like they'd take turns," Ida said of one of their foster dads who sexually abused them. "We kind of kept quiet about it," she added. "The person would threaten us."

Scholars and activists have described the child welfare system as a pipeline to missing and murdered Indigenous women. Canada continues to have disproportionate rates of Indigenous children in foster care. In Manitoba, of the 11,000 children in care, up to 90 percent are Indigenous. (The province's child welfare service is currently being overhauled as a result.) Cora Morgan, the First Nations family advocate of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, testified as an expert witness before the commissioners of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2018. When the First Nations Family Advocate Office first opened in Winnipeg, in 2015, mothers flooded in, and the office received 1,200 calls per week. These women, Morgan explained in her testimony, sometimes hadn't seen their children for ten years; others had recently given birth, and their newborns were going to be apprehended from the hospital, similar to the practices employed during the Sixties Scoop.

"Our Elders say the most violent act you can commit to a woman is to steal her child," Morgan told me. In Manitoba alone, Morgan estimates, hundreds of newborn babies are apprehended from their Indigenous mothers every year. (A government spokesperson told the Canadian Press that, in 2017/18, Manitoba child welfare agencies issued 558 birth alerts for high-risk mothers, a label that disproportionately affects Indigenous women.) The reasons for apprehension vary, and a mother's family history is considered in the assessment. This means that, if she has been a ward of family services herself or a victim of domestic violence, her child could be taken away. Once her child is taken, the woman loses her child tax credit, and if she can't pay rent, she could be forced to stay with a violent partner or live in precarious housing. Winnipeg police have estimated that more than 70 percent of missing persons are women and 80 percent of cases involve kids under the protection of Manitoba's Child and Family Services.

The extent to which the child welfare system can doom Indigenous women and girls was made particularly clear in the case of Tina Fontaine, who was murdered, in 2014, at the age of fifteen. Fontaine's small body was discovered wrapped in a duvet, weighed down by twenty-five pounds of rocks, in Winnipeg's Red River. She had previously been in and out of contact with health workers, Winnipeg police, and Child and Family Services, whose agency worker had placed her in a Best Western hotel in downtown Winnipeg, under the care of a contracted worker, around the time she was last seen. The systems meant to protect Fontaine ultimately failed to help her, a report released by Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth found last year. "There was sufficient evidence known by each of these groups to warrant a request for involvement by the child abuse unit of Winnipeg Police," yet none had initiated a follow-up, the report noted. In 2018, a jury found Raymond Cormier, the main suspect in Fontaine's case, not guilty.

"You're living in a time when something like residential schools is going on," Morgan said. When I asked why there isn't a national outrage, she replied, "In the days of residential schools, mainstream society wasn't aware of what was happening to children."

Chrystal and Peter echoed the sentiment. "What happened in Lejac school and the residential schools is the same thing that's happening with the ministry," Chrystal said, referring to BC's Ministry of Children and Family Development. "After they did away with Lejac... the white people couldn't take away our kids anymore, so they had to form the ministry to come step in and take kids that way," Peter added.

When Peter, Vivian, and Ida were preparing to share their statements with the national inquiry, they knew they wanted to target their message to the role the ministry had played in their lives and how it shaped where many of them ended up. The questioner asked Peter how his siblings were doing as adults after having spent their childhoods in care. After Mackie went missing, in 2013, he said, "my other sister, Samantha, died [in Prince George] too. She had a large amount of fentanyl in her system, they found." Samantha had three sons, and Peter and Vivian still care for her youngest as if he were their own. Peter's youngest brother, Travis, was shot and killed in Prince George. "I think he was pretty mixed up in life," Peter said.

"I think they just don't know how to deal with the trauma they've been through," Peter said. In 2016, the day of Travis's funeral service, the family gathered to grieve his passing. One of their brothers was absent from the service; people from the ministry had shown up at his home to remove his children, and he missed the funeral.

In the early 2000s, when Mackie graduated high school and aged out of foster care, she remained faithful to her dream of reconnecting with her people. Back in Tache, she lived with her partner, and they had a child together. Mackie worked several jobs: at the local school, as a receptionist at the band office, and as a house cleaner in the community. She was a devoted mother who wrote notes to herself about her child's possible autism. She adored kids and became a foster parent to some on the reserve, "so what happened to us doesn't happen to them,"

Chrystal said. Those who knew her describe Mackie as a vibrant and assiduous person—someone who struggled but was loving and optimistic and did her best to overcome the formidable forces that tried to hold her back. "She took a lot in because of her past and held that in and didn't show it, so she was always happy and did stuff for other people," Ida said. She was "just a very loving and caring and bubbly person even though she went through a lot of hard times."

In 2012, after Mackie and her partner split, she stayed with Peter and Vivian off and on. Mackie kept a bag of clothes in the closet. She and Vivian would pick berries in the mountains, and she would help cook moose steak and spaghetti. When Mackie had the house to herself, she would sit on the porch and blare her music on surround sound—Tracy Chapman, "Give Me One Reason"; Rihanna, "We Found Love"; Tom Petty, "I Won't Back Down"—until the family came home, at which point she would swiftly turn the volume down. Her laugh was infectious. She liked to draw and colour, and she decorated for birthdays, Christmas, and family celebrations.

What happened after Mackie said goodbye to Peter that evening in June 2013 is not entirely clear. The RCMP's Sascha Baldinger and Todd Wiebe, who've left "no stone unturned," according to Wiebe, and have been on the case since Mackie was reported missing, told me Mackie got into a pickup truck with a couple of local men to continue the party at a cabin down a remote forest-service road just off Leo Creek Road. At roughly 9:30 the next morning, according to the RCMP, a forestry worker saw a woman with long hair walking over a bridge, away from a truck, which had become stuck. Two men were seen at that time with the vehicle, but the woman was walking alone.

When Mackie hadn't come home by Father's Day, her family started to worry. They began calling people and knocking on doors, but no one had seen her since the night of the party. The two men she had been with told Vivian that Mackie caught a ride with someone else. The family called the police. The next day, the community set up a search camp near the bridge where Mackie had last been seen. Roughly 300 people, including those from neighbouring reserves, came to search for her. A day later, a police search-and-rescue team set out with canines. After a few weeks, when the police hadn't found any credible evidence of Mackie's whereabouts, they pulled out. The community kept searching. They found threads, socks, ribbons, buttons, old beer bottles, cans, bones. But none of what they found belonged to Mackie.

> Next to the poster of Mackie was a map, on which someone had spray-painted "Murderers Live Here."

Meanwhile, rumours circulated about who could be responsible, and during a search, Peter and Vivian woke up to find a hole slashed through their tent. In town, locals told the family they saw the truck the two men had given Mackie a ride in being washed out with bleach, but the RCMP said the police took possession of the vehicle and found no evidence of such a claim. The police also investigated Mackie's ex-boyfriend, whom she had been dating until some point leading up to the night her family last saw her. The man allegedly later ducked out of town, but the RCMP said he had an alibi.

To the RCMP, who told me they thoroughly investigated every lead on the case, nobody can technically be considered a "suspect" because, to this day, there's no crime scene. The reality is that "pretty much anybody could probably take advantage of a woman who went by herself with two guys…or more guys in the vehicle," Peter said.

In the warmer months, when the family searches for Mackie, they depend on dreams and animals to guide them. The dreams have led them to the creek, to the meadow, and deep into the wilderness, where they hope to find a clue as to her whereabouts; the animals—eagles and hawks they believe are their ancestors—channel messages about a piece of hair or clothing that might lead them to her. The family regularly gathers to watch crime shows on the Investigation Discovery channel for ideas on leads. They've seen a few psychics over the years, too, and last year, one prophesied that someone would come forward with information. So they keep looking.

One afternoon, Peter and Vivian drove with us to the remote cabin where Mackie was the night she went missing. We turned onto Leo Creek Road, outside of Tache, and the dust from the logging trucks enveloped our vehicle. We passed a large poster on which Mackie's face and the text MISSING were fixed to two large wooden planks. Next to the poster was a map, on which someone had spray-painted "Murderers Live Here."

We turned up a winding road and drove by clear-cuts, where trees once stood. Eventually, we parked the car. "There's a lot of angry people about this, Mackie missing," Peter said. He grabbed his hunting gun and slung it behind his shoulder. "Maybe the predator of Mackie, they're still around, and they try to take us out or something," he said. "That's why I travel with my gun." It's also convenient if bears approach, Peter explained, to assuage the trepidation in the air.

We walked for roughly twenty minutes, climbing a steep path with overgrown shrubbery, fireweed, medicinal plants, and old trapping trails to meet an abandoned, half-constructed wood cabin. It appeared that nobody had been there for years, and inside it was empty apart from construction material and dust and spiderwebs covering an old couch. Mackie's decision to travel to the cabin was a last-minute calculation, Baldinger and Wiebe, the investigators, told me. There's no cell-phone service in the area, so she couldn't have called for help or notified anyone of her whereabouts. "We don't know what happened to Mackie," they said. "We don't have a crime scene,

## Essential Tremor

**BY BARBARA NICKEL**

If only it were that: a little
trembling in the hand. If we could tell
your leg be still and still it would. Be it-
self before we heard the news, reeling,
before the shift and the settle into restless
in bed, the shudder as you roll—
here and gone and here momentous
as aurora and nothing I can hold.
Ends always with me spoon-feeding
and push-chairing, the secret life
of drool which maybe isn't half so bad as it looms;
in our room would gather the minuscule
beauties, for instance wind setting off the aspen,
every quaver in your lovely hand.

and we obviously haven't recovered her remains, so if she is, in fact, dead, which I think she likely is, we would have no cause of death," Wiebe said.

Peter admits to wanting to take justice into his own hands. "I told the investigators straight up, I want to hurt those people," he said, but then added, "Our Elders tell us to forgive." So, instead, Peter has restrained himself from doing anything criminal out of respect for traditional law enforcement channels. "Right now, it feels like you're a lost soul yourself, just wandering this world, and deep down in your heart, sometimes you do get to the breaking point, where sometimes you just want to take things into your own hands and deal with it your own way. But you can't," Peter told me. "You just gotta keep on trying to find answers."

As the years go by, "it just gets harder and harder" for the family to go on this way, Vivian said through tears. It has been nearly seven years now, but Peter is in regular contact with the investigators, sharing bones they've found while they're out searching and tips he hears from others. "I just have grade seven and that's about it," Peter said. "It's my way of getting educated, searching for Mackie." But Peter has suffered health problems, and sometimes he sits at night thinking about Mackie and cries.

One late afternoon, as the sun crept behind the trees, Peter and his cousin Ron Winser took us for a boat ride on the still, placid lake. When I asked how Mackie's disappearance has impacted the community, Winser told me people were in "dire shock." Mackie comes from a society that looks after its people, its families, its members. "We've always found our people," he said. "So to have someone go missing down one of our logging roads, where there was a number of people, where she should have never gone missing, to have no evidence of her, and it's six years later?…It's a major hurt to our people."

When Winser was twelve, his mother, who was Mackie's aunt on her father's side, was stabbed multiple times during a visit to Vancouver from Prince George. After a bingo night, she was killed on her way to buy a Greyhound bus ticket home. Her case remains unsolved, and Winser said he has since spent his life learning about human behaviour. He suspects the person who murdered her knew or was related to her. "I think it had to have been someone she knew. Anybody could be that person," Winser said. "I've lived through this twice now."

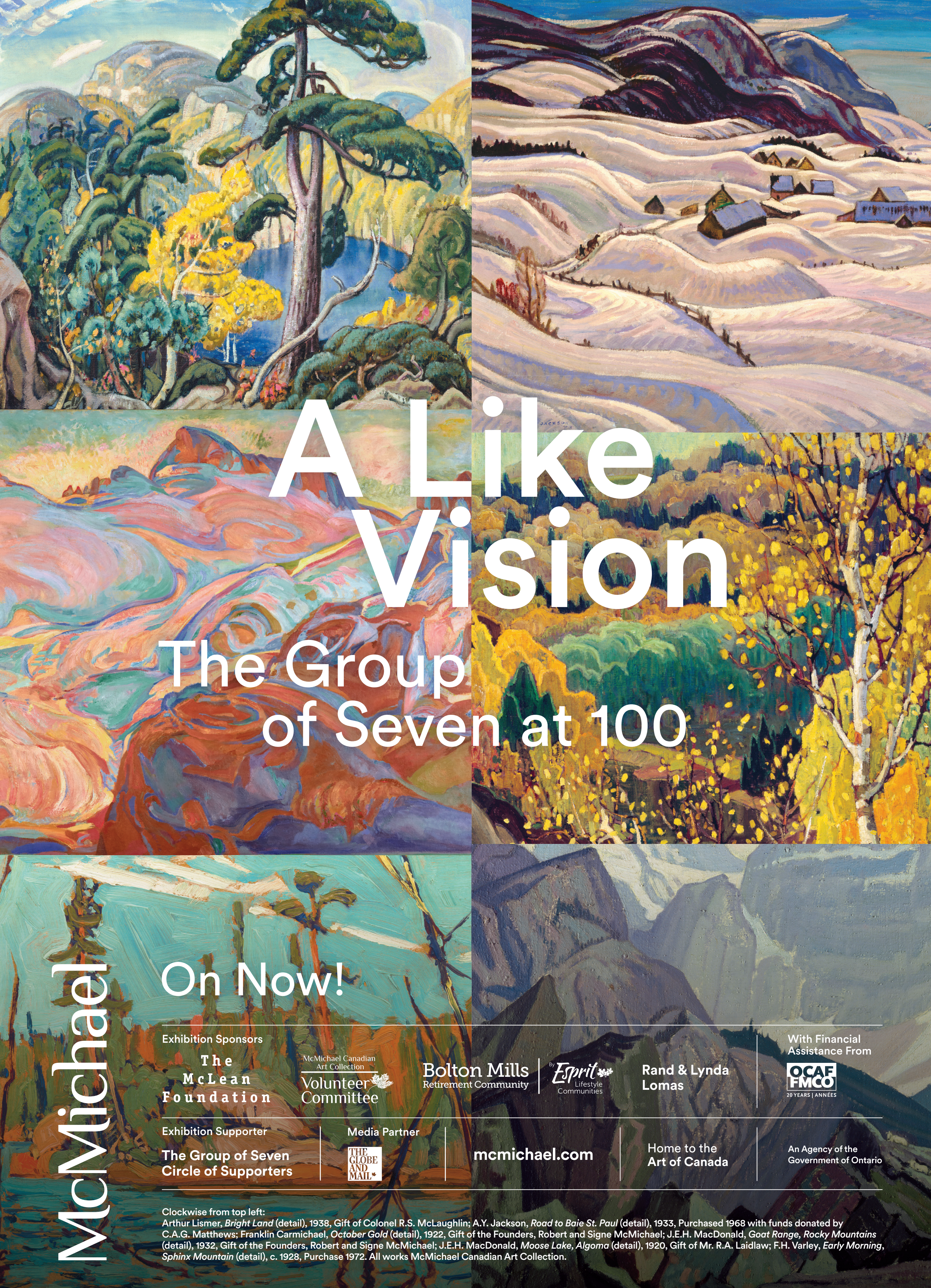
WHEN MACKIE'S family tries to talk about what happened to her, where she might be now, the only thing they can conclude is that somebody knows something, and they think that person lives in their village.

While there's a long list of colonial policies that have harmed this family and this community, they continue to place their trust in the same systems that have perpetually failed them, hoping justice will eventually materialize. Some days, Peter told me, he walks the stretch of Tache. On one end, someone asks him for a cigarette; on the other, someone tells him they want to kill themselves. "They'll throw us welfare checks, and we'll fight like cats and dogs, and then they'll rip in and tear our children away," Peter said. "Sometimes, I just sit and watch. It takes the breath right out of me, the life right out of me."

Now that the national inquiry has concluded, one hopes it wasn't part of yet another empty promise by the Canadian government to repair the damage. As Peter says, it's too soon to tell. "Hopefully, they could get more programs, like I keep saying, for people in need of help—mental health and drug and alcohol counsellors to intervene with people living through this kind of tragedy we live through right now," Peter said. "Pretty much everyone who [went] to that inquiry is looking for an answer."

Until that answer comes, Mackie's family continues to roam their territory, searching for a sign of her. One of the last pieces of potential evidence they found was a bone, but it came back from an analysis as belonging to an animal. "It leads to a dead end all the time," Peter said. "To this day, actually, I kind of expect her to come walking in the door."

**ANNIE HYLTON**'s work has been published by *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New Republic*.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Arthur Lismer, Bright Land (detail), 1938, Gift of Colonel R.S. McLaughlin; A.Y. Jackson, Road to Baie St. Paul (detail), 1933, Purchased 1968 with funds donated by C.A.G. Matthews; Franklin Carmichael, October Gold (detail), 1922, Gift of the Founders, Robert and Signe McMichael; J.E.H. MacDonald, Goat Range, Rocky Mountains (detail), 1932, Gift of the Founders, Robert and Signe McMichael; J.E.H. MacDonald, Moose Lake, Algoma (detail), 1920, Gift of Mr. R.A. Laidlaw; F.H. Varley, Early Morning, Sphinx Mountain (detail), c. 1928, Purchase 1972. All works McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

FOOD

# The End of Grocery Shopping

*How supermarkets are evolving in the age of algorithms and apps*

BY COREY MINTZ
ILLUSTRATIONS BY MIN GYO CHUNG

IN THE INTEREST of full disclosure, I should tell you that I got married in a grocery store. My local grocer, Potsothy "Pots" Sallapa, upon hearing of my engagement, insisted that we hold the wedding in his shop. My fiancée thought it sounded crazy at first—I remember her saying something about not wanting our photos to feature a stack of cereal boxes. But the store was a cozy place and near the apartment we shared at the time, and she agreed to at least give it a look with fresh eyes. As we toured the high-ceilinged, wood-beamed store, among Saturday-morning crowds stocking up on grapes and granola, I could see on her face that this wasn't just a place people went to acquire toilet paper: it was a community hub. A few months later, we walked down the store's central aisle and got married between the cash register, the root-vegetable table, a group of our friends and family, and a display of maple syrup.

Granted, this is the kind of experience that was available to us because we lived, back then, in a neighbourhood full of such places: Kensington Market, a part of Toronto that, in spite of gentrification's constant momentum, exists today as a place where people can shop for food the same way they did 100 years ago. In the course of an ordinary week, I would pop into separate stores for my meat, fish, bread, cheese, dried goods, and vegetables. In every shop, I knew someone by name.

Not everyone holds their wedding in a grocery store, or can, but it's not an unusual desire: a spokesperson for Sobeys told me the company gets a few requests a year from customers who want to get married in one of its locations. At the very least, the supermarket is a formative place. It's where most of us first experience the collision of personal independence and financial responsibility: that initial grocery shop after moving out of our parents' home, the sticker shock of how much cheese and cookies cost leaving us rattled and unsure of how prepared we were for adulthood. It's where, perhaps, we think about the ethics of how we shop, or decide what we want to teach our kids about healthy eating, or try to reconstruct an old family recipe. You don't have to hold a major life event in a grocery store to appreciate the profound role such places can have in our lives.

The way Canadians get their food is changing. Our grocery industry—which currently employs over 300,000 people and is valued at $97.5 billion according to *Canadian Grocer*—is in an arms race to modernize for a digital era. More and more customers expect the convenience of needing to think far less about their groceries, and work less to get them, than they ever have before. What's less clear is the ripple effects this will have on our daily lives, our communities, our health, and our workforces.

The first front in this campaign is online ordering and delivery. This is, for the moment, only a small slice of the market: about 1.5 percent in Canada and 3 percent in the US. But industry analysts expect it to grow rapidly, possibly quadrupling by 2023—a conservative estimate, according to the Food Marketing Institute, which predicts that 70 percent of US consumers will do at least some grocery shopping online within four years. Even the more modest growth projections represent billions of dollars in sales for Canada's 24,000 grocery stores. And this trajectory leaves the big three supermarket chains—Loblaws, Sobeys, and Metro, which share 63.4 percent of the market between them—in a tough place, facing existential threats from Walmart, which they can't beat for price, and Amazon, which they can't beat for convenience.

Amazon's 2017 purchase of upscale supermarket chain Whole Foods, for $13.7 billion (US), was possibly the biggest industry news of the last decade, signalling that the online behemoth was embarking on a major push into groceries. As of last October, some Amazon Prime members in the United States get free grocery delivery, and last November, the company announced plans for its first branded, physical grocery store.

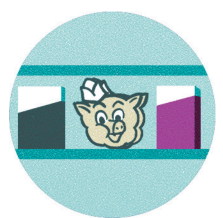
This was hardly the only recent development in supermarket shopping. Also this past fall, PC Express, which already has hundreds of grocery-pickup points across the country, opened its first stand-alone "store," which contains no aisles of food; parent company Loblaws announced the construction of a 12,000-square-foot "automatic picking facility" to harness robotics in the quest for efficiency; and Sobeys started test driving "the first intelligent shopping cart [in] Canadian grocery stores," which scans, weighs, and tallies your purchases as you go. And, in October, Uber announced it was acquiring a majority stake in Cornershop, a leading grocery platform in Mexico and Chile, which currently serves fourteen Toronto-area stores and promises delivery "in as quick as 60 minutes"—upping the ante on the next-day and same-day delivery services Canadians are still getting used to.

The rate of change is only increasing. Amazon's Chinese counterpart, Alibaba, already has 150 locations of Hema, a supermarket that features facial-recognition software, real-time pricing (digital price tags that adjust based on factors like supply and demand), automated checkout, app payment, and thirty-minute delivery. The service is so efficient that 60 percent of the company's customers are already ordering online. Then there is the host of other experimental efforts to streamline the shopping experience for consumers: 7Fresh (no cash), Amazon Go (no staff), and a horde of delivery meal-kit companies (no shopping). In the US, Walgreens and Kroger are experimenting with facial-recognition software that can target in-store ads at customers based on age, gender, or mood.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF GROCERY SHOPPING

**1883**
Bernard Kroger opens his first store, in Cincinnati, Ohio. He experiments with offering baked goods in addition to the standard grocery staples.

**1907**
J. W. Sobey starts a meat-delivery business in Stellarton, Nova Scotia. He opens a physical store in 1912, adding in produce, fish, and dairy.



**1916**
Piggly Wiggly opens in Memphis, Tennessee. It is the first self-service grocery store, allowing customers to choose their own items off the shelves.

**1919**
Loblaws Groceterias opens its first location in Toronto.

None of which begins to address the lived, day-to-day experience of shopping for food, which is so ordinary as to barely register *as* an experience and so ubiquitous as to be nearly universal. Is the act of gathering food—seeing it and smelling it and touching it, adjusting your shopping list as you go because the apples look particularly nice or the celery disappointingly wilted—an essential aspect of human life? Or are supermarkets, where we make physical and social contact with food and people—a quaint twentieth-century anachronism, like vinyl or democracy?

SUPERMARKETS WERE invented less than 100 years ago. As with the current proliferation of digital shopping tools, they were massive industry disruptors at the time—the Amazons and Ubers of their day.

In the early twentieth century, there was no such thing as a one-stop shop for food. "You'd go out in the morning to the grocery store, for canned goods and bulk stuff," explains David Gwynn, a librarian at the University of North Carolina and a supermarket historian. While there, you would speak with a shopkeeper to obtain your items; they filled your order behind the counter, weighing out dried goods from barrels. Customers would know the shopkeepers by name—and, often, vice versa. Other kinds of foodstuffs required trips to separate shops as part of this daily ritual: butchers and fishmongers, greengrocers and bakeries. These stores were much smaller than the ones we're used to—maybe 1,000 square feet or less, says Gwynn—and were everywhere in our cities.

Transformed by a childhood visit to an old A&P, Gwynn is a grocery obsessive who maintains *groceteria.com*, a database of US and Canadian supermarkets past and present. Want to know the years that the Piggly Wiggly at 384 Academy Road in Winnipeg became a Shop-Easy (1950) and then a Tom Boy (1961)? Gwynn has answers. His vacations always include visits to older stores, ancient outlets like Pay'n Takit treated like houses of worship.

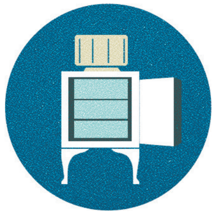
The company that would become Sobeys was launched in 1907, when J.W. Sobey started a business delivering meat by horse-drawn wagon; the first Sobeys store opened in 1912, in Stellarton, Nova Scotia. Kroger, the Loblaws of the US, also began as a small venture: it started out with four grocery stores in 1883. By 1902, founder Bernard Kroger had opened forty locations and had added a bakery, enabling him to supply bread to his stores at cost and merging what had previously been two altogether separate kinds of businesses. Sobeys helped develop this trend in Canada, selling produce, dairy, and fish and gradually adding animal feed and other food products. Over time, smaller shops adapted to this diversification of products—a little bread at the greengrocer, a little produce at the butcher shop—diminishing each store's specialty or expertise.

The next innovation was self-service, with store owners stocking items on shelves in the front of their shops instead of storing them in the back, so customers could help themselves. This shift, pioneered on a large scale by Piggly Wiggly in the US and here by the first Loblaws Groceterias in 1919, was a big convenience, as customers didn't have to wait for a shopkeeper to fill someone else's order before obtaining their own items. This also removed the need to form a direct relationship with shopkeepers—the first step down a long road of depersonalization.

As regional chains expanded, gradually carrying a wider variety of goods, they were able to buy related businesses such as bakeries and canneries, effectively becoming their own suppliers. This allowed them to lower their prices, giving them a competitive edge over smaller grocers.

For a short while, the growth of stores was incremental, one product added at a time. It wasn't until 1930 that someone had the bright idea of putting all these developments together. During the 1920s, when most food shops were still just making small additions to their offerings, Michael Cullen was a regional manager for Kroger, overseeing ninety-four small stores in Illinois. Cullen had a vision for retailing all food products under one large roof surrounded by ample parking space. He pitched this idea—of a monstrously sized store with lots of parking and 80 percent self-service—in a letter to his bosses. "Can you imagine how the public would respond to a store of this kind?...I would have to call out the police and let the public in so many at a time," his proposal boasted. "I would lead the public out of the high-priced houses of bondage into the low prices of the house of the promised land."

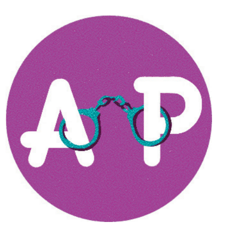
Cullen was ignored, possibly due to his biblical writing style. But he was determined. In 1930, after quitting his job with Kroger, Cullen opened King Kullen, a 6,000-square-foot grocery store in Queens, in New York City. When you went to King Kullen, there was no need for a trip to a different store for a missed item. The proto-supermarket didn't just carry a little of this and that. It sold everything, and at cheaper prices, thanks to the scope of its buying power—a huge advantage for a retailer at any time, but especially



**1927**
General Electric begins selling a "simplified icing unit"—the first all-steel refrigerator.

**1930**
King Kullen, generally regarded as the world's first supermarket, opens in Queens, New York.

**1937**
Sylvan Goldman introduces the shopping cart, a new device he invented for his Humpty Dumpty chain of stores.



**1946**
American courts issue an antitrust ruling against A&P, which was charged with engaging in monopolistic practices. This does little to slow the growth of supermarket chains.

**1950s**
Larger stores with larger parking lots proliferate during post–Second World War suburbanization.

as the Depression made customers ever more price conscious. Those early *supermarkets*—a term first used by Cincinnati's Albers Supermarket in 1933—offered another perk that presaged a seismic shift in North American culture: parking. For customers, all of this amounted to a major innovation, no less radical than online shopping or dating apps seemed at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Further innovations soon followed. Larger stores with many items required a new way of collecting your purchases—not a subject that had much preoccupied sellers previously. The shopping cart, created by Sylvan Goldman for his Oklahoma City chain of stores, Humpty Dumpty, in 1937, was at first rejected by men as too effeminate. But, after the company hired models to walk around the store pushing them, the carts took off and became a standard part of the shopping experience. And the shopping cart did just what it was intended to: it allowed customers to buy more than they could carry.

But perhaps the biggest technological innovation that encouraged people to embrace supermarkets was the fridge. Developed and patented in the nineteenth century, early commercial refrigerators used toxic gases—methyl chloride, ammonia, and sulphur dioxide—as coolants. Accidents pushed fridge companies to develop chlorofluorocarbons and facilitated the creation of larger, safer, and cheaper fridges. In 1911, General Electric sold a wooden model for home use for $1,000 (US)—twice the cost of a car. The all-steel Monitor Top refrigerator, introduced in 1927, was priced by the company at $525. By the late 1920s, the majority of Americans owned a fridge; they became much more common in Canadian kitchens after the Second World War.

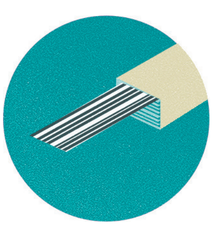
Until this era, most people had still used iceboxes, which were essentially large, wooden coolers, the interiors lined with zinc and filled with ice. These were small, had to be washed out regularly, and were not conducive to long-term food storage; there had simply been no point in filling the icebox with a week's worth of meat or fish. The prevalence of electric refrigerators meant that people could safely store food for the week, ending the need for daily shopping.

FROM THE 1920s to the 1940s, as grocery chains grew larger, popular and legal opposition to them mounted. Much of this stemmed from what were seen as the new chains' monopolistic practices. "As the grocery chains got bigger, they bought directly from manufacturers, often demanding volume discounts, rather than through wholesalers," explains Marc Levinson, author of *The Great A&P and the Struggle for Small Business in America*. Wholesalers did not appreciate this vertical integration, and their opposition to the new supermarkets culminated in a victorious 1946 antitrust suit against A&P; the case succeeded in partially breaking the company up. As the economy rebounded after the war, however, public pressure waned. Under the more business-friendly Eisenhower administration, in the 1950s, the US Department of Justice dropped the campaign to dismantle the growing power of chain supermarkets.

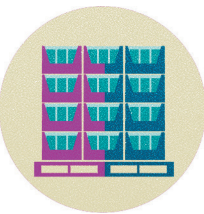
With no legal impediments in the way, the rise of car culture enabled supermarkets to dominate our food shopping. Across North America in the 1950s, fuelled by a postwar boom in the economy and population, we built suburbs with bigger houses and highways leading to them, and people transitioned to the habit of driving everywhere. Cars and their spacious trunks additionally favoured the weekly shop at the supermarket over daily trips to multiple stores. The suburban supermarket, with its ample parking, variety, and discounts, took precedence over the old-fashioned, smaller shop's quality, expertise, and personalized service. The trend perpetuated itself, with chains like Loblaws building ever-bigger stores and ever-bigger parking lots to accommodate them.

This was billed as a time saver, a boon for shoppers—which, at the time, primarily meant women. But, while it might seem that purchasing all of our food in one location would reduce domestic labour, it had the opposite effect. "The advent of supermarkets changed household purchasing habits, but not in the direction advertisers would like us to think they did," explains Ruth Schwartz Cowan, a historian and the author of *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. The new supermarkets provided everything under one roof and a parking spot to help you haul it home. But, in one key regard, they offloaded the work of buying food to individual shoppers. "After World War II, the spread of automobile ownership and the growth of the suburbs led to the cessation of retail-delivery services," she adds. Those smaller local shops had required you to make multiple stops, but those stops were all in your neighbourhood, and much of the time, the shops had delivered.

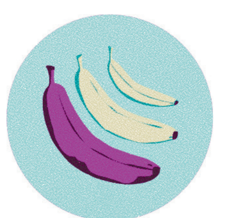
As supermarkets continued to develop, they found technologies to save on in-store labour as well. In June 1964, inside a Marsh supermarket in Troy, Ohio, a pack of Wrigley's chewing gum passed over a glass plate, exposing the bar code



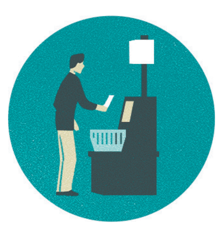
**1964**
A pack of chewing gum in Troy, Ohio, becomes the first grocery item ever sold with the help of a bar code scan.



**1976**
Sol Price opens Price Club, which pioneers the concept of the warehouse store. It will merge with Costco in 1996.



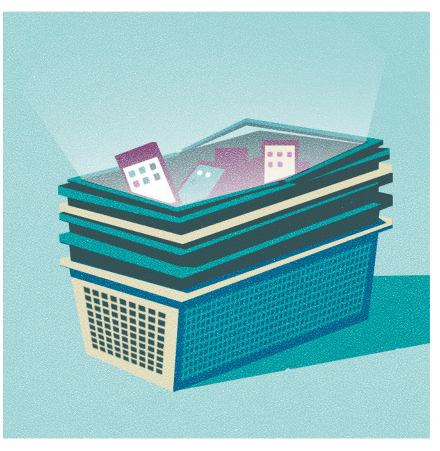
**1978**
Loblaws opens its first discount location, in Toronto, under the name No Frills.



**1989**
David Humble files a patent for "an operator-unattended checkout system for processing articles selected for purchase," initiating the spread of self-service checkouts.

**1996**
Peapod, one of the first online grocery-delivery services, launches its website.

on the package to a helium-neon laser beam. The beam, detected by a photodiode, relayed the data to a computerized cash register. And that gum, with the aid of a Spectra Physics–model price scanner that now lives in the Smithsonian museum, became the Neil Armstrong of groceries, the first item to be scanned and sold, transforming the analog systems of inventory control until then managed by paper, pencils, and human memory. Before then, packages each needed a price sticker, which would have to be changed if the price changed. The bar code eliminated this drudgery. It also laid the groundwork for the automated checkout options we see today—the ones free of human cashiers entirely.



**2017**
Chinese conglomerate Alibaba launches Hema, a technology-driven chain of supermarkets that requires shoppers to download an app to shop in person or promises delivery in thirty minutes. Elsewhere, Amazon grabs headlines for its $13.7 billion (US) purchase of Whole Foods.

This was followed by another wave of innovation, in the 1970s, when economic inflation and price wars pushed supermarkets to open discount branches under different names to distinguish them from their parent companies; this was the period that saw parent company Loblaws open No Frills, for instance. As larger chains bought up smaller regional players, this rebranding and shift to franchising allowed supermarket companies to lower labour costs by eliminating unionized jobs. "A lot of the big chains in the US and Canada started these discount chains in the '70s and '80s because they were officially subsidiaries," says Gwynn. "They could start from the ground up, without union workers."

This focus on price led to the next big shift, into the era of the superstore (technical name: hypermarket). These huge, big-box stores sell food, often in wholesale-sized packages, as well as clothing, furniture, and electronics in ever-larger volumes—and leverage their purchasing power into ever-lower prices. Walmart expanded from its origins as discount department store to add groceries, while Loblaws adapted its Real Canadian Superstores in the opposite direction.

Soon afterward came another kind of unshackling from the constraints of traditional stores: the self-checkout kiosk, first introduced in the 1990s. Now ubiquitous, these upload the labour of scanning product codes and bagging groceries to the customer—in the process, eliminating the job of cashier. In Canada, Loblaws and Metro are promising more self-checkouts to help counter minimum-wage increases and resulting pressure on their bottom lines. Selecting items on a screen from the comfort of our homes came quickly after that. It's a straight line from Kroger's shops starting to bake their own bread to the superstore and, beyond, to e-commerce.

One problem with all this progress is that, while other human beings can be annoying—clipping our nails on the subway, calling instead of texting, disrespecting the unwritten rule that the middle seat on a plane gets armrest preference—we need one another. Research suggests that even low-level social interactions—the kinds we have with our neighbours and mail carriers and local storeowners—form bonds known as "weak ties." These connections have been shown to improve physical and mental health and to help reduce loneliness. "Even social interactions with the more peripheral members of our social networks contribute to our well-being," concludes one 2014 study of weak ties—an important finding as rates of self-reported loneliness grow. More than a third of Americans over forty-five feel lonely, a 2018 study found. While some of this has been attributed to changing family dynamics (we get married later and less often than we used to, and we have fewer children), casual opportunities for social interaction, like those found when buying food, are a part of preventing isolation as well.

Sociologists studying weak ties in China have found that these types of interactions protect against memory decline and have suggested that more attention on weak ties may generate nonpharmacological treatments for dementia. A 2018 study of social integration on lung health, which is a marker of longevity, concluded that low-intimacy interactions help stave off age-related declines in lung function.

It isn't just a question of grocery shopping being good for us: it turns out that many of us just plain like it too. Delivery services may save us the bother of a trip, and over time, algorithms might be able to recommend products that suit our needs—a peanut butter that matches our preference for creaminess, a breaded fish stick that aligns with our commitment to sustainability but falls within the parameters of our budget. The obstacle in the face of this optimization and cold logic is that many of us appreciate the distinguishing features of analog shopping: getting out of the house; the freedom of choice; being in a large, expansive space; the visual stimulation of all that abundance on the shelves; the discovery of new foods; even the game of choosing the right checkout aisle, the one with the fastest cashier. A 2017 Morgan Stanley study found that 85 percent of consumers cited the need to see and choose food as the reason for their preference for physical rather than digital shopping.

"People…often have a lot of pleasure in the food-shopping process. They get a lot of pleasure from choice," says Josée Johnston, a University of Toronto professor who studies the sociology of food and its intersection with culture and gender. Historically, she says, "women's identity as providers and carers, through food, is really wrapped up in that process of selecting food. Caring for people through food involves doing research. It involves reading labels, turning things over, having a tactile sense of whether it's a good product. People…are invested

in that process." The gender dynamics may have shifted, but that basic relationship has not.

Sarah Fessenden, an anthropologist at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, in BC, says that we need to look back further than a mere century to see how we have become removed from our sources of food: the current tech innovations in supermarkets, she suggests, are just the latest microdevelopment in a much longer history that goes back at least 10,000 years to the twin advents of agriculture and exchange, when some humans stopped being foragers.

"What we know is central are the myriad relationships that are built around and attached to…food-getting strategies. So social relationships, political relationships, economic relationships, religious relationships—those are all built in and around food." As foragers, we tended to share the food we collected. That changed as we started planting and harvesting crops. "When we get agricultural societies, they're producing so much food that not everyone has to produce food anymore," says Fessenden, pointing out that social hierarchies began to emerge at the same time as early agriculture did. "We're not building relationships around food with one another. We're not spending time with people. We're not learning from them. When you buy food at supermarkets, it's often already packaged and processed. It increases our situation of feeling isolated, alienated, and distanced. From an anthropological perspective, it's clear how important food is. So, when you start losing it, it's kind of like losing a language."

WHILE CANADA LAGS behind other countries in the e-grocery game, the country's largest grocers are betting on major change—and investing in it. Loblaws, anticipating developments in artificial intelligence and automation, is promising a $250 million investment over the next five years in retraining its workforce. In 2017, the company announced plans to close twenty-two underperforming stores in order to focus on online sales and delivery. Sobeys is building customer-fulfillment centres (CFCs) in Montreal and Toronto to compete with Amazon's efficiency. Expected to be operational this year, the CFCs are a partnership with UK online grocer Ocado (which is doing the same thing with Kroger in the US) and will be similar to one in Andover, England, where 1,100 robots fill customer orders in just a few minutes. Metro is offering online sales and same-day delivery, in Toronto and Quebec to start.

Part of this change, however, involves trying to find new ways to preserve the kinds of stores we grew up with. Walter Robb, the former co-CEO of Whole Foods, helped launch the grocery chain in Canada; in industry circles, he is a bit of a celebrity. Speaking at a trade-show hall near Toronto's Pearson airport last spring, he assured a crowd of retail executives that "physical stores still matter" and gave a buzzword-filled presentation—and, perhaps, some indications of where we're headed. Robb says that the sale of Whole Foods to Amazon was necessary in order to pursue the two-tiered shopping experience of the future: competitive digital services bolstered by an enriched retail experience, like the in-store dining options known as "grocerants."

Economists and technologists usually argue that innovations free our time for other, better tasks. That makes sense on the page. But who do you know who has more time for friends and family than even a decade ago? Yes, most of us have more leisure time than we did in the nineteenth century, when we had to go to a well to gather water and light a fire to boil it. But we have less time than we did fifty years ago, when our employers couldn't reach us at all hours by phone, text, or Slack. We don't shop online today so we can spend more time with our families. We do it so we can spend more time working. Because our jobs are unstable, our family lives are overscheduled, our housing costs require greater percentages of our incomes, and our futures are uncertain.

The trend in food retail over the last century has matched these broader social and economic developments: depersonalization, a steady march toward speed and convenience, and a shift away from the human relationships built around food. It's only now, when the large, old supermarket chains feel threatened by new, digital competition, that they are motivated to invest more in the personal experience of shopping; cooking classes and in-store cafés provide us a reason to visit a physical store.

Last year, my wife and I moved from our condo to a house, and I've swapped my local independent stores for bigger shops in a supermarket. By foot, we're probably twenty minutes from the old neighbourhood. Culturally, I often feel like Henry Hill at the end of *Goodfellas*, dropped into suburbia by the federal witness-protection program. I have come up with all sorts of reasons why I need to get to know employees at the nearby supermarket: it would grant me access to the better produce or inside information on the timing of deliveries. (I'm a food writer; I'm a little obsessed with such things.) But these were a subterfuge for my real goal—forging a connection with the people who sell me food.

Before marriage and fatherhood, I enjoyed a mostly solitary existence. I probably would have claimed that I was alone but not lonely. If that's true, it was due to the weak-tie social interactions I engaged in every day, hopping from a quick hello at the bakery to the fishmonger's explanation of whether or not skate is considered sustainable to a five-minute conversation with Frankie about his ex-wife at the cheese shop. (Not all social interactions are created equal.)

"Food, along with shelter, is one of our most basic needs," says Fessenden. "How we get our food is most definitely important. And the connections that we build are important. What we keep losing are those social relationships that we built on food being so central. And, if we're not building those connections, then we're losing a part of being human."

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**COREY MINTZ** has written for the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, and the *New York Times*.

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JUSTICE

# Beyond Crime and Punishment

*Few survivors of sexual assault pursue justice in the legal system. Some are turning to an alternative option*

BY VIVIANE FAIRBANK
ILLUSTRATIONS BY HOLLY STAPLETON

Early in 2018, in an Ontario courtroom, Marlee Liss faced the man who had raped her. It was the second time she had ever seen him; the first was the night they met, eighteen months earlier. Now, she was at a preliminary hearing, where a judge would decide whether the case had enough evidence to warrant a trial. For five hours, Liss answered questions from the stand: What text messages and voicemails had she exchanged with her friends that night, and why? Why had she entered the man's apartment? How had he touched her, exactly, and where? The man's defence lawyer also read one of her Facebook posts out loud, trying to find inconsistencies in her account.

The accused, his brother, one of Liss's friends, and members of the prosecution and defence teams listened quietly as she answered. Her mother, Barbie Liss, sat on a bench in the hallway outside. Liss had never shared details of the assault with her, and though she would have been comforted by Barbie's presence in the courtroom, she wanted to protect her from hearing the testimony. Whenever there was a break, Liss walked out to Barbie and squeezed her hand. The rest of the time, she sat facing the small crowd. The man who had raped her stayed seated; he was not required to take the stand. He kept his head down while she spoke. Throughout, she insisted that the act had been nonconsensual.

To stay focused, Liss used a calming technique she had learned in her yoga practice: deep breaths in, long breaths out. She thought of the strange turns her life had taken over the past few years. Liss grew up with her mother, father, sister, and brother in Thornhill, Ontario; her father moved out when she was fifteen. She valued her ability to empathize with others, and her family knew her as someone full of love—not only the kind expressed through hugs and affection, but also the kind that seeks to make the world a better place. Still, Liss sometimes found it difficult to turn that love inward. After she graduated high school, she decided to study social work at Ryerson University, in Toronto, because she wanted to learn how to help vulnerable people. The more she studied and learned about the field, however, the more her own inability to express pain troubled her. "I wasn't even able to

cry for most of my life," she says. How could she support others working through difficult emotions when she couldn't do the same herself?

So, at twenty-one years old, Liss had decided to make a change. In the summer of 2016, before her third year at Ryerson, she travelled to British Columbia on a tree-planting expedition—a notoriously difficult job—with the intention of prompting an emotional breakthrough. She wanted to reconnect with herself, to learn how to cry. That gig suddenly fell through, and later, as she passed near Kootenay Lake, she found a yoga ashram that was centred around the "divine feminine." They were hiring, and on a whim, Liss decided to take the job.

During her three months at Kootenay Lake, Liss practised yoga and meditation, and she slowly learned to speak about her feelings. She also began to develop a more spiritual outlook on life. Most of the people she lived with there were women, many of whom had experienced trauma or abuse. "It made me realize how much I cared about women's empowerment and healing," Liss says. On one of her first days back in Toronto, she watched *The Hunting Ground*, a documentary about the prevalence of sexual assault on university campuses. Liss felt galvanized; she messaged a friend and suggested starting a student workshop to advocate for victims of sexual violence. But, in one night, Liss later told the courtroom, her life had been abruptly thrown off track.

THAT NIGHT in Toronto, Liss had planned to stay over at a friend's condo because of its convenient location. After drinks at Liss's apartment, she and some friends left for a downtown bar. A few hours later, Liss was "pretty exhausted and drunk," she says, and it was near closing time. Liss wanted to leave, but the friend with whom she was staying had disappeared and wasn't answering her phone. As Liss looked for her in the crowd, she danced with a man, a stranger about her age, for half a song. She found him "too touchy" and left to call a taxi to her friend's condo—she knew at least one of her friends from that night was already

there. But the man followed her outside, and in an ill-fated coincidence, they discovered he lived in the same building as Liss's friend. He offered to share her cab back to their mutual destination to save money.

By the time Liss and the man arrived in the building's lobby, Liss's friend still hadn't answered her phone. Liss didn't have keys to her friend's condo, nor could she remember the unit number. She continued to dial her friend's phone, but there was no answer. The man invited her inside his own condo, saying she could wait there. Liss accepted. Today, she struggles not to blame herself, though she knows nothing that happened next was her fault. "I just wanted to wind down and go to sleep," she says. Initially, the man seemed to understand. He gave her a glass of water and sat in the living room while she lay on his bed, clothed and on top of the covers, waiting for her friend to call. Then, as she began to fall asleep, he assaulted her. Again and again, Liss said *no* and *please stop*. He apologized and covered her mouth. "This is so fucked up," he repeated, but he didn't stop.

The rape lasted several hours. Afterward, the man left the room and Liss lay on the bed, in shock. "There was a clear moment when I felt like I came back into my body," she says. "I wanted to leave." Liss stood, only half-dressed, and gathered her things. As she left the bedroom, he returned, and they locked eyes. Then she walked out the door, got dressed in the elevator, and took a taxi to her apartment near Ryerson's campus.

Liss told one of her roommates about the assault as soon as she got home, and they went to the hospital that same morning. At the emergency room, they were asked to wait. Twenty-four hours later, someone was finally available to take care of Liss. "I couldn't shower," she says. "I had semen on my clothes." Hospital staff collected her belongings, her blood, her urine, and any evidence the man had left on her body. One moment blurred into the next. When a nurse asked if she wanted to contact the police, Liss automatically said yes. She hadn't had time to process what had happened—let alone decide what to do next. "I wasn't thinking of punishing him," she says. She wasn't thinking of anything. She simply did what she thought was expected of her.

Over the next year, Liss lived in a haze. She became depressed. She left her job at a café and stopped attending classes. She unofficially moved back in with Barbie. There, she would sit on the couch for hours, saying and doing nothing, shaking all over, crying. She felt as though her body and voice had been taken from her. Her guiding philosophy, centred on kindness and understanding, was eclipsed by darkness. Her instinct was to empathize with the man who had assaulted her as she would with anyone else. But he had also hurt her profoundly; she felt like she was meant to see him as a monster. "I remembered him having this internal struggle, saying sorry and pacing back and forth" during the assault, Liss says. "And I was so confused by the fact that he was just a human, just a guy."

**The justice system doesn't ask offenders what they require to change, and it doesn't ask victims what they need to heal.**

At one point, Liss tried to return to school, but the first lecture she attended was about working with people who had been convicted of murder or rape. She panicked and left. Liss spent most of her days at home, writing poetry. Over time, she began to think of what she had learned at the ashram about community and empowerment, how she had seen others speak about their trauma to regain control of their lives. Liss joined a rape-survivor support group, where she told others about what she was going through. Every other weekend, she also attended courses to become a yoga teacher. She was learning how to feel safe in her body again, to reclaim it as her own.

Now, more than a year after her assault, a defence lawyer she had never met was asking her how many thrusts per minute the man had made and at what angle. Scholars have called this the "secondary victimization" of going to court—first a person is assaulted by their rapist, then they are assaulted by the court system.

When the preliminary hearing ended, "I was just exhausted and so proud of myself," Liss says. "I wasn't thinking about the next step at all." But, a few weeks later, news of the next step came: having reviewed the evidence and Liss's testimony, the judge decided there was enough for the case to go to trial. Liss wasn't relieved to hear the decision. Testifying in court a second time would mean facing the same interrogation, this time in front of a larger crowd. Liss wanted to heal, to move on. But how could she, when pursuing her attacker in court continued to trap her in the horrific events of that night? She never wanted to be on the stand like that again.

If she went forward, there were only two possible outcomes. The trial would culminate either with a finding of guilt, in which case the man could be sent to jail and would have a criminal record, or with an acquittal, in which case her testimony and the suffering it caused would have been in vain. But Liss wasn't interested in either outcome. What she really wanted was for her rapist to feel remorse, for him to admit what he had done and be willing to face the consequences. She wanted him to understand how much he had harmed her and her family. She wanted him to strive to be better—to make the world a safer place—and to never do anything like that again. "I had joked about rapist rehab," she says, "but I didn't think it was possible."

As Liss spoke with Barbie and her friends about her reluctance to return to court, she began to research alternatives. Eventually, she learned about the concept of restorative justice. The practice can involve victims, offenders, their family members, and their communities in a collaborative process that prioritizes healing and understanding the harm

caused by the crime. Restorative justice takes place around the world in a variety of forms and contexts, including in conjunction with criminal courts. It often includes therapy and dialogue between parties—and it is known to help some victims recover from trauma and PTSD. Like many Canadians, Liss had never heard of restorative justice. But the more she learned about it, the more she felt it was what she had wanted all along.

SEXUAL ASSAULT is an exceptional kind of crime. The Criminal Code doesn't give an explicit definition: it defines assault, then considers sexual assault to be a form of assault. Consent, which is itself defined in detail, is the critical issue. Any activity such as kissing, touching, or sexual intercourse is legal only when all parties involved give their consent. This understanding of sexual assault is the product of decades of evolution in Canadian law. Still, today, it can seem impossible for legal language to appreciate the subjective and emotionally fraught elements of physical intimacy. There remains a divide between our theoretical understanding of sexual assault—based on purposefully ambiguous definitions—and firsthand experiences. Of all crimes, sexual assault causes some of the highest rates of depression and PTSD among its victims. It can take years, even decades, for a survivor to process the extent to which the incident has affected their life and to understand how to move forward.

Yet, despite a growing awareness of the crime's singular nature, society's expectations of victims of sexual violence remain largely unchanged: if they've been abused, we often tell them, they should provide incontrovertible evidence of the act and push for their assailant's punishment as loudly, as harshly, and as soon as possible. Any deviation from this behaviour—if a person doesn't respond with anger toward their assailant or if they don't report to the police right away—is often taken to undermine the victim's credibility. Not only is pressing charges something they are supposed to *want* to do, it is also considered their social responsibility. For any victim of crime, this ideology is embedded in the mechanics of the courtroom, where refusing to testify could send a complainant to jail. But victims of sexual violence must also navigate the wider culture, which allows them little room to express reluctance about pursuing their attacker.

Elaine Craig, a law professor at Dalhousie University, has shown in her research how frequently defence lawyers and other parties weaponize this aspect of popular culture. In one case of a PhD student accused of raping his classmate, for example, the defence suggested that the complainant was not serious about her allegations because she had waited two days to contact the police. In another trial, the complainant was so distraught by the first day of cross-examination that she didn't return to court the next day, Craig wrote in a 2015 paper. The woman insisted that, for the sake of her mental health, she did not want to testify, but she was arrested, detained, and "compelled back to court" for four more days on the stand. The defence lawyer used her reluctance to testify to suggest that she was lying about the incident.

On the surface, it seems that society has changed substantially over a few short years. A Canada-wide conversation about rape culture began in October 2014, when Jian Ghomeshi, then a popular host of the CBC radio show *Q*, was dismissed from the broadcaster following accusations of sexual violence. (In March 2016, Ghomeshi was acquitted of four counts of sexual assault because the presiding judge considered the three women who testified to be unreliable. He later signed a peace bond for a fifth charge of sexual assault.) The next year, the *Globe and Mail* published "Unfounded," an investigation that examined how police respond to sexual-assault allegations and exposed "deep flaws at every step of the [judicial] process." And, by November 2017, the #MeToo movement was in full swing on social media, and hundreds of celebrities, CEOs, and politicians were accused of sexual misconduct. Today, it's no longer so controversial to say that sexual violence is a severe, widespread, and contemporary problem.

Though these developments have raised awareness of the ubiquity of

sexual violence, they have not helped bridge the divide between what survivors of sexual violence want and what others *think* they want. While some complainants benefit from seeing their attackers in jail or excluded from society, where they can cause no further harm, others' versions of justice might look quite different. In one published study, a researcher at Osgoode Hall Law School found that, over several months in 2014, many people who spoke to news media about their experiences of sexual assault "were not actually interested in seeing their attacker formally punished." Some instead expressed a desire for the opportunity to tell their story or to receive an apology.

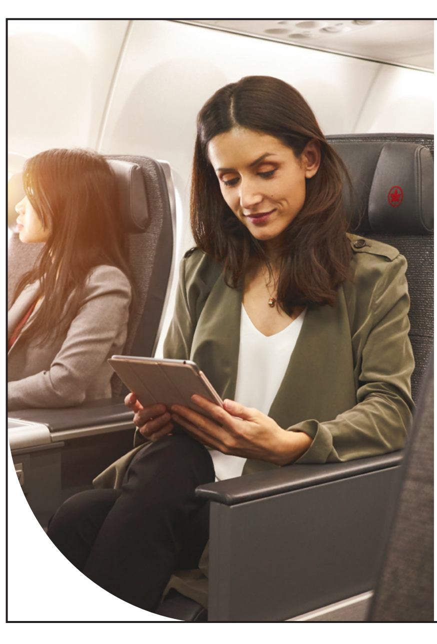
Among those victims who are interested in pursuing criminal justice, few are likely to find it. There are over half-a-million self-reported incidents of sexual violence in Canada every year—an estimate researchers agree is much too low, even when accounting for false accusations, which occur at a rate of 2 to 8 percent. In 2012, an academic study found that only an estimated 15,200 incidents were reported to police in a single year, 15 percent of which were declared "unfounded" and dismissed. Fewer than half (5,544) of the rest led to a suspect being charged. Half of those led to court—compared to three-quarters for physical assaults. And half of *those* led to a conviction for sexual assault. The result, the author wrote, is that "only 0.3 percent of perpetrators of sexual assault were held accountable."

For all the conversations about sexual violence that have taken place in the last several years, there is still little understanding of how to improve the situation. Meanwhile, there is a growing consensus among scholars, front line workers, and legal experts that, even if rates of conviction were to vastly increase, the courts are not well equipped to help society transform. That's because the traditional criminal justice system arguably doesn't ask offenders what they require in order to change, and it doesn't ask victims of a crime what they need to heal. It is by definition concerned only with punishment, and it essentially considers justice to be found after two parties, the Crown and the defence, argue—and one of them prevails. Because the Criminal Code defines a crime as an offence against *society*, victims, when they are involved in the court process at all, are officially only witnesses.

"If you tell a victim of violence that, it can feel surreal," says Jo-Anne Wemmers, a leading expert in criminology based in Montreal. "Witnessing" sexual violence can dramatically affect the course of one's life. Yet, once charges are pressed, a victim has little control over what happens next. The legal system is focused on punishing individual offenders. While this might seem like an obviously productive goal, such single-mindedness in the aftermath of a crime can become a failure to acknowledge the cultural problems influencing what crimes are committed—and against whom. Systemic problems such as racism and gender-based violence can be left untreated or even worsened, adds Jennifer Llewellyn, a professor of law at the Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University.

All of this is why, increasingly, some scholars, advocates for victims of sexual violence, and even legal professionals are turning to restorative justice as a framework for thinking about justice differently. Research suggests that, while it is not appropriate for every situation, restorative justice has the potential to help us navigate the complex realities of sexual assault, beginning with listening to victims first. In 2014, Statistics Canada found that, while only 5 percent of survivors of sexual assault report the crime to police, as many as one-quarter would be interested in restorative justice—and, the more time passes after the offence, the more that percentage may increase.

Restorative justice starts from a baseline understanding that someone did something wrong; the offender needs to admit responsibility for the harm they have caused. From there, it can be implemented in a variety of ways depending on the situation. In victim-offender mediation, for example, parties engage in dialogue, either directly or through

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writing. If victims are not interested in speaking with the offender—and every party is always given the choice to participate—they can speak with others who have committed the same type of crime. The aim is not necessarily to find forgiveness; the victim is never expected to absolve their abuser. But researchers have found victims usually get satisfaction from being able to ask the offender questions such as, "Why me?"

Because of its flexible structure, restorative justice can allow for conversations about culture and community to take place within the context of a specific crime. Advocates say it has the potential to address the intersecting problems at the root of sexual violence in Canada, where women, Indigenous people, members of the LGBTQ community, and people with mental health problems are at a higher risk of being sexually assaulted than is the general population. What's more, the vast majority of sexual assaults are perpetrated by someone the victim knows, including intimate partners, casual acquaintances, and family members. Such situations of abuse don't always translate well to punitive justice.

Restorative processes can shift our attention away from arguing about whether a crime took place, how to prove it, and whom to punish and, instead, toward thinking of justice as a means of recovery and minimizing harm. The practice invites us not to forgive or excuse an offender's behaviour but to help them learn from their mistakes, if they're willing, and to find a way to support victims, even if their idea of justice differs from our own.

LATE IN 2018, Liss connected with Jeff Carolin, a criminal defence lawyer in Toronto who had recently pursued restorative alternatives with some of his clients. When they spoke, Liss explained that she was interested in "doing something different," and Carolin agreed to help.

Together, Liss and Carolin met with Cara Sweeny, one of the assistant Crown attorneys assigned to her case. It was an unusual situation: most people who choose restorative justice for serious crimes do so either before reporting to the police, in which case the criminal justice system is not involved at all, or after the offender has pleaded guilty, been convicted, or been sentenced. Sweeny wasn't certain it would be possible to implement restorative justice halfway through the criminal process, particularly for a case of sexual assault. But she was intrigued. Sweeny told Liss that she was willing to try as long as the man and his defence lawyer were also on board. She agreed to reach out to them with the proposal.

Restorative processes within the Canadian criminal justice system have existed for more than forty years. Whatever the form, all approaches share a common philosophy: focus on healing and prevent further harm—to victims, to offenders, and to the communities they live in. This viewpoint has existed among Indigenous peoples for centuries. In the 1980s, Hollow Water, a small First Nations community in Manitoba, created one of the foundational examples of restorative-type programs in Canada. The Community Holistic Circle Healing program (CHCH), which is grounded in regional Anishinaabe values of healing, was created specifically to handle instances of sexual abuse. In *Returning to the Teachings*, Rupert Ross, a legal expert who documented Hollow Water's work, tells the story of the program's founding. Elders and social workers in the community understood sexual violence to be part of a cycle of abuse, a problem concerned with relationships and prevailing culture; combatting it would require the same kinds of considerations.

> "Any ounce of me that had dealt with self-blame or doubt . . . I could finally tell myself, 'You're not crazy.'"

Under the program, anyone who is accused of sexual violence and acknowledges having committed the offence reports directly to CHCH. Police and prosecution teams usually stay on the sidelines. The offender is encouraged to formally plead guilty as soon as possible, after which CHCH takes over to determine the appropriate parameters for the healing process. If the offender refuses, the case goes to police. (Out of forty-eight cases over the first nine years of the program, five people did refuse and were later imprisoned.) The CHCH process, which involves a series of circles, including some with the victim and victimizer, culminates with a group-sentencing circle where a "Healing Contract," similar to probation terms, is presented. Ideally, those terms are then relayed to the Crown and presiding judge. Everyone involved is offered counselling and the choice to participate. Over those first nine years, only two out of forty-three participants ever repeated their crimes. (The typical recidivism rate for sexual abuse in Canada is approximately 20 percent over ten years—more than four times higher.) According to Ross, several people have also come to CHCH, unsolicited, to admit to crimes they committed.

Today, in Canada, despite restorative justice's effectiveness in other countries and its historical roots in addressing sexual violence, many people are skeptical of its appropriateness for sexual crimes. Some have safety concerns about victims of sexual violence facing their abusers without the mechanisms of a trial. Others do not like the idea of offenders continuing to live in society without jail time. But research shows this is largely an outsider's opinion: in 2013, a review of fifty-eight studies on restorative justice and sexual violence found that a number of victims had an increased sense of empowerment after the process. In Arizona, a pilot program found that participation led to a meaningful decrease in PTSD among victims of sexual violence. Still, in Nova

Scotia, which started a restorative justice program in 1999, restorative practices are encouraged for every crime *except* sexual violence—a moratorium largely forbids it.

That isn't to say restorative justice is *always* more empowering than the traditional court system. Before entering into an agreement, victims must understand their own needs, what they can expect from the process, and how they will respond if things don't go as planned, says Farrah Khan, the manager of Consent Comes First, Ryerson University's office of sexual-violence support and education.

Khan is an advocate of restorative justice for cases of sexual violence, having gone through a restorative justice process herself. But she warns that poorly implemented restorative processes can be harmful for everyone involved—especially if the onus is put on the survivor to forgive someone. Programs are commonly run by community centres, other nonprofit organizations, and, for people who wish to participate after being convicted, Correctional Services Canada. But other processes happen more informally—particularly within marginalized communities whose members don't feel comfortable approaching the police, the courts, or other institutions. Khan adds that there is currently no "shared understanding" of the practice across regions and industries. Quality control and lack of training standards can be a concern. In an August 2019 *Xtra* column, for example, Kai Cheng Thom writes that "a person who claimed that they were a survivor of intimate partner violence asked the community to beat up their abuser as a part of their formal accountability process." The request was fulfilled, she adds, and the abuser ended up in the hospital.

Instead of viewing restorative justice as an alternative to criminal justice, Khan suggests viewing the two as part of a spectrum in which victims can decide where their case fits. For Wemmers, the first step is to reorient the guiding philosophy of Canadian courts to give victims more priority. The government should allocate more money to victims' services, she says, some of which are severely underfunded. With the right support, victims are then capable of answering the question: "What does justice look like for you?" The answer might include a criminal trial, restorative processes, neither, or both, and the system should be prepared to see what's possible. The most important thing, Wemmers says, is to give complainants a choice—the very thing that was taken away from them when they were assaulted.

Sweeny says that it's up to Crown attorneys' individual discretion whether they inform a complainant of such options—and few of them do. The Crown is also not obliged to honour a victim's requests, and Liss, too, met some resistance from legal staff. It took weeks to get everyone on board. To arrange the process for Liss, Carolin reached out to St. Stephen's Community House (SSCH), a nonprofit agency in Toronto that is known for its work in conflict resolution. Catherine Feldman Axford, a veteran coordinator at SSCH who specializes in community mediation, consulted with Liss and Carolin to develop a vision of what restorative justice might look like in Liss's case. They decided the process would end in a group-conferencing format. There would be no sentencing agreement—Liss didn't want to pursue punishment in isolation.


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Once the man agreed to participate, he and Liss signed a civil agreement that keeps certain details, including his name, private. They agreed that, if restorative justice didn't work, or if it felt like the man wasn't participating in earnest—he was required to at least admit to the rape—they would return to a criminal trial. Nothing said in the circle could be used against him if the trial did go forward. If all went according to plan, the criminal charge against the man would be dropped after the circle concluded. Both Liss and the man met individually with mediators, in early 2019, to discuss their needs and desires throughout the process. The man signed on to take several months of therapy before the group conference took place. Before anything else happened, Feldman Axford says, "I wanted to know that the offender knows what it means to give and receive consent."

Over the next few months, as the man attended therapy, Liss, having completed her yoga training, continued to teach courses and facilitate workshops about healing and body positivity for women. Without the looming threat of a criminal trial, she felt she could begin to rebuild her life. Sometimes, she would tell workshop participants about her experience, and they would share their own stories in return. She discovered that speaking about her assault wasn't painful the way it had been on the stand. Liss was taking control of her story.

One day last summer, more than a year after the preliminary hearing, Liss faced, for the third time, the man who had sexually assaulted her. She sat in a circle with six other people: her mother, her younger sister, Cara Sweeny, Jeff Carolin, the man, and a close friend of his. Two mediators presided over the meeting, which began, at 10 a.m., with an opening ceremony acknowledging the Indigenous roots of restorative justice. Participants wrote down the life values they believed in. (Liss remembers that the man wrote "courage, honesty, loyalty.") The mediators established a speaking order—Liss's sister, then Liss, Carolin, Barbie, Sweeny, the friend, and the man—and laid out ground rules for the day. Everyone in the circle would start by answering a question in turn: "What brought you here today?" After that, they would go around the circle—no interruptions or speaking out of order. There would be set breaks every forty-five minutes.

All morning, Liss was visibly shaking. She had no idea what the man would say. He had never made a statement to police. Liss was terrified that he would speak only to defend himself—that, despite their agreement otherwise, he would participate without admitting what he had done. That he would cause her more harm. She hoped to see evidence that he had reflected on his actions and understood what led him to assault her. If he shared that knowledge with her, maybe she, too, could understand. When the man finally admitted to what he had done that night—he used the words *sexual assault*—Liss began to cry uncontrollably.

"I had been waiting years to hear him say it," she says. "Any ounce of me that had dealt with self-blame or doubt… I could finally tell myself, 'You're not crazy. It really happened. The person who did it is owning up to it.'" The first time Liss spoke, it was for more than an hour, about the pain of the past three years and what she had come to believe about healing. It felt revolutionary to be in a room of people listening to her story and prioritizing her well-being. Liss looked directly at the man most of the time, and he looked back through tears. She thanked him for making eye contact. "Court sucked for me, and I'm sure it sucked for you," she told him. "To just sit in a circle and look in each other's eyes and acknowledge each other as humans is all I've ever wanted."

The circle was supposed to last three hours, but it didn't end until eight hours later, after everyone had spoken several times. Some moments stand out for Liss and others who participated—moments that Sweeny and Carolin had never seen in their work in criminal courts, where silence and opposition rule. In a particularly emotional part of the afternoon, the man's friend described the day the man told him about the criminal charges and asked him to participate in the circle. The man had started to cry, and his friend had put his hand on his back, unsure how to react. "Guys don't know how to do this," Liss remembers the friend telling the circle. He had never been so emotionally intimate with a friend. Together, they had reevaluated their relationships to those around them. "I've learned more today," he said, "than I have in eight years of my job, five years of school, and twenty-five years of life."

The man who assaulted Liss spoke about how long it had taken for him to admit to himself what he had done. He had spent the first few months after his arrest despondent and suicidal. But, one day, a friend told him that she had been sexually assaulted. The man found himself providing support, telling her it wasn't her fault. As he spoke with her, he was forced to confront his own actions; he knew he was guilty. He told the circle that he no longer felt he was entitled to anyone else's body. He apologized, and he committed to educating others. He thanked Liss for not taking her own life the year after the assault, and later, she thanked him for doing the same. (The man, his lawyer, and his friend refused to speak to media to preserve their anonymity.)

A few weeks after the circle, the Crown officially withdrew all criminal charges against the man. Liss and the man will likely never speak again. She now says she feels a sense of forgiveness and no longer resents herself for seeing him as human. Liss believes she helped him learn to be better while also finding her own way forward. Already, she has an idea of what that might be: last November, she and her mother launched a nonprofit organization called Re-Humanize. Her hope is to show other survivors of sexual assault how restorative justice might help them too. She often thinks back to what she experienced in the circle—how much those eight hours helped her and others heal. At the end of the day, the man had asked, "with permission and respect," to shake Liss's hand. She agreed. ◘

**Viviane Fairbank** is the associate editor at The Walrus.

FICTION

# WITNESS

BY KAIE KELLOUGH
ILLUSTRATION BY DOROTHY LEUNG

I WAS SMOKING on the veranda when Quammie returned from his day trip to Berbice. Everyone pronounced it *Borbeace*, bending the vowels while digging deep into the first syllable. He had gone out with Uncle Koffi, Auntie Shanice, and Calvin, the driver. They went to visit our cousin Calib, who had spent decades in a state-run asylum. They packed clothes and chocolate for him, and since the other patients might try to steal both the clothes and the chocolate, they brought enough chocolate to share with everyone.

When Auntie Shanice asked if I wanted to go, I declined. I spent the day in downtown Georgetown. I wandered. I got my hair faded at an open-air barbershop. I absorbed the heat and the compressed cacophony of the city. I spent an hour and the equivalent of a hundred US dollars at a bookstore that had a large collection of Caribbean writers, the kind of collection that can't be found in Canada. I returned just after dusk and sat outside, leafing through Mittelholzer, Nichols, and Walcott. The humidity softened my cigarette, and the smoke thickened in my throat.

It was too early to drink, so I read and waited for the others to return. I'd stayed back because I didn't know Calib. I didn't want him to feel embarrassed by his circumstances, but I was curious. When the electric gates creaked open and the car rolled into the drive, I stood and motioned for Quammie to join me on the veranda. He came up, sat back on one of the mahogany deck chairs, closed his eyes, and let out a long sigh. I balanced my cigarette on the ashtray.

"How was the visit?"

He kept his eyes closed and his head tilted back. His face was greased from the heat. I waited. Finally, he spoke without opening his eyes. "It was disturbing, actually. I don't want to talk about it."

He stood up and went inside. I heard some bumping around, a door closing, and he reemerged with a Banks beer. "Mostly it was flat, brown, yellow, green. We spent a lot of time in a hot car."

"I figured."

"Is that why you didn't come?"

"No. I figured it might be overwhelming for him to see so many people.

I didn't want to intrude."

"What did you do?"

"Got faded. Explored Georgetown." Quammie motioned for me to turn my head. I did.

"Very nice. Tomorrow you'll show me where. Did you get anything?"

I pointed to the books on the table. "What about you, any tourist souvenirs from Berbice?"

He laughed. "No." Then he pointed to his head and said: "Just up here. I don't know how I'll sleep tonight."

"Was it that bad?"

"I don't want to talk about it yet."

"Okay. Uh, did the rally start before you left, or did you get out of Berbice before it started?"

"The rally," he groaned. He leaned his head back and looked up at the silhouette of a tree. "We got out just fine, no traffic, but on the way back we passed the president's motorcade."

"Whoa. You saw Ramotar?"

"No, I just saw his car."

It was rare that a Guyanese election made international ripples. Uncle Koffi had been feeding me copies of the local paper, the *Stabroek News*, and I'd gleaned that oil had been discovered in the ocean. Guyana and Venezuela were debating whose waters the deposits were submerged in. Exxon had planted an offshore rig outfitted with a helipad. Venezuela was seemingly preparing to mobilize troops along the border. Ministers stood to grow rich, and the temperature of the debates rose. Many people feared violence if the election adhered to the country's racial divides. Several shops downtown had already boarded up, and the challenger David Granger's Georgetown headquarters was under armed guard. He'd been nicknamed "Danger" in an attack ad that flashed

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CANADA'S CONVERSATION

an image of rolling dice. Jimmy Carter, ninety years old, was expected in Guyana to advocate for a peaceful electoral process. The polls were predicting a narrow loss for Ramotar, who had decreed a state-media blackout on all ads and coverage for his rival. That very night, one week out from the election, Ramotar was holding a large rally in Berbice.

"As we were leaving the area, we noticed cars pulled to the shoulder and people and bicycles and goats all standing still, and then a cop stepped into the middle of the road and flagged us, so we pulled over as well. He didn't give us any explanation, so Uncle Koffi leaned out his window and asked another driver what was going on, and they said: 'Ramotar. E comin troo.'

"We sat in the car for five minutes. Nothing happened. The sun started going down, and across the savannah you could hear those night sounds start up, but quietly, all of the whistles and chirps, and then the crickets hissing. We got out of the car and waited, and more cars were flagged over to the shoulder, and then a murmur ran through the crowd, and as it approached us people turned and said that Ramotar's motorcade was on its way, it was coming. We squinted as far up the road as we could, stood on our toes, and sure enough there was a black speck vibrating in the distance, and it got closer, louder. The single speck divided into multiple vehicles, motorcycles in the lead, then a series of black vans, then more motorcycles. We were on something of a low hill, so as they approached, we could see their entire file. Behind the first group of motorcycles was a long black SUV with Guyanese flags flying from the front headlights. That must have been Ramotar's car because behind it were smaller SUVs and sedans."

Quammie slid one of the Matinées out of the pack and lit it. It was dark on the veranda and the night was breathing around us. I saw a thin yellow lizard on the wall above my brother's head, but I didn't say anything. I could see its narrow flanks pulsing to the sounds of crickets and frogs. The odd street dog barked in the distance, and I thought of going to the fridge and grabbing two Guinnesses, but Quammie interrupted the thought.

"I mean, we could see the motorcade approaching, and it was going fast, like over 120 fast. A goat wandered into the road and stopped, with its head down, licking at something."

"A goat?"

"Yeah. A fucking goat. The same scrawny goat we saw in New Amsterdam, the kind we saw on our way in from the airport. The kind of tough goat we see browsing in a ditch or tied to a stake in someone's yard. It was yellowish white, and it just wandered out into the road. An old Indian guy started shouting at the goat, but he didn't go into the road because there was a cop in front of him. He kept shouting at the goat, then speaking to it and pleading with it, then making these soft kissing noises and beckoning in a gentle voice like: 'Come ere, come, come ere, come, come…' and then cooing like a pigeon while gesturing fiercely, but the goat was preoccupied. It kept its head down and licked at the road. I don't know if it was a stupid goat or not, but at one point it noticed the motorcade. It twitched. We could all feel the vibrations through the road, we could feel the speed of the engines. It stood still and looked up, its ears perked, and seconds later two motorcycles roared past it, one on either side, and I swear I saw the goat's body shake with the speed of the bikes. It stood and blinked for a second, and then—as if it hadn't noticed anything—it took a few lazy steps and stopped again, put its head back down, and licked at the road. The Indian guy intensified his cooing, and everyone by the roadside seemed to collectively cringe. The goat looked around just as Ramotar's SUV appeared."

I FELL INTO an old memory of when we were kids. The car radio was playing. Quammie was asleep. My father reached for the volume knob as the car slowed. Chaka Khan's voice faded down into the engine's hum. My mother strained to see above the line of cars stretching ahead of us. We inched along, two slow lanes of traffic, until a Parks Canada ranger in his

green-and-khaki uniform waved the cars over to the right.

"It must be an accident."

"Or construction."

"I don't see any construction signs."

My brother groggily came to as I looked out my window. The shoulder dropped off into a shallow ravine, and beyond that a curtain of evergreens rose.

The cars rolled in stops and starts. We passed another park ranger who was standing next to a brown pickup with yellow lettering, and then my father said "ooh" under his breath, and my mother inhaled sharply through her teeth. They were looking ahead and to the left. My mother twisted in her seat and told us not to look outside.

I wanted to look, so I ignored the instructions and pressed my face to the window. It was cool and dotted with raindrops. Our Oldsmobile advanced along with the sedans and station wagons ahead of us.

We approached a mass of contorted metal immobile in the left lane. As we crept past, its form seemed to twist and lengthen until it resembled a blue BMW. Its side windows were shattered. The front and rear doors on the passenger side were driven inward, into a V shape. The back wheels looked thin and unsteady, as if they might collapse. Two children sat in the back seat, grimacing. Their faces trembled, as if they had tensed up so suddenly in anticipation of impact that their bodies still clung to that tension and would not release it. I was close enough to see their mouths. Their lips were drawn back and their teeth looked like they were about to chatter. The mother was in the passenger seat, turned all the way around, restrained by her seatbelt but reaching out to her children. The father was in the driver's seat, with both hands still on the steering wheel and his head leaning limply forward, a gash along his hairline.

Our windows were up, and the highway scene rolled by like a silent movie. The BMW's windshield was crushed inward, with a hole larger than a human head in front of the passenger seat. I think my dad slowed down as we passed their car, or maybe the images just appear to me in slow motion now, but I wouldn't put it past my father to slow down and take a long look, wincing while trying to absorb every detail.

The front end of the car was crumpled, and a few metres from the car, which looked like it had been launched backward by the impact, lay a moose. It shivered, and one of its legs twitched. Its legs were spindly, its neck was corded with muscle, and its face was long and sloping, a solid mass of bone covered in coarse fur. Not an ounce of superfluous flesh quivered along its thighs or flanks. As the moose lay there, its massive ribs lifted and fell quickly.

Its glazed eye stared up as the clouds changed shapes and lumbered along.

QUAMMIE continued, "I mean, the van didn't even slow down. It didn't swerve, it didn't brake, nothing. It kept straight on course, and when it hit the goat—"

Neither of us blinked. Our expressions were mirrors of incredulity. Then we guffawed. Our laughter grew louder and rolled down the veranda. We laughed

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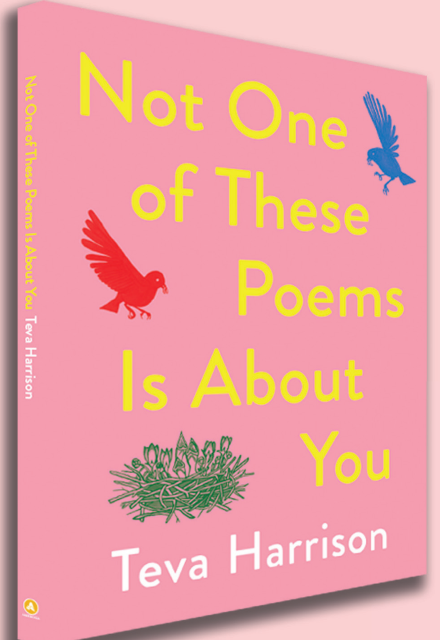


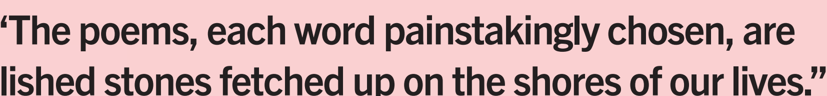


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until we were bent over in our chairs, until our sides ached, until tears squeezed out of our eyes and our breaths came in pitched wheezes, and then we settled back and I said: "Fucking Guyana," and we started laughing again.

"When the SUV licked the goat, I swear it seemed like it was happening in slow motion, but the van was going fast. It hit the goat's hind leg, like high on the ass, and the goat flew up in the air and flipped—"

We both nearly fell off our chairs laughing, and again our voices tumbled the length of the veranda and disturbed the night. My brother's eyebrows were raised and he was sitting forward in his chair.

"It fucking flipped up in the air," here he drew a quick flipping motion in the air with his fingers, "and then it fell back down and landed just off the shoulder of the road, but it landed on its feet, and I swear to fucking God it started running while it was still in the air, its legs pumping, because the second its feet hit the ground it bolted into the bush," here he shot his hand forward, holding the cigarette. The ash shook but didn't fall, "and it vanished, like it was swallowed by the bush. The leaves shook behind it and then went still, as if nothing had disturbed them. Then the rest of the motorcade passed. It passed so fast that the little flags on the cars were stiff."

"Whoa."

"Yeah."

The frogs' high, nocturnal whistling grew louder and seemed to encircle us. I glanced down the drive and noticed that the streetlights had come on. Mosquitos sizzled around the porch light, and a large moth spread its soft, oil-tinted wings on the white ceiling of the veranda.

"As we drove back, at intervals Calvin would start shaking his head and would bang a fist into the steering wheel and exclaim: 'Man! They ain't even slow the damn car! Straight through! They ain't swerve, nothing! Man!' Koffi and Shanice sighed these painful sighs every time Calvin exclaimed. They hardly said anything all the way back."

The night settled around us, its sleeping trees and leaves breathing slowly to the crickets. Beyond the bushes in the yard was the concrete fence, the spool of razor wire atop it, the electric gate. We heard a muffled, thudding music approaching, and a car crept by, its lights prowling the semipaved street, its suspension creaking with the unevenness of the road. We watched the car as we smoked, then Quammie stood up and asked me if I wanted anything. He disappeared inside, and moments later I heard dub music, a record called *Vital Force Dub* by a Nigerian artist. The music was sparse and ominous, with heavy low end and sounds delaying and echoing in stereo, but true to its genre, it was buoyed by its rhythm. I listened, feeling a curious sensation of being in two places at once.

Quammie stepped back onto the veranda and placed two bottles on the table. He then slid a photo out of his shirt pocket and pressed it down next to the bottles. He pointed and said, "That's him."

It was an old photo. Calib stood in a brown field in front of a long building. The building was low, concrete, institutional, with cracks running up the walls. He was wearing an oversized

white T-shirt, and beneath it, he looked gaunt. In his narrow face I recognized my own. We must have inherited it from the same distant ancestors, a face in which the African, Chinese, and Portuguese were mixed in equal proportions and each was visible in a different feature. He had tight red curls, almond-shaped eyes set at an angle, wide lips and flared nostrils, freckles across the bridge of his nose, bronze skin, and a stretched smile that looked like it was unsuited to his face, an expression he rarely made but recalled from an earlier period in his life. His teeth were long and yellow, and his smile seemed too genuine. I had only seen such unreserved smiles on children or on elderly people who had languished in care facilities and who, removed from regular social interaction, had forgotten themselves.

I listened to the whistle of the frogs as it rode above the cicadas. Quammie exhaled and stubbed out his cigarette. "When we were leaving, a group of inmates—or patients, whatever—swarmed us and demanded chocolate. At first I didn't know what was going on and I tensed up. Calvin was tense too, but Auntie Shanice was like, 'Be cool, be cool, here, here you go,' and she shared out the extra chocolate while talking to the patients. The asylum staff stood by, watchful." He leaned over, took the photo from the table, remarked, "That's an old picture—he doesn't look like that anymore," and slipped it back into his pocket.

"Once the chocolate was gone, Uncle Koffi gave us a discreet nod and pointed toward the parking lot. Calib had hung back during the chocolate rush, but while the staff was preoccupied with dispersing the patients, which really meant barking at them and handling them in a way that was just rough enough to command respect but not rough enough to bruise anyone, Calib slipped away. We found him at the edge of the grounds, out by the parking lot, pacing. He hugged each of us and insisted that we bring out our phones and take more snapshots. Several minutes went by, and no one wanted to break off the engagement, until one of the employees strolled past and noticed Calib. The employee sternly called him over. Calib didn't budge. The employee called for support. Calib backed away just as two more employees appeared, their faces seized with concern. None of us could stand to watch Calib rebuked and manhandled…"

Quammie stood up and turned toward the door, then he stopped. The last thing he said before he went to sleep was that, when our cousin was hovering at the edge of the grounds and no employee had yet noticed his absence, he felt a surge of excitement, and he knew his cousin Calib felt the same thing, a realization that they could rush him into the car and drive off. Quammie looked at Uncle Koffi, at Auntie Shanice, and at Calvin. Their eyes all confirmed the same thought, and they froze.

**KAIE KELLOUGH** is a Montreal-based poet, novelist, and sound performer. He is the author of the novel *Accordéon* and the poetry collection *Magnetic Equator*. His latest book, *Dominoes at the Crossroads*, from which this story is adapted, was published in February by Esplanade Books/Véhicule Press.


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CULTURE

# Stay Tacky, Niagara Falls

*Why I wouldn't change a thing about my hometown*

BY JOHN SEMLEY

IT WAS ON a chintzy patch of street in Niagara Falls called Clifton Hill that I was first alerted to the possibility that civilization was a mistake. There, in the shadow of an enormous sculpture of Frankenstein's monster eating a branded Burger King Whopper sandwich, my underage mind muddied on enormous schooners of beer procured with a fake ID from an adjacent Boston Pizza, I watched two other drunk loafers come to blows in that messy, soused, all-Canadian way—where they sort of thrash each other and toss out soft punches, which roll off buttery cheeks gone red with drunkenness, the brawl resolving when one combatant attempts to jersey the other by pulling his shirt over his head like they're in a hockey fight.

A few blocks away were Niagara Falls—both the mighty Canadian-fronting Horseshoe Falls and, on the American side, the comparably piddling Bridal Veil—with their pummelling cascades of water that make you feel small and stupid. But there, on that corporate-gaudy tourist-trapping strip, were two hammered chuckleheads locked in a sloppy, disgusting pas de deux, barely punching each other for no discernible reason while wreaths of neon lights sang their ambient buzzing song and an enormous promotional monster looked on, unfeeling. I remember imagining a cabal of ancient Greeks wrapped in cloaks, all assembled, gazing into a crystal ball and, witnessing this, gulping hemlock and cutting off humanity then and there. They saw—as I, young and blitzed on big beers, saw—that we were all basically doomed.

And this is what I think of when I think of Clifton Hill.

JUST A BLOCK AWAY from one of the world's natural wonders, Clifton Hill advertises itself as a "world famous street of fun." A stretch of road straddling Niagara Falls' major casinos, it boasts the bulk of the town's nonwaterfall attractions and is effectively an open-air amusement park, teeming with families, drunks, and a talking animatronic sarcophagus. It is also a walk-through allegory for Niagara Falls itself, which is a tourist town, a border town, a gambling town, a mob town, and depending on your disposition, a rather sad town. Imagine if Yellowstone had a Kelsey's, an enormous Ferris wheel, a Skee-Ball arcade, a go-kart track, a dinosaur-themed miniature-golf course, and a mess of wax museums—a tourist district that proffers a totalizing holiday experience. The Falls' abounding natural beauty is either

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRE THIBAULT

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complemented or affronted by these just-as-abounding man-made amusements. Again: depending on your disposition.

"It's such a weird place," says Canadian filmmaker Albert Shin, sitting in a sleek, modern, modular press-junket suite during the 2019 Toronto International Film Festival, where his film, *Disappearance at Clifton Hill*, made its world premiere (under the pithier if less evocative title *Clifton Hill*). "I can't believe someone hadn't set a film there yet." Shin grew up around Niagara Falls, among other places. The city, and especially its tourist-baiting main drag, has long occupied his imagination. His film, which will be released in theatres at the end of February, is what one might call a poison love letter to the namesake street and the city it so awkwardly defines.

Shin's third feature, *Disappearance at Clifton Hill* opens on the muddied, brown-and-tan banks of the Niagara River, where a young girl named Abby, on a fishing trip with her family, watches as a little boy is kidnapped and jammed into the trunk of an idling car. Years later, an adult Abby (played by *Downton Abbey*'s Tuppence Middleton) inherits her family's Niagara Falls motor lodge—a rundown, no-tell motel with a busted sign advertising JACU ZIS POOL. A slick Clifton Hill tycoon (Eric Johnson) attempts to charm Abby into offloading the motel, which he plans to redevelop as a "glow-in-the-dark paintball maze," but she is more interested in piecing together the mystery of the missing boy whose abduction she witnessed in her youth.

Shin's psychodrama includes crooked Niagara Falls impresarios; scheming married French Canadian dinner theatre magicians named "The Magnificent Moulins"; and a scuba-diving podcaster—played with weirdo relish by David Cronenberg in a rare onscreen appearance—who operates out of the basement of a local diner shaped like a UFO. The location is key to the plotting, with the Clifton Hill setting taking on the role (as per the cliché) of a character.

In time, Abby's sleuthing is compromised by emerging concerns about her mental health and the unreliability of the various narrative threads she's weaving together in her mind. She is a liar. Or schizophrenic. Or bipolar. Or some unstable combination of the above. She has a hard time cleaving memory from imagination. She slips in and out of identities, pretending to be people she's not.

Like Clifton Hill itself, Abby exhibits a great capacity for reinvention.

I REMEMBER coming across a photograph of my paternal grandparents posing on a Niagara Falls lookout, dressed to the nines and looking vaguely like the stars (or at least two extras) from a playful caper by Hitchcock. Even when I was a kid, the Falls' romance seemed bygone, a shell of its exhausted ambitions. The closest I got were conspiracies about each side of Clifton Hill being owned by rival families, Montague vs. Capulet–style, or harrowing stories of nineteenth-century hotel owners sending boatfuls of wild animals over the Falls' precipice in an early bit of carnival-barking hucksterism. The Falls were not a place to fall in love and enjoy a soak with one's paramour but a place to be avoided, like a haunted funhouse at the bottom of a dead-end street.

Shin is quite right in noting how, despite the status of Niagara Falls as one of Canada's key tourist destinations—welcoming an estimated 13 million visitors annually, most of whom hail from within Canada—very few films unfold there. There are a few early comedies. There's *Canadian Bacon*. And there's Henry Hathaway's *Niagara*, in which Marilyn Monroe (billed as "a raging torrent of emotions that even nature can't control!") arranges for her jealous husband to be murdered in a tourist tunnel carved into the rock behind Horseshoe Falls. That film captures something of the honeymoon capital of the world's midcentury idyll and invests it with the turgid intrigue of film noir.

Shot under extreme secrecy, with the misdirecting title "Jane of the Desert," *Disappearance at Clifton Hill* takes a different tack. Shin reduces the roaring falls themselves to the periphery while foregrounding the infrastructure cobbled around them in all its gaudy neon and wan desperation.

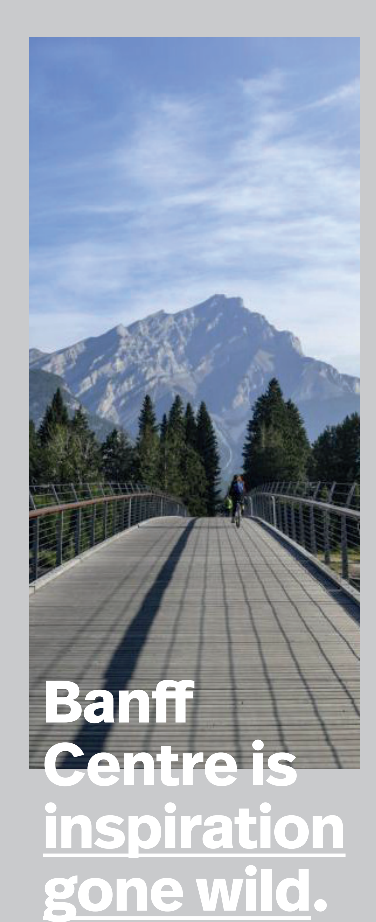
"It's always about just getting them to stay one more day," says Shin, describing the area's eager allure. "They come for the Falls. Then, how can they get them to stay for something else? So they built this whole thing.... They built stuff for children. They built stuff for adults. Casinos." Shin's movie elbows back against the shimmer and PR blather. As one character describes the Hill: "The haunted houses aren't actually haunted. And the funhouses aren't actually fun."

Such withering appraisal didn't exactly endear Shin's production to the so-called city fathers. In advance of *Clifton Hill*'s premiere, Toronto's *Now Magazine* tantalizingly described it as "the movie Niagara Falls doesn't want you to see."

"IT IS NOT a true—in any way, shape, or form—picture of Niagara Falls or Clifton Hill, from what I understand," says Tim Parker of the Victoria Centre BIA, which represents business interests in the Falls area. "Clifton Hill, in any film, documentary, or context, is always put out there, for all intents and purposes, as a *honky-tonk* or a *tourist trap*—all of those slang words that obviously don't depict Clifton Hill as it is today."

Parker hasn't seen *Clifton Hill*. His conclusions are drawn from the opinions of his colleagues who, he believes, have seen it, or have at least read early versions of the script. They're also informed by thirty years of experience working on and around the Hill—including thirty years as the manager of the Ripley's Believe It Or Not! Odditorium, an attraction whose "array of weird," boasts its promotional blather, "will leave you awe-struck." Parker's concern about *Clifton Hill* feels almost reflexive, like the result of decades of hearing people slag off what is, in his words, a "well-displayed hill of fun."

Even before Shin's film came along, Clifton Hill had suffered some lousy press. Last summer, the *St. Catharines Standard* reported on a seventeen-year-old hustler who plied his trade on Clifton Hill, nicking purses and wallets inside the Great Canadian Midway. In his statement before an Ontario court, the paper wrote, the teenager's lawyer made shady reference to the "criminal underworld" of

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Niagara Falls. (People whisper about Hells Angels and "the mob" in Niagara with mischievous glints in their eyes, as if the very threat of organized criminality conferred the area with legitimacy.) Also in 2019, *Vice* reporter Graham Isador (a local returning in search of the city's worst bar—a real needle-in-a-stack-of-needles quest) described Clifton Hill, accurately, as "the dark beating heart of Niagara."

In 2014, the mockery even made international headlines, with UK tabloid the *Daily Mail* devoting an extensive photo gallery to "North America's worst waxworks," the Movielands Wax Museum of the Stars. (The story was subsequently picked up by Global News, which seemed chuffed in that deeply Canadian "Hey! People are noticing us!" way.) Pressed about that particular broadside, Parker retorts: "It's all in the eye of the beholder. One guy could say, 'Yep. That looks like Lucy Ball. It's good. It's perfect.' And the next guy comes up and says, 'Are you kiddin' me? That's not Lucy Ball! That's fuckin' Lawrence Welk!' It's very difficult to say." Above all else, Clifton Hill boosters like Parker resist the idea that the tourist strip is "tacky," a word he deploys repeatedly in conversation. *Tacky*.

LATE LAST September, news came of a Clifton Hill institution's imminent demise. Rock Legends Wax Museum—which is technically on Centre Street, which is what Clifton Hill is called when it cuts northwest of the bisection of Victoria Avenue—was closing. Rock Legends (established, according to its bright blue-and-yellow signage, in 1983) warehoused sculptures bearing passing resemblances to a number of rock and roll superstars: the Beatles, Bono, Kiss, Bruce Springsteen, Chuck Berry, Alice Cooper.

The life-size figures were modelled in an inelegant, deeply uncanny, just-as-deeply-cheapo way that might frighten a young a child or amuse an adult ironist. Each one was made, by hand, by Pasquale Ramunno, by turns described as an accordionist and opera enthusiast who landed in Niagara in 1956, emigrating from Pacentro, Italy, a tiny village which is, incidentally, also the birthplace of Gaetano Ciccone and Michelina Di Iulio, who are Madonna's paternal grandparents.

The word came courtesy of 91.7 Giant FM, "Niagara's Classic Rock," a station whose modest headquarters straddles the border between Welland and Port Colborne, where I was born and reared, and which, when I was a kid, was the first commercial radio station in Canada owned by an Indigenous woman. It is now being acquired by Stingray Group, a media multinational with employees on at least four continents. Like Clifton Hill, 91.7 has been steamrolled—or "revived"—by bland corporate aesthetics. Such, it increasingly seems, is the fate of much modern culture absorbed by the bloat of monopolistic interests.

Tackiness gets a bad rap because it makes us feel like suckers. It offends our belief that we deserve better. We are allowed to marvel at top-shelf wax statues of celebrities or modern movie blockbusters because they meet some implicit standard of verisimilitude, because they look "real": it's okay to be crassly entertained so long as that entertainment passes some bar of acceptability. Anything that fails that standard is generally held to be tawdry or kitschy or cheesy—to be, in other words, beneath our esteem.

But tackiness of the kind you'll find—or *used* to find—on Clifton Hill proves memorable, even affecting, not just because of some knowing irony. It's because, I think, it feels so lovingly and painstakingly handmade. Who cares that Pasquale Ramunno can't nail the details of Bruce Springsteen's half-agape mouth? What lingers is not the perfect resemblance to the Boss but the sculptor's efforts. Something similar can be said of the dumpy mannequins of Movieland and even the enormous Whopper-gobbling Frankenstein's monster. Their profound flaws are an index of the sloppiness of humanity. They are perfectly imperfect. And this is certainly preferable to the alternative.

RECOUNTING a June 1831 visit to Niagara Falls, the British novelist Fanny Trollope wrote: "We passed four delightful days of excitement and fatigue . . . we strove

## Autobiography

**BY DAVID O'MEARA**

Jobless on the half-rotten porch, pulpit
to a sunken trans-Vancouver bike path a minute's
whir from East Hastings. Jaded, couch-
surfing castaway, I thought
youth the best refusal and the great hope.
Jeff obsessed over how a spider gets its web
across the considerable distance between rail post
and magnolia. He asked me. I said *dunno* and went
to the library. Without design, the future shrugged.
I hoped I might find myself over there and not
be disappointed. Identity's alarm. Mere puzzles
I juggled as I passed the grim ranks of homeless.
And learned the strand from a spider's spinneret dangles
on the breeze until it sticks to something solid.

to fill as many niches of memory with Niagara as possible." Modern Niagara Falls seems similarly keen on defining those niches of memory, but now, they aren't being filled with reminiscences of its abounding natural beauty or even of the weird and cheap and seedy and bad. They're being plastered over. Clifton Hill is rapidly gentrifying outside of its own tackiness. It's especially despairing because, while there are many stateside locales where busloads of visiting looky-loos can pay good money to feel like suckers—Vegas, Reno, Times Square, Nashville's Honky Tonk row, that sad strip in Hollywood where men dressed in superhero spandex pose with tourists for tips—in Canada, Clifton Hill is basically nonpareil. And this may be a font of its specialness: in its ostentation and brazen indecorousness, it just seems straight-up un-Canadian.

The future projected by Shin and local business-improvement interests—of families ferried from one chain-dining franchise to another, with a pit stop, in recycling-bin-blue plastic smocks, under the Falls themselves—is utterly despairing. I want to see drunk and sweaty men sock each other in their soft pink faces. I want to see scammers and sketch-bags investing the strip with the vague threat of criminality we call "seediness." Now, even an enormous ghoul munching a Burger King–branded Whopper sandwich feels like a local treasure, imbued with the residue of time, pressed into the supple wax of memory. It is, if literally nothing else, just extremely stupid. And that is so obviously more desirable than being nothing at all.

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JOHN SEMLEY's latest book is *Hater: On the Virtues of Utter Disagreeability*. He grew up in the Niagara Region.

FIRST PERSON

# How to Travel with a Goldfish

*My life in carry-on luggage*

BY MICHAEL WINTER

IT PROBABLY BEGAN with my Toronto goldfish. I could find no one to take care of the fish, and so I brought him with me to Pearson airport for a summer in Newfoundland. That's where I grew up and where I return every year to a summer place I bought with money I won from a short story prize.

I'd read the airline regulations and had the fish in his bowl in a sealed plastic bag with a small amount of water. I had, in my luggage, several vials of water to pour on him once we'd gone through the X-ray. I told people behind me in the queue they might be better off in another line. Security took one look at the goldfish bowl on the conveyor belt and said, "No, no, you can't bring a fish on board." I said there was nothing in the regulations about a live fish. The line was halted and a manager fetched, who sized up the situation and also said no. We continued up the chain in this way until the person who, I think, built the airport security system came and agreed with me that, technically, I was allowed to bring the goldfish on board.

For the plane, I had a book about, among other things, German submarines. I had the fish on the floor between my feet, and a combination of the stress of departures and the subject of the book put me fast asleep. When I woke up, the fishbowl was gone. A flight attendant quickly came and whispered that the man in front of me was experiencing breathing problems and they'd had to put a canister of oxygen beneath the seat, and they had discovered my goldfish. "Don't worry," she said. "Your fish is in the cockpit."

"Are you saying," I asked, "that my goldfish is pretty much copiloting this flight?"

For various complicated reasons, I had a baby and lived in a small apartment in Toronto. The place was so small that, at Christmas, we'd get a live potted tree to decorate and put presents under. In January, I couldn't throw out the tree. It felt cruel. So I stored it on the back porch and fed and watered it once a month. I didn't know what to do with it. In the spring, I was going to Newfoundland and I thought, "I'll bring the tree."

It fit in my carry-on. And I flew there, drove the tree out to the house, dug a hole, and planted it. Now, after ten years, there's a grove of my son's Toronto Christmases in front of the Newfoundland house.

In the spring, in Newfoundland, I saw an iceberg and, of course, thought: bring it to Toronto.

The iceberg was melting and a small chunk, a "growler," floated in to shore. I climbed down a rock face and chopped some off with an axe. A few days later, I was at the Griffin Poetry Prize, in Toronto, with a slab of that iceberg in a cooler. Seamus Heaney was at the bar, and I asked if he wanted any ice in his drink. He put a whole lump in his whiskey.

A year later, he was dead.

It gets worse, these things I've brought aboard airplanes.

There was an apple tree nestled in the Newfoundland woods. Some fisherman a hundred years ago had tossed an apple out while farming, I supposed.

It took me all summer to figure it out.

In the fall, just before my return to Toronto, I went back to visit the tree and picked the apples. I brought the apples on board a flight and ate them with my son in Toronto. My mother explained "stratification": you put seeds in damp paper in a bag in the fridge for a few months. This helps them germinate.

Now I have that Newfoundland apple tree growing in our Toronto backyard.

What else? I travelled to Egypt and a friend asked me to bring a piece of labradorite to throw into a Giza pyramid. Why? "To confuse the archaeologists," he said.

Check.

The one thing I could not take aboard a plane was a pocket knife.

I had forgotten I had it on me—I was on my way to departures in St. John's. I really liked the knife and I was sad to think of losing it. I realized, of course, what I was doing: I was living the life of a shepherd migrating his flock up and down the valley and mountain with the change of seasons. It's called transhumance, this activity, and the airplane was my modern method of movement.

There was a large potted plant beside the escalator. I took the knife out and stuck it in a grocery bag. I dug a hole beside the plant and buried it.

Eight months went by.

When I returned, I found the plant by the escalator. And I dug up my knife. ✈

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**MICHAEL WINTER** is the author, most recently, of *Into the Blizzard: Walking the Fields of the Newfoundland Dead*. He lives in Toronto.

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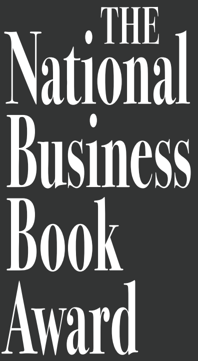


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