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MAY 2020

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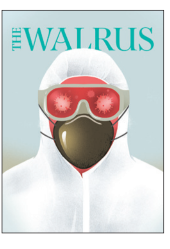

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Sébastien Thibault is an illustrator based in Matane, Quebec. His work has appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and the *Guardian*.

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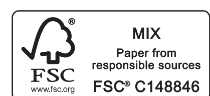

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Editor's Letter

I FIRST MET Kevin Patterson in the 1990s, when we both attended the University of British Columbia's creative writing program. Patterson, a medical doctor, was a bit further along in his professional life than the rest of us. He went on to distinguish himself with a literary career in both fiction and nonfiction, winning the 2003 Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and publishing books on everything from sailing to the war in Afghanistan. This past January, as reports of a new virus in Wuhan, China, were breaking, I saw that he'd tweeted, "The Wuhan outbreak should be as big a story as the events in Iran," referring to the heightened sense of tension around the world following the death of military leader Qassem Soleimani. Patterson, who has a lyrical writing style, isn't usually an overtly political writer—let alone, as he sounded in this case, frustrated. I sent him a message asking if he might want to write a story about the coronavirus outbreak for The Walrus. The resulting feature, "Anatomy of a Pandemic," is this month's cover story and part of our ongoing coverage of COVID-19 on *thewalrus.ca*.

I'm often asked how we determine which stories we publish. It's a hard question to answer directly because it's not a snap decision. About half of our story ideas are proposed by freelance contributors, and the other half are developed in-house by our editors, who spend a lot of time discussing current events and thinking about the most relevant ways to address those events for our readers. Scheduling is another consideration: while it's possible to write a good story in a day, it's common for an ambitious story to take months, especially if it involves significant research or travel.

We do a disservice to writers when we romanticize the profession. The creative process is often depicted as an effortless, spontaneous flow; your spouse never complains about the amount of time you spend alone, and your readers are invariably fans. In reality, writing is a painstaking process of revision, often in pursuit of something you can't identify until it's on the page. When a writer is "in the zone," so to speak, it's not always clear where their ideas are coming from. "The books are written by somebody I scarcely know myself," I was told recently by prolific sci-fi novelist William Gibson, whose latest book, *Agency*, was published in January.

In a world of so many aspiring writers, there's a considerable industry built around the sharing of expertise. At first, I was a bit surprised to see that Neil Gaiman, Margaret Atwood, and Malcolm Gladwell (who popularized, in his 2008 bestseller, *Outliers*, the now infamous idea that the road to mastery of any subject requires an investment of 10,000 hours) had lent their names to the popular MasterClass series of online lessons. How much could you possibly learn, even from the world's most successful authors, in twelve-minute sessions? But I soon got hooked. The secrets to good writing are so elusive—what works for one person might not work for another; what works for the same person one day might not work the next. When staring down a deadline or dealing with a case of writer's block, though, you'll look for wisdom anywhere you can.

One of the dangers of putting established writers on pedestals is that "success" in this world is so predicated on quantifiable achievements—Amazon rankings, Twitter followers, invitations to deliver TED talks—that we rarely see the long apprenticeships of successful people, their struggles to produce good work.

Earlier this month, I was invited to visit a class of master's students in journalism at Ryerson University, in downtown Toronto. Faced with a room full of people who would be on the job market in a few months, the best advice I could summon was not to judge yourself in your twenties by the professional goals you want to achieve by forty. If you want to write big features for publications like *The New Yorker*, *National Geographic*, or this one, that's great; but don't pressure yourself to get there overnight, and be glad for the training of writing and publishing at smaller outlets. That's as good an approach to planning a career as it is to writing an ambitious piece. It's true that Kevin Patterson—working with senior editor Hamutal Dotan and Beijing journalist Echo Xie—wrote "Anatomy of a Pandemic" in a matter of weeks. But it took him decades to become a writer capable of explaining a complicated moment in international public health to a general audience—and of making the resulting story seem effortless.

—*Jessica Johnson*

ILLUSTRATION BY GRAHAM ROUMIEU

Contributors' Notes

KEVIN PATTERSON
"Anatomy of a Pandemic," p. 28

"A public health plan to contain a viral outbreak isn't dramatic, and it isn't sexy, but it works. It eventually worked in 2003 with SARS in Toronto. I'd like to see a more clearly articulated public health plan for coronavirus. When do we close schools? When do we cancel hockey games? When do we shut down airports? If we can stop the epidemic from overwhelming health care systems, that would be huge. But just how long can this go on without dramatically disrupting supply chains and everything else about our lives? Maybe this is an opportunity to emphasize the necessity of global cooperation and intervention."

Kevin Patterson is a writer and a physician specializing in internal medicine. He lives on Salt Spring Island, BC.

TATUM DOOLEY
"Story Sellers," p. 19

"The way we interact with one another has shifted because of social media, and we're seeing influencers at the apex of a new type of marketing where we're all advertising to our friends. I think the question is: Why do we fall for it? The psychological aspect of that baffles and interests me. At the same time, I wanted to peel away the layer of mystique and talk about the business side of influencer marketing."

Tatum Dooley is a freelance writer and curator. Her writing has appeared in Canadian Art, *the* Globe and Mail, Lapham's Quarterly, Artforum, *and* British Vogue.

M. TRAVIS LANE
"Stick," p. 59

"In this poem, the speaker is contemplating the vitality of water. Water does what it's going to do. If it wants to go around something, it will; if it wants to knock down a house, it will. But it always has a place to go. It has strength. It's all of what this speaker feels she has lost. I think this is one of the glummest poems I've ever written."

M. Travis Lane has published over eighteen books. In 2016, she won the Lieutenant-Governor's Award for High Achievement in English-Language Literary Arts. She lives in Fredericton.

YASUKO THANH
"Empty Nesters," p. 66

"When we used to keep chickens, I would sometimes take them into the house and cuddle them. My daughter was just aghast—she'd say, 'A chicken is not a house pet. Get it out of here!' As I explain in this story, we don't have chickens anymore. But my boyfriend knew how much I loved those chickens and that I missed the cuddliness of them. He bought me a lovebird for Christmas. Her name's Momo, and she's a much better pet."

Yasuko Thanh is a novelist and short story writer based in BC. Her bestselling memoir, Mistakes to Run With, *was published last year.*

CRISTIAN FOWLIE
Illustrations for "The Digital Afterlife," p. 44

"To illustrate this story, I wanted to depict where the vast data trail we generate ends up after death. The deceased person's family is separated from that data, either by law or distance, and there's no easy way to access it. The author calls the process of dealing with internet companies a geopolitical chess game. The grid in both images shows the digital realm, but it also captures the idea of chess, the struggle of it."

Cristian Fowlie is an illustrator based in Burlington, Ontario. His work has appeared in the Globe and Mail, Reader's Digest, *the* CBC, *and* Maisonneuve.

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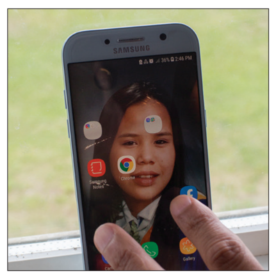

JUSTICE FOR MACKIE

Stories like Annie Hylton's feature on Mackie Basil, one of more than 4,000 Indigenous women and girls who have disappeared or been murdered in Canada, are important for raising awareness ("Searching for Mackie," March). But tackling the underlying causes of this systemic violence will mean transformative changes at all levels—legal, social, cultural, and economic. Policies and practices rooted in colonialism, such as residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the forced sterilization of Indigenous women, have left a devastating mark. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is a mere starting point on the path toward reconciliation and redemption.

Lorraine Whitman
Native Women's Association of Canada
Ottawa, ON

COURT ON TRIAL

After reading Viviane Fairbank's feature on restorative justice as an alternative to sexual assault trials ("Beyond Crime and Punishment," March), I have no doubt that the criminal justice system is not serving women. In spite of forced resignations or sensitivity training for judges who have made absurd, anachronistic, and offensive remarks to survivors of sexual assault, attacking the victim is still a legitimate legal tactic, which may account for why so few women pursue their abusers in court. While the #MeToo movement has evolved, these women still have little legal recourse. Our institutions will have to come to terms with that.

Doris Wrench Eisler
St. Albert, AB

Fairbank's account of Marlee Liss's experience surviving sexual assault rings true. For twenty years, I've worked at an organization that provides survivors with support, and I know that many yearn to feel heard, believed, and respected—by the legal system and the general public as well as by their assailants. But, because restorative justice originated in Indigenous cultures that put value on different gender roles, applying it in our colonial, patriarchal society will require time, training, expert facilitation, and counselling for all involved. Governments will have to create the conditions for these healing processes to thrive. Are they up to the challenge?

Lauren Power
Bracebridge, ON

SPECIAL DELIVERIES

Corey Mintz's feature on the storied past and uncertain future of supermarkets ("The End of Grocery Shopping," March) brought to mind my mother. In the 1950s, without a car of her own, her shopping was dependent on the vendors who made weekly visits to our street: the fruit-and-vegetable man, the bread man, and the more frequent milkman. Some even became friends of the family. To her and others like her, grocery shopping was so much more than a purchase of goods and services.

David Rosen
Mississauga, ON

GIVE LEASE A CHANCE

Regarding Shawn Micallef's essay on the decreasing affordability of home ownership in Canada ("Why It's Impossible to Buy a House," *thewalrus.ca*), a distinction should be made between the right to housing and the right to own a house. When I was growing up in Quebec, owning didn't seem important. It was only after moving to Ontario that I encountered this perception that renting is "throwing money away." But plenty of homeowners die in debt, and considering the money "thrown away" on property taxes, insurance, interest, and upkeep, renting doesn't seem so bad.

Linda Heslegrave
Toronto, ON

COVERING THE BASES

Brianna Sharpe's article admirably addresses the persistent impact of stigma on the health of LGBTQ Canadians ("Count Me In," March). However, when describing the challenges one patient faced accessing services, it implies that HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is unavailable in Ontario. It is available, and most or all of the cost is covered for those who qualify for publicly funded programs and for many of those with private drug plans.

Jean Bacon
The Ontario HIV Treatment Network
Toronto, ON

"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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SOCIETY

Dementia Village

A new housing model for managing mental decline

BY KARIN OLAFSON
ILLUSTRATION BY CHELSEA O'BYRNE

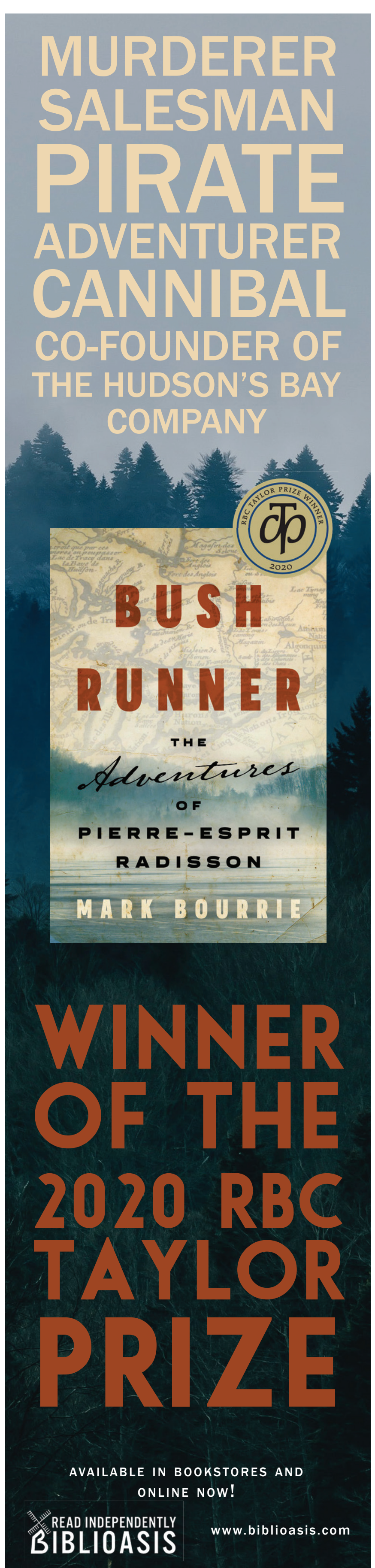
PETER MOODY always starts his day with a cup of coffee. He then laces up his white Reeboks and heads out the front door for a run. Moody might jog past his neighbour, Bob Beauchamp, walking his black-and-white dog, Lucy. He might pass another resident on their way to buy a few groceries or others sitting on a bench in front of their cottages, enjoying the sunshine. Later in the day, Moody might visit the community centre to listen to music or watch a movie. Or he might go on another jog.

It's an unremarkable scene, really, except that each of the community's forty-five current residents lives with some form of dementia: the syndrome where memory and the ability to perform everyday activities progressively deteriorate. The Village, located in Langley, BC, opened its doors last August, making it the first dementia-care facility in Canada that does not identify as a hospital or a care home but a whole town. There's the community centre, which houses a general store and a hair salon. Residents live in six single-storey cottages, each painted a different colour, with white picket fences. There's a well-tended communal garden. Tall evergreen trees line the Village's picturesque perimeter, as does a two-and-a-half-metre-tall fence, built so residents can wander the grounds independently without straying too far from staff.

Dementia has no known cure. Alzheimer's disease is its most well-known and common form, although it isn't the only one: vascular dementia and Lewy body dementia are others. Whatever the type, over time, dementia's progressive nature will affect an individual's ability to live independently. They might forget how to use everyday objects, such as cutlery or a toothbrush, or they might forget which groceries need to be refrigerated. Maybe they can't remember whether they've taken their medication or the steps to take when showering. Eventually, dementia could also affect the individual's safety: they might forget to turn off the stove or put on a coat in the winter, or they might get lost while walking in familiar areas. That's when a care home could be needed—a place where individuals with dementia often live full-time and where staff assist with everyday tasks.

The Village, however, is a far cry from the care homes and dementia units that Karen Tyrell worked at for more than twenty years in Ontario and BC. They looked like hospitals and felt cold and hostile. Mostly, she remembers the locked doors. One afternoon in particular stands out: she had finished her shift and was leaving the facility. The residents saw her walk through the unit's doors, which clicked shut behind her. Through the window that looked out beyond their unit, they watched her walk away. Behind her, Tyrell heard the residents banging on the locked doors, asking Tyrell to take them with her, begging her not to leave them.

"People with dementia are still human," she says. "And that way of housing those people just felt so wrong." These days, Tyrell runs her own Vancouver-based business, Personalized Dementia Solutions, working as a dementia-care consultant and sharing care techniques to minimize the negative behaviours common to those with dementia, like anxiety, agitation, and aggression. In her book *Cracking the Dementia Code: Creative Solutions to Cope with Changed Behaviours*, Tyrell explains that fear, confusion, and the sense of being trapped can drive aggression as well as the panic and anxiety she saw in that locked



dementia unit. Conversely, to minimize those emotions, she adds, caretakers must prioritize a person's autonomy, individuality, and freedom. It may seem simple, but when it comes to dementia care, it could also be revolutionary.

Between 2002 and 2013, the number of Canadian seniors living with dementia increased by 83 percent, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information. In 2016, the Alzheimer Society of Canada estimated that more than half a million Canadians were living with dementia and projected that this number would rise by 66 percent by 2031. There is a clear need to consider how to care for this growing population in a way that is both compassionate and effective. Already, other care facilities similar in concept to the Village are beginning to pop up, with communities currently being developed in Vancouver and Comox, BC. All of them are working to answer an urgent question: Could a place where someone has the freedom to live their day as they choose, move around as they like, and walk outside whenever they please be a model for the future of dementia care?

> "There's a misconception about people living with dementia that they can't learn or can't be productive."

ELROY JESPERSEN sits on a yellow couch in one of the Village's sunrooms, a beam of light streaming in. Jespersen helped found the Village. Before turning to this project, he worked in the senior-care industry for thirty years in cities across Canada. In a wavering voice, he explains one of his motivations for the project: in 2014, his wife's aunt began showing symptoms of dementia and was placed in a care home. There, she often left the facility and sometimes got lost while walking around West Vancouver. Her dementia progressed, she continued her walks, and she continued to get lost. She went from freely walking kilometres each day to no longer being able to do so safely. Jespersen felt that he couldn't provide her with what she needed most: a sense of self.

He considered the possibility of a better way of care. First, he turned to the US nursing-home culture-change movement, which pushes for traditional institutional models to be replaced with environments that look, feel, and operate like actual homes. The movement, which has been gaining ground since the late 1990s, advocates for better quality of life and care that goes beyond a person's basic physical needs to also consider their identity, their values, and their interests. The movement stresses the importance of autonomy, meaningful activities, and close social interactions—all things that make anybody's life, no matter their age, worth living. For seniors, particularly those with dementia, such factors can be especially crucial.

American geriatrician Bill Thomas came to such a conclusion when he first accepted a job in a care home, in the early 1990s. There, he witnessed what he describes as endemic loneliness, helplessness, and boredom among residents. He now calls these feelings "the three plagues." Instead, he sought to foster an understanding of well-being that included autonomy, connectedness, and a resident's source of joy and identity—whether they enjoyed walking, baking, or gardening. Thomas's philosophy challenges that of traditional care homes, where care is often centred exclusively on mitigating physical decline. For Thomas, good dementia care—as well as good care for seniors without dementia—is about ensuring the whole person is nurtured so they can continue to live a meaningful life.

In 1994, Thomas co-created the Eden Alternative, an international nonprofit that works with seniors' organizations to help them implement a holistic approach—one that focuses on eradicating the three plagues. Recent data collected by the Eden Alternative found that the populations of American care homes that switched to this approach required 26 percent less antipsychotic medication within the first year. Another study found an 18 percent decrease in the use of restraints at Texas-based homes that used

the approach. And one Kentucky-based organization found the communities that embraced the Eden Alternative approach saw a reduction in falls, weight loss, nurse turnover, and antipsychotic medication.

The Village doesn't adhere to one care model. Jespersen also borrowed from other approaches around the world, including De Hogeweyk in the town of Weesp, in the Netherlands, and the Green House Project in the US. Both are community-like care homes that prioritize residents' freedom of movement, and each also offers homey environments instead of institutional ones, providing residents with autonomy. For Jespersen, the result is a unique combination of existing best practices meant to focus on a person's remaining abilities, not on their decline.

ADRIENNE ALFORD-BURT, the executive director at the Village, recalls one late evening at work. Before heading home, she stopped by one of the cottages, knocked, and waited to be invited inside. She remembers the smell of fresh baking filling the air. The residents, she says, had decided to host a high tea the next day and, with the help of a staff member, were busily preparing homemade pastries, egg tarts, and cookies. For Alford-Burt, this is just one example of what makes the Village different. "A misconception about people living with dementia is that they can't learn or can't be productive," she says, adding that, in her experience, "in a traditional setting, you'll see baking listed on the recreational activities board, and a group of residents sit around and watch the staff do the work." But not at the Village.

Alford-Burt argues that business-as-usual methods will not meet the growing demand for dementia care, and she worries people will be warehoused in institutional facilities. So do federal policy makers. Last June, the government of Canada released its first national dementia strategy, which was created to influence how the country approaches the expected dementia boom. The strategy explicitly outlines a need to focus on dementia care that is holistic and respectful of individuals' dignity, and it acknowledges that, currently, there is a lack of both access to and awareness of such care. It also warns that, considering Canada's aging population, access to good dementia care will only become more challenging, and the availability of good care could decline if changes aren't made to meet future demand.

Jespersen and Alford-Burt both see what they've created as a starting point, not the end solution, when it comes to supporting Canadians living with dementia. For one, the Village can be a challenging template to follow. It sits on 2.8 hectares of land, and this property's availability, area, and location were pure luck. Jespersen happened upon an ad selling a former elementary school site in 2016. That much space is hard to come by in urban centres, and real estate costs can be prohibitive. So, too, can patient costs. Monthly fees for the Village range from $7,300 to $8,300, an all-inclusive rate Alford-Burt says is consistent with the industry average. Still, because the Village is a private care facility, there are no government subsidies available. Residents must pay 100 percent of the fees out of pocket, hindering equal access.

But, even if replication is difficult, both Jespersen and Alford-Burt want the Village to inspire others providing dementia care. Those unable to build new structures or renovate existing ones could work to shift culture, for instance, by focusing on giving residents the freedom to live on their own terms. Even incorporating more colour by painting over the institutional whites and greys or hanging artwork on the walls, suggest Jespersen and Alford-Burt, would be a step in the right direction. "I hope to see the day when we don't need dementia villages, but that's not today," Jespersen says. "There needs to be change, both with the design of our cities and in society as a whole. But, until that happens, this is a whole lot better than the options out there."

KARIN OLAFSON is a Vancouver-based writer who focuses on stories about health, science, fitness, and the outdoors.

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BUSINESS

Story Sellers

The expanding world of paid social media influencers

BY TATUM DOOLEY
ILLUSTRATION BY VIVIAN ROSAS

In 1932, Lester Gaba set out to create the ideal woman. His aim was simple: she would be beautiful but attainable, a figure that the everyday person could see themselves in. Gaba named his creation Cynthia. Though Cynthia was technically a mannequin—one commissioned by Saks Fifth Avenue—Gaba started bringing her out into the world, treating her like a real person at all times.

Cynthia quickly became a quasi celebrity. She was a regular sight at parties and events and was even photographed for a *Life* magazine feature. Companies, sensing an opportunity to capitalize on the attention, started sending her their products. "She received free dresses from Saks, diamonds from Tiffany's, tickets to the Metropolitan Opera," said journalist Roman Mars on an episode of the design podcast *99% Invisible.* "When she showed up in tabloids, she was wearing designer clothes." Cynthia may not have been sentient, but she was a trendsetter; her brief time as a socialite-cum-advertiser also foreshadowed the world of social media influencers who dominate Instagram feeds and marketing campaigns today.

Like Cynthia, social media influencers aren't usually celebrities, at least not in the traditional sense. They tend to be regular people—often young, often attractive—who have turned posting pictures or videos to YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, or TikTok into jobs. For just about any niche or hobby, whether it's travel, fashion, video games, or fishing, there's an influencer posting about it on a daily (or hourly) basis, amassing a large and loyal following. Companies have taken note, and they are buying access to these audiences in exchange for merchandise and cash.

This new realm of influencer marketing is less than ten years old, but it's become a central strategy for certain sales departments because, unlike more traditional formats, such as television spots and billboards, influencer posts are advertisements that don't feel like ads. Up until the past couple of years, most paid-for posts weren't even labelled as such. Still, despite the new best practice of noting "#ad" or "#sponsored" in captions, the intimacy of social media means that, for the audience, it can still feel like the influencer just had to let everyone know that they love a particular makeup brand, or a pricey pair of headphones, or, in the case of Kim Kardashian West, a new appetite-suppressing weight-loss product. Canon, Starbucks, Volvo, H&M, the tourism board of Nova Scotia: all have used influencer marketing in recent campaigns. According to *Business Insider*'s 2019 Influencer Market Report, companies are projected to spend $15 billion on the field by 2022.

Still, influencer marketing on social media is a new business model, and the tactic of throwing money at young personalities and hoping it translates into sales has led to some not-so-surprising results. In 2018, megainfluencer Luka Sabbat (then with 1.4 million followers) was sued for failing to fulfill a $60,000 deal that required him to wear Snapchat's new product, Snap Spectacles, at high-end fashion shows. (Sabbat had

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agreed to a minimum of four Instagram posts that included the product; he uploaded only two.) The effectiveness of influencers was further questioned last May, when Instagram star @Arii (then with 2.5 million followers) launched her own clothing line and sold fewer than thirty-six shirts.

It's failures like these that Bryan Gold is trying to prevent. Gold, a twenty-seven-year-old entrepreneur, is the co-founder and CEO of #Paid, a pioneering Toronto-based software company that deals in influencers. #Paid exists somewhere between talent agency and ad agency—it doesn't directly manage influencers, but it's positioning itself as a professional middleman that can work with big businesses to develop and oversee social media campaigns while wrangling the thousands of young social media users who have the desired captive audiences.

Gold knows that influencers have a checkered reputation: despite the value they offer brands, they can be inexperienced and unpredictable, making them potential threats to companies' images. But the roster that works for #Paid, he explains, is different from the rest. For one, his nearly 22,000 social media stars aren't mere influencers, he insists—they're *creators.*

I trip on this bit of semantics again and again over the few days I spend at the #Paid office—a contemporary open space complete with the requisite start-up perks of LaCroix sparkling water and a Ping-Pong table. Each time "influencers" leaves my mouth, I earn a stern look. The difference between the two, various staff members explain to me, is that, unlike typical influencers, #Paid creators care about what they do. They are discerning about whom they'll work with. (Gold tells me that, when his company received a shipment of a weight-loss product, they sent it right back.) I'm told that, whenever a #Paid creator embarks on a campaign—with, say, Coca-Cola or Uber Eats—the result is an authentic expression of how they feel about the product; the relationship is about more than just making money. "A lot of the creators I spoke with wanted to use their influence for good," Gold tells me. "They were genuinely passionate about making a difference in the world and making the world a better place."

While soda endorsements and food-on-demand probably won't change society for the better, recent trends seem to show that influencer marketing is the future that's coming for us all: one where social media becomes work, the work never stops, and all online identities are commodities to be constantly managed.

AROUND 2013, Gold noticed that a friend, Ronnie Friedman, was becoming popular online. Friedman had been building a steady following by posting her fitness journey, sharing healthy meals, before-and-after body shots, and gym selfies. "She was creating awesome content," Gold says. "Her audience would buy anything she used in order to get fit." Companies must have noticed this too, as some started reaching out to ask if she'd be interested in posting their products. Friedman hadn't planned on turning her social media presence into a small business and was stuck trying to manage these deals on her own. Gold saw an opportunity. In 2014, he secured a place in Ryerson University's startup incubator and officially launched #Paid with co-founder Adam Rivietz. In 2018, the company raised $9 million in venture funding.

Soon, everyone on social media may be selling to everyone else.

The goal of #Paid isn't to sign big-name celebrity influencers, like reality-television star Kylie Jenner (164 million Instagram followers, net worth reportedly $1 billion US), or massive YouTube stars, like Logan Paul (20.5 million subscribers, estimated net worth $19 million US). Gold built #Paid for people like Friedman: everyday social media users who had carved out a modest following in a particular niche. Many of these users are classified as "microinfluencers," who tend to have at least 5,000 followers and up to 100,000. The company also acts as a safety net for brands by vetting creators via an algorithm to ensure their followers are real. One thousand fake followers can be bought for a little more than $10, and cybersecurity firm Cheq reported that this kind of fraud was projected to cost advertisers more than $1 billion in 2019.

When it's time to run a campaign, #Paid puts together a shortlist of potential creators from the around the world for clients. Each creator has tags describing them and their audience, which help companies find the right fit for their target demographics (e.g., "mom," "single," "interested in cars"). Once a creator has been selected and has agreed to the partnership, they conceive and execute their own post and upload it onto #Paid's platform—essentially a mock-up of an Instagram post—for client approval. The two sides go back and forth if necessary, retaking shots and tweaking captions until everyone is happy. The smallest details matter: the #Paid office features a "trending word chart," a white piece of Bristol board where employees keep track of ever-shifting online slang, which helps ads abide by the zeitgeist. Hours of work go into a single post that most viewers will scroll past and internalize within seconds.

Unlike the less reputable players in influencer marketing, #Paid makes sure that all of its creators' ad posts are clearly marked as advertisements and follow necessary government regulations. Once a post goes live, the #Paid team goes into analytic overdrive, examining the engagement metrics provided by Instagram (mostly data on likes and comments). It has also partnered with the market research firm Neilson to create sets of statistics that show the effectiveness of its work, tracking a post from app to online cart to purchase. When I visit the office, a projector is displaying the live numbers of a current campaign, showing that an extra $50 ad buy for a sponsored placement on Instagram feeds was leading to $10,000 in sales.

When done right, influencer marketing is a dream for businesses, all high returns on low investments. Creators

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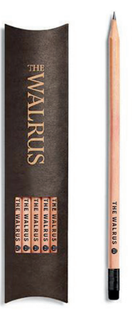

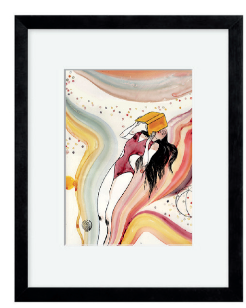

with #Paid set their own rates: they can make anywhere from tens of dollars to thousands per post, depending on their reach. And, though many small-level influencers won't make a living from social media, the money isn't nothing. Meanwhile, #Paid earns its cut by charging clients a monthly fee, which gives businesses a set number of sponsored posts, analytics, and contracts with creators.

In recent years, results have shown that choosing the right influencer for a campaign can be the difference between success and failure; bigger influencers don't always mean more sales. In an interview with *Business of Fashion*, Nicolaj Reffstrup, the then CEO of Ganni, a Danish fashion line that relies heavily on influencer marketing, explained that success on social media can be highly unpredictable. Big-name celebrity endorsements sometimes have no effect on sales. "Other times," he said, "you can have a girl with 4,000 followers in a regional area in Sweden, and she converts to sales extremely well because she makes so much more sense to her followers."

A recent report from technology-research company Morning Consult found that 56 percent of millennials and Gen Z say that they have made a purchase after seeing a post by someone they follow. Another 86 percent said that they'd be willing to post sponsored content if someone paid them to do so. They may soon get the chance—lately, industry watchers have been promoting a new class of marketing agent: the nano-influencer, usually defined as a person with between 1,000 and 5,000 followers. In a few years, everybody on social media may be selling to everybody else.

DIGITAL MEDIA has democratized and diffused celebrity, but it seems that many companies buying influencers today want a lifelike Cynthia figure: someone safe, someone on brand, someone who, ideally, doesn't speak for themselves.

Sylvia Jade is the strategy lead at #Paid, and part of her job is to soothe companies' fears about working with influencers. "I've gotten requests from clients to avoid anyone who's controversial. I've been asked to do background checks," she says. "If we're presenting a roster, they can't be associated with any bad press."

This kind of digital panopticon has become part of Jade's own life: in addition to being a #Paid staffer, she's a beauty YouTuber with more than 180,000 followers. Jade tells me that she's always highly conscious whenever she leaves her house, careful to look put together and happy. She avoids small expressions of negative emotion, like getting visibly annoyed with her boyfriend while waiting in line for lunch. It's too risky; she never knows who will recognize her. It seems that normal people can now have all the negative trappings of celebrity with a small fraction of the money and power that usually comes with it.

At first, this level of artifice can be difficult to square with influencers' main selling point: their authenticity. The word crops up repeatedly when speaking with influencers and the companies that represent them, but its meaning seems to have undergone a shift from its traditional usage. Authenticity among influencers is not about living in a manner that's true to oneself. Instead, it describes anything that feels true to the audience.

Take @LilMiquela, an Instagram influencer with 1.9 million followers. Miquela is a pretty, freckled woman who looks to be in her early twenties. She's recently partnered with Ugg and Calvin Klein for sponsored posts and is often pictured hanging out with friends, travelling, and promoting social justice causes. Miquela is also completely fake, a CGI avatar who, like Cynthia nearly ninety years earlier, feels just real enough: fans can see themselves in her, and companies can have complete control over her. She is all artifice but always authentic; a gold standard for mortal influencers everywhere.

TATUM DOOLEY is a freelance writer and curator. Her writing has appeared in *Canadian Art*, the *Globe and Mail*, *Lapham's Quarterly*, *Artforum*, and *British Vogue*.

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PUBLIC POLICY

A Dose of Dr. Zee

One man's case for legalizing recreational drugs

BYJONAH BRUNET
ILLUSTRATION BY FRANZISKA BARCZYK

IN THE SPRING of 2018, a new recreational drug briefly appeared on the Canadian market. It looked like white wine, came in fifty-millilitre bottles, and sold for roughly $10 apiece from a nondescript website. According to its inventor, Ezekiel Golan, the drug, called Pace, is a panacea for our post-modern, late-capitalist lives, capable of curbing excess in everything from food to shopping to sex. Through his company, Golan marketed Pace as an alcohol-binge-drinking mitigator.

Within nine months, it was shipped to some 1,000 customers across the country. One of these early adopters, posting a review to Pace's website, described it as tasting "like dirty puddle water from a busy gas station" and characterized its effects as being "like a STRONG drunk except without the slurring of speech, or most of the imbalance issues, and absolutely zero hangover." Five stars.

Exactly how Pace affects the brain is contested and something of a mystery. Golan's theory is that the drug's active ingredient, MEAI (or 5-methoxy-2-aminoindane), works by binding to the brain's 5-HT1A receptors and saturating the serotonin system, a process that can help mitigate cravings: roughly speaking, the more serotonin available to a person's brain, the less they tend to desire things like alcohol and cigarettes. "It's the 'enough' switch," Golan says of MEAI. "[Serotonin] signals to the brain that it is satisfied, that it wants nothing." And, at least anecdotally, Pace seems to work: over one-third of its online reviewers confirmed (and none denied) that, when they took the drug, they felt like drinking less.

Pace's short run on the market ended in December 2018, when a CBC reporter wrote a story about Golan's new alcohol alternative. She sent a media request to Health Canada, tipping the regulator off. "It Never Killed Anybody," Golan insists in the ensuing CBC headline, evoking a desperate inventor shielding his creation from an angry mob. The article paints a similarly dramatic picture of Golan's past: a "controversial 15-year career in the shadowy world of cutting-edge psychoactive drugs." Within weeks, Health Canada declared MEAI a Schedule I controlled substance—on par with cocaine and heroin—and effectively ordered Golan to stop selling it. Though Golan complied, he was just getting started. To him, Pace is more than a product: it is part of an ongoing quest to revolutionize the way we think about recreational drugs.

A GROWING NUMBER of scientists and experts around the world believe that psychoactive substances, most of which have been illegal for the past century, have been unjustly villainized. In fact, as Golan is happy to point out, these substances can be beneficial in ways we've overlooked: recent studies and accumulated anecdotal evidence have pointed to the untapped potential of psilocybin (the active compound in magic mushrooms), ketamine, LSD, and MDMA to help treat schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, and PTSD.

Meanwhile, research has found that the psychoactive substances often granted legal status, such as alcohol, are among the most damaging. This conversation was galvanized in 2009, when David Nutt, then chairman of the UK's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, was fired after stating that alcohol and tobacco are more harmful than cannabis, ecstasy, and LSD. In the wake of Nutt's dismissal, he and a team of researchers who disagreed with the advisory council developed a scale to compare twenty popular psychoactive substances according to two overarching categories: a drug's harm to users (whether physical, psychological, or social) and its harm to everyone else (from drug-fuelled violence to emergency-room crowding). To Nutt's surprise, alcohol ranked top of the list—above meth, crack, and heroin. (Nutt later partnered with Golan on a Pace prototype called Chaperon.)

Ever since the early twentieth century, when the majority of psychoactive substances were first banned, conversations about drugs have been among the least rational areas of public discourse. Today, as new technologies and scientific research reveal deeper insights about these substances, it's becoming increasingly clear that our relationship with them is profoundly flawed. In much of the world, for decades, alcohol has been the only legal option for those seeking a substance to help them blow off steam—and this has amounted to the greatest promotional campaign any drug has ever enjoyed, creating a powerful industry and giving its product a cultural significance that belies its harms. To Golan and his contemporaries, it seems, it's high time we came up with something better.

Ezekiel Golan was born in 1970 in Tel Aviv, Israel. From a young age, he was told that drugs were to be avoided and feared. For a while, this stuck: he describes himself as having been a "traditionalist teetotaller" late into his twenties. Then he was invited by an uncle to observe the Yemeni-Jewish tradition of chewing khat leaves, which contain cathinone, a stimulant popular in East Africa and the Arabian peninsula. This gathering of devout, serious men getting high to discuss scripture changed the way Golan thought about psychoactive substances and those who enjoy them.

At Australia's University of Queensland, Golan studied computer science and mathematics. Today, he characterizes his work as more math than chemistry. He starts from a database of psychoactive chemicals, selecting and tinkering with molecules using personalized cheminformatics software (programs that allow him to visualize, adjust, and analyze molecular structures), then sends digital blueprints of his most promising creations to a lab elsewhere for chemists to synthesize. Cathinone, for instance, tweaked according to this method, yielded mephedrone—the substance that, between 2009 and 2011, became one of the most popular party drugs in the UK. As one of the people who promoted mephedrone, Golan, under the pseudonym Dr. Zee, ascended to fame, with profiles in the *Guardian*, the BBC, *New Scientist*, and more.

In 2014, with his partner and three children, Golan relocated to Canada. He set up shop in Vancouver, seeking to establish himself as a drug entrepreneur. In Canada, no law prohibits Golan from creating or possessing his inventions, nor is it illegal for him or anyone else to consume them—that is, unless the drug is added to the federal list of banned substances, which is what Health Canada did to MEAI. But legally *selling* a new drug is where obstacles arise. One must first navigate an approval process that costs roughly half a million dollars in licensing and application fees per unlikely attempt. This makes legal drug discovery prohibitively expensive for all but large pharmaceutical companies, whose interest in new drugs is limited to the medicinal (and profitable). Consequently, the pathway to approval for a new recreational drug is largely uncharted—though that doesn't mean there isn't anybody out there inventing them.

In the clandestine world of designer drugs, Golan is an anomaly less for his work than for the openness and idealism with which he does it. He speaks of his profession in a language that combines the startup's big promises, the philosopher's love of theory, and the scientist's detached intellectualization. (He frames the shaky legality of his enterprise as a conflict between "a body of law, which is a human construct—a purely human construct—and a body of biochemistry, which is natural.") He seems genuine in his belief that his drugs have the potential to help people; what he's missing are the frameworks, the resources, and the oversight to develop them responsibly.

According to studies and experts in the field, Golan's claims about MEAI should be taken with several grains of salt. The drug has gone through three preclinical toxicology tests, and in only one of these tests was Golan himself not involved. Though these studies suggest that MEAI's risk is low and offer some clues about its effects on the brain, each concludes with some variation of "further research required."

How quickly Pace was made available to the public also presents ethical issues. While beta testing may be well and good for tech, disruption in the realm of drug discovery risks undermining the regulatory safeguards that protect public health. (Not that these safeguards are themselves ideal—even former UN secretary general Kofi Annan, who once advocated for stricter drug regulation around the world, has since admitted that "drugs have destroyed many people, but wrong policies have destroyed many more.") Harmful policies notwithstanding, drugs retain

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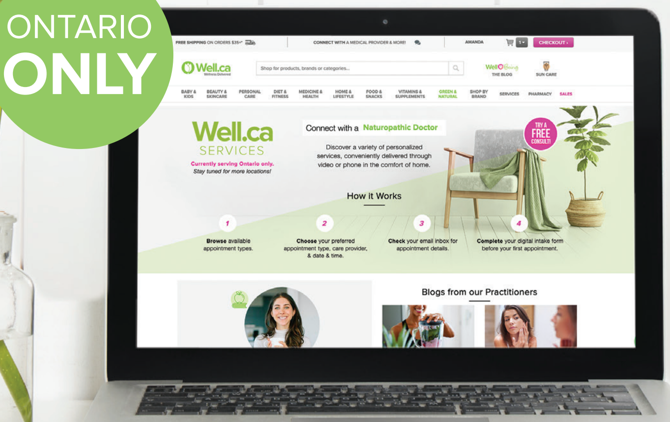

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their dangers, and the advent of entirely new substances compounds this fact: as we've seen with e-cigarettes, the capacity of a new kind of recreational drug to cause injury and death, particularly over the long term, can remain unknown even as its popularity explodes.

Much of what Golan knows about MEAI is what he's experienced personally. His regimen of self-experimentation is methodical: he begins with an imperceptible dose of a drug and ramps it up carefully, recording any effects as he feels them and stopping at the earliest sign of an adverse reaction. On testing MEAI, he says what he found most remarkable was the hangover-free mornings. "They were quite delightful."

The idea behind this controversial method is that one cannot truly know the effects of a mind-altering substance without experiencing them first-hand. But, for Golan, there's also an element of necessity. Lacking the resources and institutional support available to researchers in the mainstream, he finds himself in a similar predicament to that of his users, who must rely on anecdotal research and shared personal experiences when attempting to discern purity and measure safe doses.

As Golan comes increasingly into the public eye, he is confronted more and more with his work's potential to cause harm. In 2010, the UK's Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs compiled a list of twelve deaths in which mephedrone was implicated. (An independent review the following year found that the drug was primarily responsible for only two of those deaths.) And, in 2013, Golan was featured in a TV documentary on "legal highs" that followed a young British man who used drugs like Golan's on a regular basis. Three years later, a BBC journalist asked Golan if he felt guilty when people became addicted to his drugs. Golan paused, looked around, sighed, screwed up his face. "This is a really hard one for me," he said, "because the answer is no. I don't feel guilty at all. I've never met anybody addicted to my drugs."

When asked the same question by *New Scientist*, he responded, "I am greatly saddened by anything I've done that has contributed to harming another person.... That's why I take pains not to be reckless in my discovery process."

Today, Golan seems sick of the question. "Did you want me to convey compassion?" he says. "Because I can. But I'm not going to be apologetic. The war on drugs has been extremely harmful, and legislators are not held accountable. Not acting, or siding with prohibition, is more harmful than being experimental."

THROUGH HIS LAWYER, Golan is currently appealing Health Canada's decision to prohibit Pace. Regulators were able to ban MEAI by lumping it together with already-illegal amphetamine PMA, declaring that the two substances were "substantially similar" after comparing side-by-side images of each molecule in bond-line notation—a shorthand language chemists use to communicate in molecular structures. Memorial University of Newfoundland chemistry professor Erika Merschrod calls bond-line notation "a limited way of thinking about what a molecule is going to do." Assessing a substance by this measure alone is like trying to determine whether a building is structurally sound by reading a paragraph describing it. Golan's argument is that, in ignoring the gap between reality and two-dimensional transcription, Health Canada has misunderstood his molecule.

When drug science goes up against drug law, the law wins.

Nevertheless, Merschrod stresses that Golan lacks the research necessary to substantiate his salesman claims about MEAI's effects. She also notes that, despite the limitations of Health Canada's analysis, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act's condition of "substantially similar chemical structure"—a flexible criterion—can certainly be argued as applicable in the case of MEAI and PMA. "As a chemist, I agree with the science of Golan's points," she says. "But I don't think he has a chance. To me, it's clear that MEAI is prohibited under the law. Whether you think those laws are correct is another question."

According to a growing body of research, they are not: banning psychoactive substances causes all kinds of collateral damage, from violent crime to increased street-drug potency, besides which it isn't a surefire way to deter their use. But perhaps the most clearly misguided aspect of contemporary drug laws is their choice of exceptions. People have been suffering the nausea and headaches—not to mention the cancers—attendant to our drugs of choice for generations. In Canada, alcohol was responsible for 80,000 hospitalizations from 2016 to 2017, more than were caused by heart attacks, and over 3,000 deaths in 2015, more than were caused by car accidents (though, given alcohol's tendency to cause car accidents, those two statistics overlap). "It isn't difficult to create something less harmful than alcohol," Golan says. "It's an open market that hasn't been exploited, due to overconservatism."

In this sense, Golan may be fighting the good fight. Yet his prospects seem grim when measured against the sheer inertia of prohibition. Typically, when drug science goes up against drug law, the law wins.

And so, as his legal appeal drags on, Golan is hedging his bets. His latest innovation is a nonpsychoactive liquid fertilizer that, when sprayed on certain leafy vegetables, causes the plants themselves to produce MEAI. These greens can then be eaten in a salad, blended into a smoothie, steeped as tea, or smoked to experience the drug's effects. It's tempting, in light of Golan's past, to view this latest breakthrough as just another scheme to circumvent prohibition, this time by laundering his drugs through nature itself. But he insists that the process, which he calls human-assisted phytosynthesis, is about profoundly more. "It's bridging the gap between the natural and the synthetic," he says. "Nature had a hand in this creation." ¤

JONAH BRUNET is the copy editor at The Walrus.

HEALTH

ANATOMY OF A PANDEMIC

History has much to teach us about how to survive the COVID-19 outbreak. We need to listen to the lessons of the past

BY KEVIN PATTERSON
ILLUSTRATIONS BY SÉBASTIEN THIBAULT

TO BE ALIVE is to be afraid; anxiety is the spirit of this age and, substantially, of all ages. However good things have gotten, at least for those of us in Canada—however low crime and unemployment rates have become, however much war deaths have declined, life expectancy has grown, or HIV, cancer, and age-adjusted heart disease death rates have shrunk—disquiet claws at us. Financiers may advise that what they call the downside risk—the potential for loss in the worst cases—is limited, but at an existential level, we know better. Everything could just go all to hell, no matter how shiny things look. You don't need to be a wigged-out prepper in the woods to suspect it.

Things have always gone all to hell. Over 4,000 years ago, climate change came to Mesopotamia, causing drought and a subsequent famine so severe that the world's first empire, Akkad, simply ceased to be. Farmers abandoned their crops and many scribes just stopped writing. For archaeologists, for the next 300 years: near silence.

This is from *The Curse of Akkad*, written around the time of the silencing:

> Those who lay down on the roof, died on the roof; those who lay down in the house were not buried. People were flailing at themselves from hunger. By the Ki-ur, Enlil's great place, dogs were packed together in the silent streets; if two men walked there they would be devoured by them, and if three men walked there they would be devoured by them.

In the third century, the Three Kingdoms war shattered China. The An Lushan Rebellion, five centuries later, shattered it again. Millions died in each of: the Mongol conquests, the nineteenth century's Taiping Rebellion, colonialism in the Americas, the Thirty Years' War in Europe—and, of course, the World Wars, which killed, conservatively, over 110 million.

Famine and war routinely bring civilizations low, but though he trots closely beside those two, the horseman who carries off the most has always been pestilence. The Roman Empire's Justinian Plague, which was perhaps history's first known pandemic, is thought to have killed millions in the sixth century and may have further stressed the weakening imperium. Procopius writes contemporaneously that death rates in Constantinople were as high as 10,000 per day:

> And many perished through lack of any man to care for them, for they were either overcome by hunger, or threw themselves down from a height. And in those cases where neither coma nor delirium came on, the bubonic swelling became mortified and the sufferer, no longer able to endure the pain, died.

This was humanity's first catastrophic involvement with *Yersinia pestis*, the

bacterium that would resurface again during the Black Death, killing 30 to 60 percent of the population of medieval Europe. Western Europe's population would not reach what it had been in the 1340s again until the beginning of the sixteenth century. In subsequent centuries, cholera also swept the urbanized world—crowding being a powerful accelerant for non–vector borne (that is, not insect- or snail-spread) infection. (Paleolithic peoples saw no sustained human-to-human infections; their numbers were too small to keep up chains of transmission.) What John Bunyan called the "captain of all these men of death," tuberculosis, has been with us for at least 9,000 years, since the Neolithic period, and has killed more than a billion humans in the last 200 years alone. It was responsible for 25 percent of all deaths in Europe between the 1600s and the 1800s. It remains the most lethal infection worldwide, killing about 1.5 million people a year, and currently infects one-third of living humans.

Those infections are bacterial, but history's worst pandemic was caused by a virus that swept the world only a long lifetime ago: the misnamed "Spanish" Flu of 1918–1920 was a strain of H1N1 influenza of unknown origin (any place where pigs and chickens and people live is a candidate). That illness was often complicated by a supervening bacterial pneumonia, for which there were then no antibiotics, and it spread around the world over the course of two years, ultimately killing 20 to 50 million. It killed, on average, 2.5 percent of the people it infected, but certain communities were hit much harder: about 7 percent of Iranians died, a third of Inuit in Labrador, and 20 percent of the Samoan population.

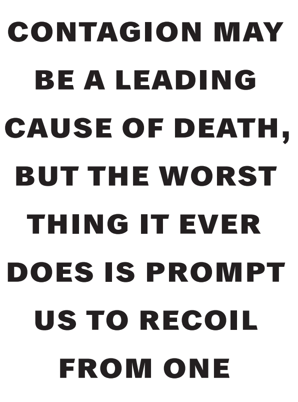
In *The Great Influenza*, historian John M. Barry quotes an American Red Cross worker: "Not one of the neighbors would come in and help. I...telephoned the woman's sister. She came and tapped on the window, but refused to talk to me until she had gotten a safe distance away." Barry continues: "In Perry County, Kentucky, the Red Cross chapter chairman begged for help, pleaded that there were 'hundreds of cases...[of] people starving to death not from lack of food but because the well were panic stricken and would not go near the sick.'"

Contagion may be a leading cause of death, but the worst thing it ever does is prompt us to recoil from one another—much the greater injury: to our health, to our communities, to whatever it is that stands in the way of this slouching beast.

THIS JANUARY and February, things started looking like they could again go all to hell. (They may yet.) Wuhan, in the province of Hubei, China, is a transportation hub of 11 million built

where the Yangtze and Huan Rivers meet. In December, patients began presenting, in steadily increasing numbers, with symptoms and clinical findings suggestive of viral pneumonia. (Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs; it may be caused by viruses, bacteria, or fungi.) Tests for known pathogens capable of causing such an illness came back negative. This raised the question of whether a novel pathogen—an infectious agent not previously known to affect humans—had emerged.

Novel pathogens inspire a particularly pointed sort of anxiety among doctors. Many familiar pathogens are lethal on a broad scale—influenza caused over 34,000 deaths in the US in 2018/19, for instance—but their behaviour is known and tends to be consistent. Seasonal influenza, for example, is active in the northern hemisphere beginning in November; its spread slows dramatically by late March. It is monitored carefully and understood well enough that vaccines may be prepared that are usually effective at reducing disease incidence and severity. We know how to contain this virus, we know which patients will be the most vulnerable to it, and we know, within an order of magnitude, how many will die. The ceiling on that number matters. While the best-case scenario for influenza each year includes many deaths, we also have an idea of what the worst-case scenario is. The downside risk is not infinite.



With novel pathogens, this is not true. The worst-case scenario is undefined. Novel pathogens are not inevitably virulent or necessarily prone to become epidemic, but some of them do prove to be catastrophic—and doctors don't know, when one emerges, what course it's going to take.

The number of ill in Wuhan grew quickly, as did the number of medical researchers paying attention. On December 31, China notified the World Health Organization (WHO) that it was seeing an outbreak of pneumonia due to an unknown agent. By January 7, Chinese virologists had sequenced the genetic structure of this new virus—which has been dubbed SARS-CoV-2 (the illness that it causes is called COVID-19)—posting it online so that researchers around the world could access it. A few days later, an apparent connection to the Huanan Wholesale Seafood Market, in Wuhan, was reported to the WHO, and the market was quickly ordered to close. On March 11, following growing transmission in countries around the world, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, which it defines as "the worldwide spread of a new disease."

The virus was found to be part of the family of Coronaviridae, or coronaviruses: a large group of viruses that are so named because, when examined with an electron microscope, they appear studded with projections that suggest a crown. Benign instances of coronaviruses cause up to a third of common colds. A more alarming example is the SARS virus, which leapt from an unknown agent (likely bats) to civet cats and caused a multinational outbreak, killing about 10 percent of the 8,000 people it infected, and which hit Toronto, where forty-four people died of the illness. Another coronavirus leapt from camels to humans in 2012 or earlier and causes a type of pneumonia called MERS, or Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome, which persists in Saudi Arabia. These new coronaviruses are zoonotic: they originated in animal populations and were then transmitted to humans. Researchers concluded early on that SARS-CoV-2's leap to humans had occurred quite recently, likely sometime last November.

The story of this pandemic is, in many ways, a story about speed. HIV circulated among humans for about six decades before it was noticed. The quickness with which science has identified this new infection and defined the genetic nature of the virus causing it is unprecedented, but this is matched by the virus itself: the rapidity with which it was observed to leap to humans and the rate at which it

was seen to disseminate among us has almost no parallel in modern medicine.

Everything about this story is fast: the science, the virus, and the almost instantaneous popular fascination with and fear of unfolding events—spread by social media but also by traditional journalism and a public sensitized by Ebola and 2009 H1N1. The spirit of our age anticipates disaster when once it anticipated flying cars. For a time after 9/11, every loud noise was a bomb and every brown man a bomber. The disasters of our time have been mostly human caused (or anthropogenic, as the climatologists put it). Given human obduracy, this is less reassuring than it might be.

The Chinese government's information management around the COVID-19 outbreak worsened our general unease. China has been more forthcoming than it was with the 2003 SARS outbreak, but even so, it has not been broadly transparent. Frustration over this among the citizenry crystallized over the treatment of Li Wenliang, a thirty-four-year-old ophthalmologist in Wuhan who alerted his former medical-school classmates to the outbreak, on December 30, over WeChat, the Chinese messaging and social media platform. After being summoned for questioning by police and signing a statement that his warning had "disturbed [the] social order," he was released—only to come down with COVID-19 himself, dying of it on February 7. The indignation and anger on Chinese social media was uncharacteristically plain-spoken.

The early clampdown on information had many repercussions. Echo Xie, a reporter for the *South China Morning Post*, travelled to Wuhan in the first weeks of the outbreak. As recently as late January, she told me, "a lot of people didn't take it seriously. It's been almost twenty days since the Wuhan health authorities first published information about the coronavirus, but some people still haven't heard about it." She went on to describe some of the people she had met:

> A woman surnamed Xu, thirty-one, said her father, her brother-in-law, and a family friend had all developed severe pneumonia and breathing problems. Her father had caught a fever in early January, after a business trip to the southern region of Guangxi. He was treated for a common cold at first, but his condition kept worsening. He went to the hospital on January 12, where he was not formally admitted as the hospital had no beds left; he was instead put in an observation room—one that he shared with eleven other patients with different illnesses, with no partitions separating beds. An X-ray showed his lungs were infected, but at that time, he could still walk. On January 19, when he got another X-ray, three doctors told Xu that her father was in a very serious situation and there was a large area of shadow on his lungs. Still, he was kept in the same room as others, without quarantine facilities.
>
> People were asking for help online when almost every hospital was full and no longer accepting any new patients. Yuan Yuhong, a professor in Wuhan, posted on WeChat: "Parents of my son-in-law were infected by the coronavirus and they were diagnosed, but now no hospital accepts them."

SEVERE VIRAL pneumonias are a familiar problem to intensive care units all over the world, and the level of resources that must be devoted to the care of such patients is high, often straining existing health care structures even with the comparatively low numbers of such patients that are usual most years. ICU care is expensive, costing more than $1,500 per day, and maintaining surge capacity—the ability to respond to an abrupt increase in caseload—is correspondingly expensive. And so, little elasticity exists in most Western medical systems, including Canada's.

The H1N1 influenza strain of 2009 (commonly referred to at the time as "swine flu") is perhaps the most recent outbreak in Canada that can give a sense of what COVID-19 would be like if it spread here in earnest. Intensive care units were profoundly taxed with patients who had needs that were similar to those of the most serious COVID-19 cases. Supporting critically ill patients—those in multisystem organ failure—requires ventilator support, dialysis, and one-to-one or sometimes even two-to-one nursing staff. It takes only a few such cases to stretch an ICU and its staff, together with allied disciplines, such as respiratory therapists, to their limits, or past them.

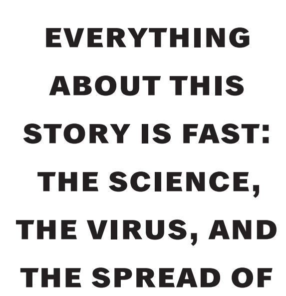
In the intensive care unit where I work as a critical care physician, in Nanaimo, on Vancouver Island, we began seeing such patients in late December 2009; by January, we were consistently over capacity. Nanaimo is a medium-size city of just over 100,000, and the Nanaimo hospital has nine ICU beds—a little fewer than the national average of about 12.9 beds per 100,000 people. In such a setting, even a handful of extra patients requiring high-level care can put unsustainable pressure on the system. And it did. By March, the nurses, who had worked long overtime hours for months, were spent.

Those days had a frenetic quality to them that lingers in the memory of clinicians. Usually, the patients were admitted through the emergency room after several days of fever and coughing—familiar symptoms of influenza, which progresses just as COVID-19 progresses. When pneumonia supervenes, breathlessness is the most common indication that things are going badly. This is a consequence of inflammation in the lungs limiting their ability to transfer oxygen to the blood and to permit the exhalation of carbon dioxide.

With respiratory distress comes confusion and agitation; if that distress becomes severe, there may be a decision to sedate and intubate the patient—to pass a plastic tube into the trachea in order to force oxygen into the lungs and facilitate the removal of CO_2. The tube is connected to a ventilator and the pressures and volumes of oxygen-enriched air are titrated to adequately support lung function without overdistending the lungs—a narrow window with patients so sick. People with severe pneumonia are often laid prone, on their fronts, in their beds, usually chemically paralyzed

and sedated to the point of anaesthesia. Special intravenous catheters will have been placed by this point, leading to the large veins that drain into the heart, to facilitate the administration of powerful medicines to support blood pressure. Dialysis catheters may also be necessary if the kidneys are failing, and that, in turn, will usually be treated with continuous dialysis machines, requiring a dedicated nurse and the help of kidney doctors.

That process of stabilization and the initiation of life support systems will occupy a physician, a respiratory tech, and three or four nurses for one to three hours, when it goes well. Three such admissions would fill a day—in addition to the care required for other patients, with heart attacks and abdominal infections and injuries from car accidents, which do not go away during a pandemic—and still leave our ICU short a dialysis machine.



This is what clinicians know: a few dozen extra cases—each of which may require many weeks of care—in a winter can be overwhelming. It is impossible to even imagine how hundreds or thousands of such cases would be managed.

In retrospect, after 2009 H1N1—as well as after SARS and the other recent near misses, to say nothing of the fifteen-century history of pandemics—the surprising thing is how little was done subsequently to prepare for the next disastrous outbreak. There are not boxes full of spare ventilators in the basements of North American hospitals, ordered in volume once H1N1 subsided. There are not broadly understood and detailed plans for coping with the toll of caregiver infection, for housing and feeding the many new staff the medical and ICU wards would suddenly require; personal protective gear has not been stockpiled in anything like sufficient quantities—indeed, according to Tedros Ghebreyesus, director general of the WHO, worldwide supplies are already under severe strain.

As much as the COVID-19 story is about speed, it is also about fear. Frightened people behave badly; contagion makes them recoil from one another. This serves the purposes of the horseman, distracting from important problems and their solutions and making marginalized people—some of whom seem often to be deemed culpable for epidemics—even more vulnerable. Plagues preferentially consume, whether directly or indirectly, the poor and powerless; it is a taste they have exhibited since Procopius.

As a barometer of fear and social dissolution in pandemics, othering has a long history; contagion has, for centuries, been associated with disparaged minorities. The Black Death certainly did not inaugurate anti-Semitism, but there is evidence that it propelled it to new depths. More than 200 Jewish communities were wiped out by pogroms justified by the libel that Jews were responsible for the plague in that they had poisoned local wells. There is a terrible account in Jakob von Königshofen's history of Agimet of Geneva, a Jew who was "put to the torture a little" until he confessed to having poisoned wells in Venice, Calabria, and Apulia, among others. This became a narrative that accompanied the plague as it moved throughout Western Europe.

A similar othering effort was applied to gay and bisexual men when HIV was first recognized, attributing the HIV pandemic directly to sexual practices and indirectly to drug use (particularly amyl nitrate, or "poppers") that lowered inhibitions—which is to say, to the queer "lifestyle." Bathhouse culture was implicated—as if promiscuity were only the province of gay men—as was intercourse between men.

The new coronavirus, it has been suggested, arose and became epidemic among humans in China because of the Chinese themselves. Chinese dietary customs were singled out early—though any sort of explanation would likely have served. In the first days of the outbreak, a clip from a 2016 travel show of a young Chinese YouTube celebrity eating bat soup in a restaurant on the Pacific island of Palau was widely circulated. (Throughout much of Oceania, bats—the only native mammal species to many of the Pacific islands—have long been considered a delicacy.) This was presented as evidence of the unnatural behaviour of the Chinese, which was in turn held to be the proximate cause of the epidemic. The response was disgust and contempt and a chorus of self-righteous disdain—just as is intended when malicious stereotypes are circulated in such situations.

Alongside these noxious comments, a competing—and equally racist—account of COVID-19 began circulating. A paper—later retracted—was distributed prior to peer review arguing that SARS-CoV-2 had such "uncanny" genetic commonality with HIV that it was probably bioengineered, presumably by the Chinese, who have a microbiology lab located in the Wuhan Institute of Virology. This fringe theory (the genetic sequences in question aren't just in common with HIV but with many other viruses) was repeatedly espoused by Tom Cotton, a Republican senator from Arkansas. (He later walked back the claim.)

Sinophobia has acted at a more local level as well. During the height of the 2003 SARS outbreak, business at Chinese restaurants in Toronto dropped by 40 to 80 percent. Restaurateurs in Chinatowns across Canada were seeing customers stay away before the epidemic had even arrived. And, in January, parents in a school board just north of Toronto signed a petition demanding that a student who had recently travelled to China not be admitted to school; it now has just over 10,000 signatures. "This has to stop. Stop eating wild animals and then infecting everyone around you. Stop the spread and quarantine yourselves or go back," wrote one signatory.

After You

BY BRIAN WICKERS

After you left
us, I was left

feeling you'd leapt
through a door swept

open in one
way's direction,

me alongside
on the wrong side

of hereafter,
here and after—

same door, except
the way it's kept,

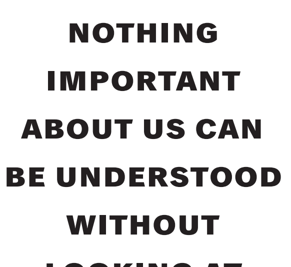
as though the door
still looked for more.

THE MEASURE of a plague is the number of people it infects and how seriously it sickens them. The number of people it's expected to infect multiplied by its mortality rate yields its prospective death toll. And this, naturally, is the question that draws the most attention: How bad is it going to get? How many are going to die? What are the numbers? People seek numbers in times of uncertainty because it feels like they have a solidity about them. A quantified subject is a tamed one, to some extent.

The R_0, or the basic reproductive number, is a tool that allows epidemiologists to describe how contagious a pathogen is in a given circumstance. It is the average number of people who will in turn be infected by each new infection. If it is less than 1, the infection dwindles. More than 1, it spreads. Regular seasonal flu has an R_0 of about 1.4; pandemic flu between 1.5 and 2, depending on the strain. Some early calculations estimated COVID-19's R_0 to be as high as 4, but as with the mortality rate, successive estimations moderated the result, and by mid-February, most experts estimated it at between 2 and 2.5. Which remains high compared to influenza but is hardly unprecedented. Measles, in unvaccinated and crowded populations, can be as high as 18.

Other numbers are needed to understand how fatal a pathogen is. A point made often, early in the course of COVID-19, was that its mortality rate is much lower than that of SARS (10 percent) or MERS (34 percent). Though it is too soon to pin down the mortality rate of COVID-19, current estimates put it at between 1 and 4 percent. (In Wuhan, where the health care system has clearly been profoundly stressed, it is at the higher end of that range. Elsewhere, the early numbers, at least, have been lower.) This follows known patterns: as a general rule, there is an inverse relationship between mortality and spread; COVID-19 has infected many more people than SARS or MERS and has a lower fatality rate.

Paradoxically, the lower virulence of SARS-CoV-2 makes it more dangerous. With SARS, people who were infected but not yet symptomatic were mostly not contagious. When they did fall ill, they often felt so unwell so quickly that they took to bed or went to the hospital—where they became very contagious. Many nurses were infected, but community spread was limited.



With SARS-CoV-2, it seems that many quite contagious infected people may feel well initially or indeed throughout their infection. Decreased virulence is bought at the price of increased contagiousness, and even if infected people are a quarter as likely to die, ten times as many people have been infected, and many more infections are yet to occur. The Spanish Flu's fatality rate was under 2.5 percent; the WHO believes it killed about 50 million, though some other estimates go as high as 100 million. Seasonal influenza's fatality rate is generally accepted to be about 0.1 percent—though it, too, is lethal, killing tens of thousands of North Americans every year as a consequence of how widespread it becomes every winter.

There are reasons for optimism and reasons for pessimism.

One point that needs more emphasis is that epidemics have diminished in much of the Global North for good reason. There has not been an uncontained and uncontainable epidemic on the scale of 1918 in over a century. This is only partly because of specific antibiotics, antiviral therapy (for viruses like HIV and hepatitis C), and vaccines. A large part of this is due to affluence and, to a qualified and recently diminishing degree, justice. The poor in the rich parts of the world no

longer often die of hunger. For a majority, drinking water is cleaner. The crowding and misery of Dickensian London saw tuberculosis become the leading cause of death among adults; over the course of the twentieth century, that death toll fell 90 percent. Streptomycin, the first effective antituberculosis antibiotic, was made available in 1947, but there was a huge drop in infections prior to that due to improvements in quality of life. There had been some redistribution of wealth, and the very poorest were less poor than they had been. Tuberculosis in most of Canada is almost gone. But, in Nunavut, which has Canada's highest poverty rate, the incidence was recently comparable to Somalia's.

Part of this reduction in illness is also due to the sustained efforts of public health workers. Public health measures work. They worked to contain SARS in Toronto in 2003. Identifying and isolating infected and contagious people reduced the R_0 to less than 1. The discipline of public health lacks the drama of the Salk polio vaccine or effective antiretroviral therapy, but it has saved countless lives nonetheless. It may be just beginning to work in Wuhan. Within a few weeks of the outbreak, there was a test for the virus. In a few weeks more, there may be a much more rapid and convenient test, perhaps available at the point of care, which would make isolation measures much more effective.

But the reasons for anxiety are compelling too. A vaccine is at least a year away. There is no drug with proven efficacy against the virus. As of this writing, the virus is present in more than 100 countries. There are nearly 8 billion humans on the planet; the next largest population of nondomesticated large mammals is the crabeater seal, around Antarctica: 15 million. We live, worldwide, mostly in cities and now in densities that make us profoundly vulnerable. As Michael Specter, writing presciently in *The New Yorker* about pandemics, has pointed out, few of us can completely isolate ourselves—and, in Wuhan, the lockdown cannot continue indefinitely. In other parts of the world, where the central government is less powerful, it could not even be initiated. People need food; people need medicine; people need one another.

Nothing important about us and our success as a species can be understood except by looking at our interdependencies. If many of us could not come to work—because of sickness, because of the need to care for loved ones, or because of mandated social-distancing—then the fabric of our society would begin to tear. Transportation networks would fail; airports would cease to operate. Human beings are ambivalent about their interdependence. To need others is to be vulnerable; when we're under threat, vulnerability elicits fear.

Despite our hopes, and despite the unprecedented quarantine, COVID-19 was not contained in Wuhan as SARS, improbably, was contained and extirpated in Toronto and the other cities it broke out in. The Wuhan lockdown did slow the epidemic, however, and relieved the pressure on the city's health care system, which was failing.

Now, the rest of us brace for a version of what the Chinese experienced. We must now contemplate how much we need one another. The instinct to recoil would be the worst possible response because doing so would ensure that the most vulnerable among us are consumed. And, in a pandemic, that injury would not be purely moral or social—though it would be those too. It would feed the contagion, overwhelm the hospitals, and increase the risk to the less vulnerable. Rarely is the argument for mutual devotion so easily made.

It might be that that this pandemic will turn out less severe than what is feared; it might be that the winter spike in Wuhan will not be replicated elsewhere. But, even if we contain this virus, there will be another. And this point, that some threats can be faced only collectively, will remain. We have to learn it. ✚

With files from Echo Xie, whose reporting for this article was supported by the Global Reporting Centre.

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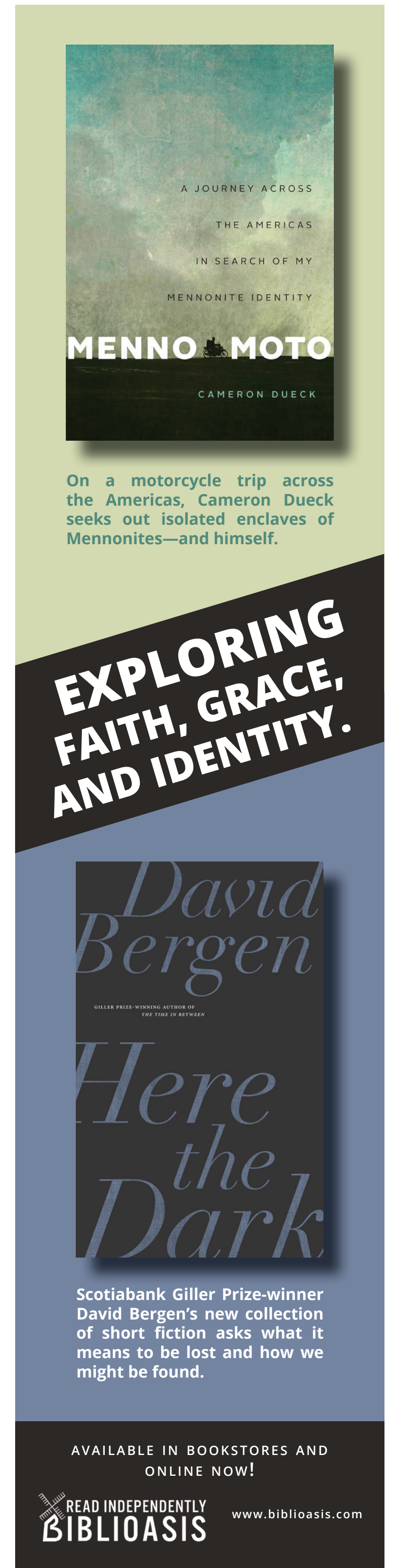
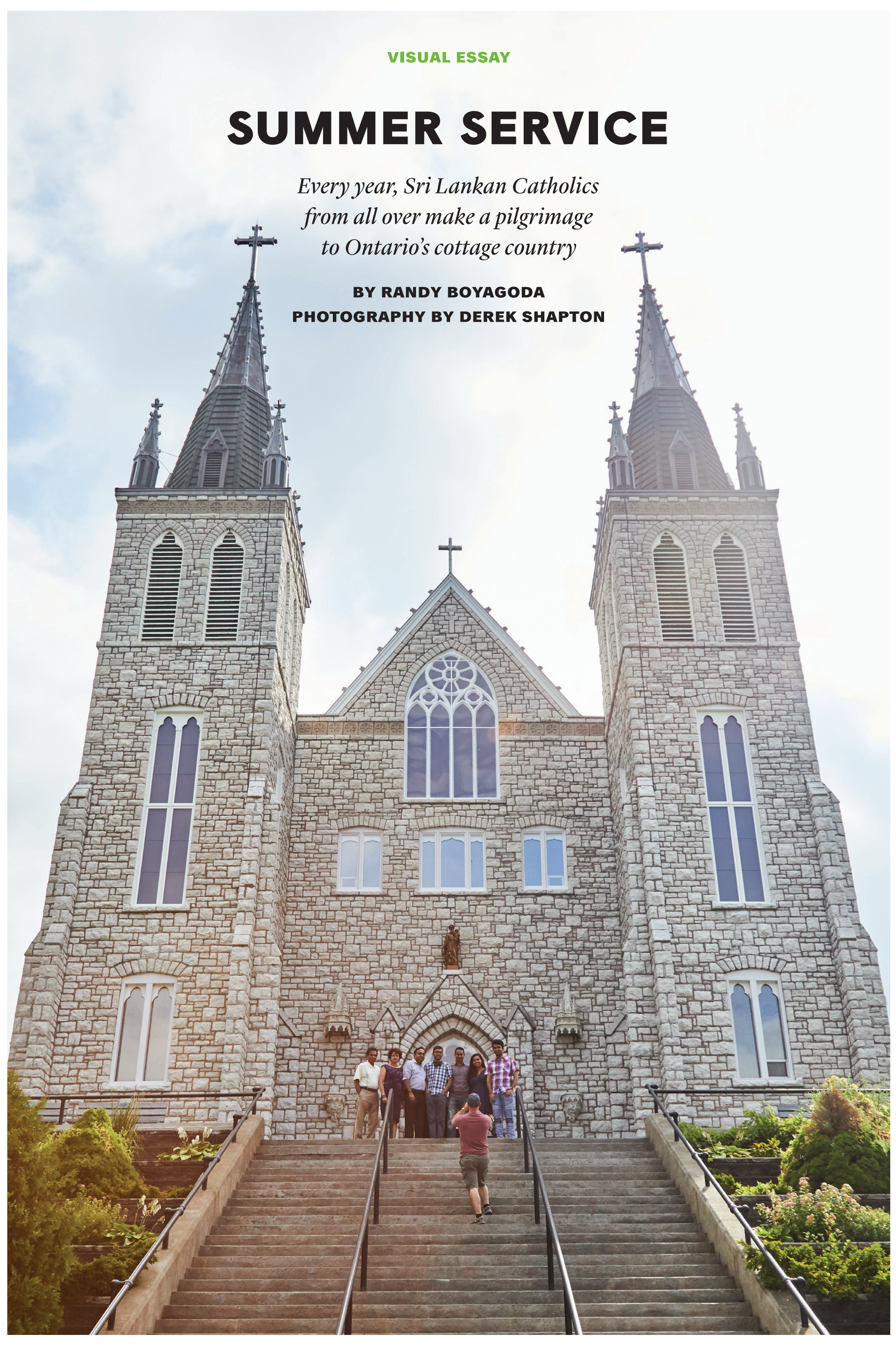


VISUAL ESSAY

SUMMER SERVICE

Every year, Sri Lankan Catholics from all over make a pilgrimage to Ontario's cottage country

BY RANDY BOYAGODA
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DEREK SHAPTON



LEFT A procession of pilgrims with a portable sound system.

BELOW Sampathawaduge Maxwell Grenville Silva, Auxiliary Bishop of Colombo.

God has a sense of humour: drive two hours north from Toronto to escape the summer heat, and even in an old church overlooking Georgian Bay, it's hotter than it was back home. The heat is thick and it slows you down and reminds you of stories your father told about going to a "jungle church" in Sri Lanka every August, as a child, in caravans that set up tents and huts around the building for days and nights of prayer and song, feast and play, all in muggy, snake-infested lands. He loved those pilgrimages, but fear of the slouching beast of Ontario summer traffic trumped hope of renewing an old devotion in Upper Canada.

When I was growing up—"back home" for me is 1980s Oshawa—we never made the trek to the Canadian Martyrs' Shrine, which is Canada's nearest approximation of Our Lady of Madhu, in Sri Lanka. Founded in 1926 near Midland, Ontario, the shrine honours the seventeenth-century martyrdoms of Saint Jean de Brébeuf and his companions. It has since become the proxy destination for other Catholic immigrant groups seeking to continue pilgrimages and devotions associated with their home countries and religious communities. Last July, under the cover of family life and the writing life, I drove there to pray with some Sri Lankans.

OPPOSITE Pilgrims pose for pictures at the entrance to the Canadian Martyrs' Shrine, July 2019.

Because of childhood stories and because the timing of our visit fell mere months after the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings—a coordinated series of attacks in Sri Lanka that portended a new arrangement of sectarian conflict and division in a country still dealing with the traumatic legacies of a civil war that ended brutally and decisively in 2009—I was prepared for a dramatic demonstration of Sri Lankan communion. You'd certainly expect to see far more than a thousand people coming

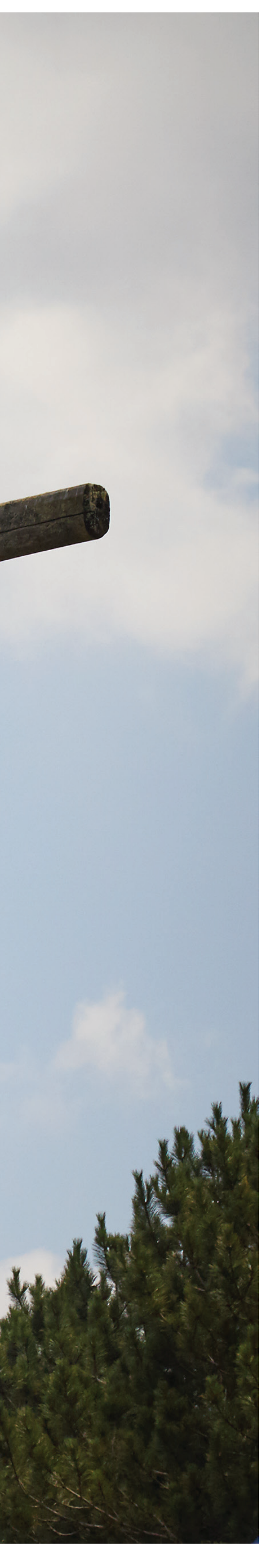
together if you combined the Sri Lanka–related Catholic communities from around Toronto into a single day's trip to cottage country. I had already witnessed the sort of spectacle that can be induced by this shrine, which draws visitors from all over Canada in spite of its size and relative geographical obscurity. I inadvertently attended the Tamil Catholic pilgrimage two years ago, when I visited the Martyrs' Shrine one July morning with my daughters. We were staying at a cottage nearby and had intended to go to a quiet little summertime Mass before taking in a matinee show of *Ant-Man and the Wasp*. Instead, we were stuck in purgatorial traffic along Highway 12 before joining thousands of GTA Tamil pilgrims, who packed the church, which holds 500 and, on that day, hosted more than 8,000—and whose vehicles spilled over parking lot lines to pack unpaved roads and take up space all over the rolling green shrine lands.

I don't know how the Jesuits decide which of some thirty-two different ethnic Catholic groups gets to enact its particular pilgrimage to the shrine on what date in a summer-long industrial-scale version of *Eat Pray Love*. It must involve a combination of practical considerations, respect for long-standing, internally coherent immigrant-community religious practices, and perhaps a more quiet desire to avoid the possibility of old grievances coming to life in a new place. Last year, the Sunday closest to the traditional date of the Madhu feast day went to the Italians. The Polish and Syro-Malabar got the dates around the Assumption, another very important Catholic feast day in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan Catholics' faith dates only to the early sixteenth century, making them youngsters compared to the Italians (Saint Paul was preaching in Rome mere decades after Christ's crucifixion), Syro-Malabars (52 AD), Poles (the tenth century), and in fact closer in age to First Nations Catholics, whose own pilgrimage day at the shrine was June 22. In Sri Lanka, the major pilgrimages to Our Lady of Madhu church happen either on July 2, the feast day of the most prominent devotion in Sri Lankan Catholicism, or around August 15, to commemorate the more widely celebrated Feast of the Assumption—which informed my decision to travel to the shrine when I did, in the deep, dead heat of summer.

In any event, on the day of our visit, the turnout was at best only in the high

RIGHT A seagull looks on while a drone captures the proceedings.

OPPOSITE Young dancers before the procession.



hundreds. I noted that the program I picked up from one of the display tables near the outdoor altar declared on its front cover, “Let’s Pray for Unity in Sri Lanka.” It was the liturgical equivalent of a talking point during the Mass itself, by a bishop who had come from Colombo to preside over the pilgrimage. With limited success, forty-five minutes after Mass was supposed to have started, organizers asked the loitering, chatting, phone-tapping pilgrims to congregate for a rosary procession that would mark the formal start of the event. The walk started a long way from the altar. At the back of the procession, the presiding bishop carried a replica of Our Lady of Madhu—a small statue, whose presence in Sri Lanka dates back to at least 1543, of the crowned Virgin holding a child Christ. Wearing a shock-white cassock and a rich amaranth sash, the bishop walked under a gold-fringed beige canopy held up by guys in jeans and sneakers. Ahead of them was a monstrously amplified group of mostly older women, some children, and a few glum-looking teens, many holding droopy roses while reciting the rosary in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. They were led down the lane by altar servers slow-cooking in their heavy robes. At the very front: a smiling, chatty old white guy decked out in mildly militaristic Knights of Columbus finery.

The procession was wonderfully broken up, near the altar, by a procession of done-up, dancing little girls followed by heat-sick flower girls dropping rose petals—they were dressed, respectively, in sequined and frilly white outfits that seemed Hindu and Buddhist. There’s probably some Catholic orthodoxy watchdog that’s already sent a letter to the local bishop about this, but those girls, dressed and dancing as they were, fit in perfectly well with the overall proceedings, or at least as well as the tray of Costco dessert bars melting on a display table, which served as the traditional offering of sweets, alongside a dignified cheeseball arrangement of silver crucifixes, flanking Canadian and Sri Lankan flags, pseudotropical flowers, and a wood carving of Sri Lanka itself, that last item probably straight out of a Colombo airport gift shop.

The stately older ladies dressed in diaphanous dark and bright saris that swished across the scrubby greenery of the Canadian Shield likewise fit in fine, as did the tall gleaming rooster-topped brass oil lamp flanking the altar’s right, which, in keeping with Sri Lankan tradition, was lit by business-suited dignitaries using an unreliable barbecue lighter. The many minivans, rusted-out sedans, and vanity-plated luxury cars parked

under every available stand of shade trees also made sense. The cars had rosary beads hanging from rear-view mirrors and trunks packed with oil-stained silver cooking pots and plastic bags of short eats and string hoppers from takeout shops in Scarborough and Brampton.

In both contemporary Canadian and global Catholic terms, all of this sprawling brown life going on under endless tall green pines made for only superficially unexpected juxtapositions of difference, whether religious, geographic, economic, or cultural. In reality, these densely packed, fused-together moments and experiences of *here* and *there*, *then* and *now*, are the baseline realities of life in modern Canada and of universal life as a Catholic. The latter became even more apparent when the bishop delivered his homily. Squinting against the harsh midday sun and looking miraculously sweat-free in his heavy green liturgical vestments, the bishop, in a single seamless sentence, proposed a hard, true kind of unity, invoking the seventeenth-century martyrs of both Ceylon and Ontario, the first- and third-century martyrs of Nero's and Diocletian's Rome, and the twenty-first-century martyrs of Sri Lanka. His point: the church was built—is built, *continues* to be built—on the blood of martyrs.

But none of the pilgrims seemed particularly affected by his remarks, never mind concerned about the nontraditional timing of the event. Instead, they just went about their holy holiday business, keeping babies quiet and children cool under the high sun; taking pictures of the raccoon-size drone hovering overhead to film the festivities; negotiating trash barrels and cooler bags on the way to communion; lining up after Mass to venerate, with hands and kisses and iPhones, the Upper Canada edition of the Our Lady of Madhu statue; walking from booth to booth accepting gifts of cold bottled water and lukewarm spicy pastries from proud representatives of the Sri Lankan Canadian business community; and, eventually, making their way over to the cool dark shrine, both for a break from the heat and to pray.

PREVIOUS SPREAD A cross bearer from the procession (left), a visitor (right).

LEFT A procession of pilgrims led by a member of the order of the Knights of Columbus.

I kept wanting there to be more. I wanted the Sri Lankan Catholic globalized pilgrimage to rural Ontario to be fuller in every possible way—to be a wild, grand, polychromatic statement of an ongoing, intercontinental, intercultural, transhistorical, even cosmic drama of unified human experience in a fraught, fragmented, and mobile age, no less a drama that I had connections to through my own family and faith and life in Canada. It was what it was, just not what I imagined it would be; if anything, *I* was the source of the day feeling off-kilter. Everything and everyone fit in fine with everything and everyone else, just as they had last year, and last century, and will again this summer, and next summer, and next century.

One group kept catching my eye. Four young men were hanging around before Mass, lingering at the margins during Mass, then venerating statues in the Martyrs' Shrine after Mass. They were in their twenties, goateed, gold-chained, constantly checking their phones and swaggering around in new running shoes and untucked sports jerseys. So far as I could tell, they were here together and on their own. They hadn't come to the shrine because their mothers or grandmothers had guilted them into the car that morning or because their entrepreneurial aunties needed help setting up a food tent or, had they been a little older, because their wives were insisting this was something good to do together as a family. They had come of their own accord.

These four young men were the last people you'd expect to see at a religious pilgrimage north of Toronto. I think they knew it too. After declining to be photographed, they bro-swaggered their way out of the church. I watched them disappear around a cornerstone, and then the story my father told me of his last pilgrimage to Our Lady of Madhu in Sri Lanka gyred into focus. It took place fifty years ago, in 1970. This was his triumphant first return trip to Ceylon after immigrating to Canada in 1967. Upon arriving, at the start of his summer break as a high-school chemistry teacher, he learned that his mother had already arranged for him to join the pilgrimage to Madhu. "So you went?" I asked, imagining how out-of-place he would have seemed, a twenty-eight-year-old bachelor in Age of Aquarius bell-bottoms praying among the sarong- and sari- and slack-wearing pilgrims of Ceylon. "I did." Another memory swerves in front. "My cousin also went…with his girlfriend…in a sports car…a Karmann Ghia."

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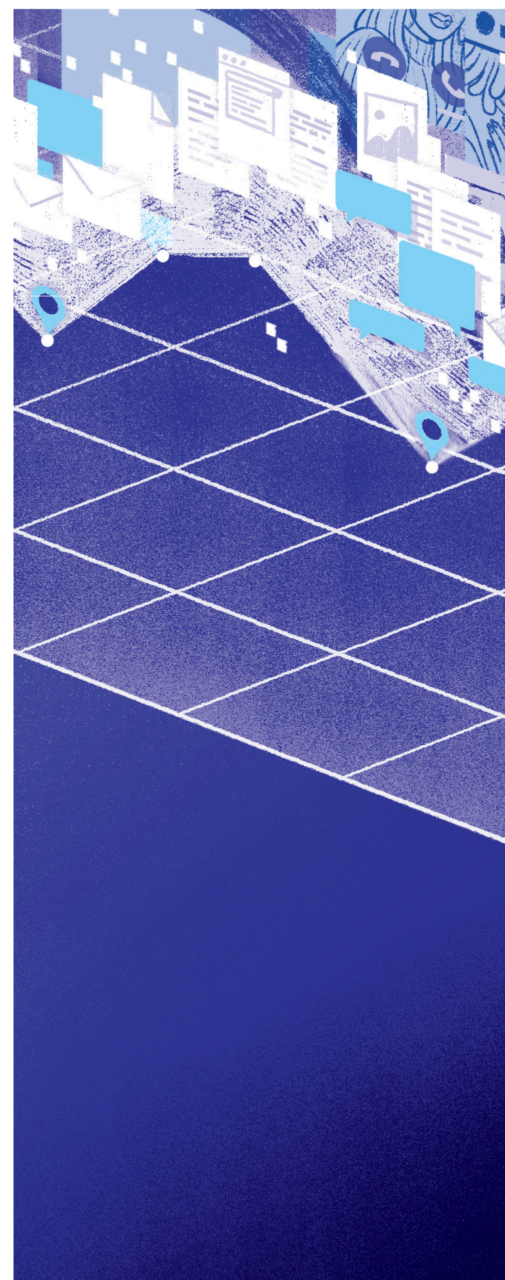
TECHNOLOGY

The Digital Afterlife

The ongoing legal battle to decide who owns our data after we die

BY BRIAN J. BARTH
ILLUSTRATIONS BY CRISTIAN FOWLIE

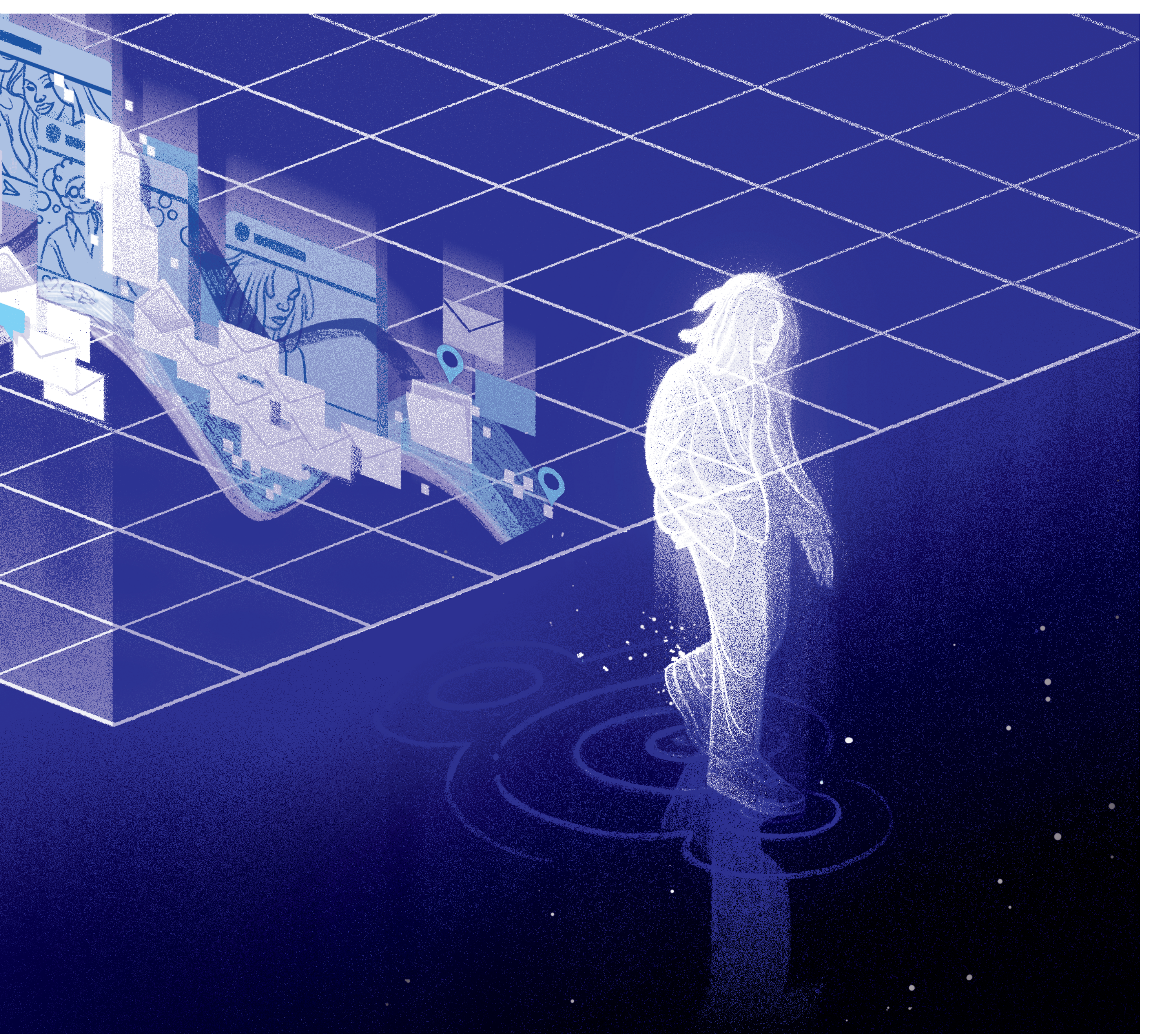


DOVI HENRY, a poet and University of Toronto French major, had been missing for more than two months when his body washed up at an Ontario Place marina in July 2014. Naked except for a pair of threadbare socks, the corpse had decomposed to the point that race and sex were not immediately apparent. The coroner's office was unable to determine the cause of death.

For roughly the next two years, the unidentified remains lay in repose at a Toronto morgue while Dovi's mother, Maureen Henry, did all the things one does when their child goes missing: notified the police, contacted his friends, combed the streets, grieved. There were small leads—one friend thought Dovi might have gone to Germany—but nothing panned out.

In April 2016, Henry googled "unclaimed black male remains." The search turned up the website of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Missing Persons and Unidentified Bodies Unit—and a listing that seemed like a possible match. She called the OPP, and after examining Dovi's dental records, a forensic dentist confirmed it.

The following month, the family held a memorial at the Mercury Lounge, the Ottawa venue where Dovi had joined friends at a poetry reading on May 5, 2014—his twenty-third birthday. This was the last known time he was seen alive. A tall, slim man, Dovi grew up in



Ottawa, where he attended a program for gifted students. According to Henry, he was known as a sensitive person who connected easily with others. At the University of Toronto, he joined the Delta Upsilon fraternity. By 2012, Dovi's second year, his friends, family, and frat brothers noticed significant changes in his demeanour. He became erratic, argumentative, depressed. That year, he decided to take a break from school and returned to Ottawa, where he worked as a tutor and gave poetry readings at night. At times, he appeared disturbed and incoherent. In January 2014, he moved back to Toronto, where he may have occasionally eaten meals at a Salvation Army shelter during the period leading up to his death.

But, having found her son's body, Henry was not ready to close the book on his life. There were too many unanswered questions. Though the coroner had been unable to determine a cause of death, the police told Henry they considered it a suicide and refused her request for a homicide investigation. Henry believes foul play may have been involved. In 2009, she says, she received a phone call from someone threatening to kill Dovi; she also says that, around the same time, her other son, Osita, received a Facebook message making the same threat about his brother. In March 2014, in one of the last emails he exchanged with his mother before he disappeared, Dovi said that "someone tried to kill me." The family hired a private investigator, who learned of a drug debt from 2012. (Dovi smoked pot regularly and may have used other substances.) The investigator also interviewed several members of Delta Upsilon, one of whom stated that "Dovi had gotten in with the wrong people" and "would bring strange people to the house."

In 2017, hoping to gain insight into Dovi's final months at the frat house, his mother asked the Toronto police if they

could obtain access to Dovi's phone and digital accounts. They told her they did not believe they had grounds to apply for a search warrant but said she was welcome to go to court and attempt to persuade a judge herself.

She did, and in October 2017, Henry received a court order directing Bell, Facebook, and the Canadian subsidiaries of Apple and Google to provide her with access to Dovi's accounts. Persuading the judge turned out to be the easy part; enforcing the court order was another matter. Bell readily complied, as did Apple, unlocking Dovi's phone. Neither yielded useful information as he had not been using his phone at the time of his death. (He'd left it at his aunt's house in Toronto before disappearing.) In fact, when the phone was opened, more than three years after Dovi had last used it, his Facebook and Google accounts were logged out; he had visited an internet café while without his phone and may have changed his passwords. Facebook and Google, however, have yet to comply with the ruling.

Lacking funds to hire a lawyer, Henry, an occasional teacher, has represented herself in court for the past two-and-a-half years, facing attorneys from both tech giants. She refuses to back down. The court fight remains her best tool for finding the truth, but Henry also sees it as a struggle to reclaim her son's humanity from Silicon Valley servers.

For big tech companies, our collective digital lives are valuable marketing data—data that fuels the sale of ads personally designed for and delivered to each of us based on detailed "psychographic" profiles generated by algorithms. But it's unclear what happens to those digital lives after we die. Should digital assets remain under the lock and key of a corporation? Or should they be inheritable by our next of kin—just as physical assets are now?

This is the legal quandary posed by Henry's case. The judge determined she was entitled to Dovi's passwords, which would give her access to not just his messages but a trove of other data that the companies make available to users, including location information, search history, IP addresses, ads clicked on, purchases, voice commands, and more—a rich, intimate picture that likely includes details one might not readily share, even with their closest family members and friends.

As Dovi's personal representative in the matter, Henry—as estate lawyers often put it—"steps into the shoes of the deceased." It's the standard legal procedure for settling a family member's estate, but it's also one that takes on new meaning in the digital age. While it's easy to sympathize with Henry's need to find out what happened to her son, her potentially precedent-setting case raises the question of where to draw the line for others who seek to step into similar shoes. Planning for postmortem access to digital assets and accounts is becoming increasingly common among estate lawyers—you can specify who gets access to what. But what about when a young person dies without a will? It's not hard to imagine reasons why the deceased may not want their next of kin peering into their digital history. Under what circumstances should a grieving parent or spouse have that right?

The average Canadian values their digital assets at $32,000. Our descendants shouldn't have to forfeit them.

OUR EVERYTHING-DIGITAL era has made it easier to preserve every last scrap of information about our lives, but eventually, many of us will have to face the question of who really controls our photo albums, letters, diaries, and other personal mementoes stored in the cloud or on password-protected hard drives. As it is, tech companies do not readily hand over passwords or account contents to third parties upon request, including family members of the deceased. Terms-of-service agreements generally prohibit it. Tech companies also contend that privacy laws prevent them from doing so. But a growing number of court cases in jurisdictions around the world, often involving parents whose children have perished under mysterious circumstances, have begun to push back against this reading of the law.

In Germany, the parents of a fifteen-year-old girl who was hit by a train in 2012 sued Facebook for access to her account in hopes of determining whether their daughter's death had been a suicide or an accident. The precedent-setting case went to Germany's highest court, which ruled in 2018 that "online data" was no different from "private letters or diaries," and thus a social network account automatically passes to the next of kin upon death (unless the person's will specifies otherwise).

Similar cases in the US have tested the boundaries between privacy and inheritability. After a fifteen-year-old boy killed himself near his family's farm in Virginia, his parents spent a year attempting, unsuccessfully, to gain access to his Facebook account in the hopes of gaining insight into his inner life. Their plight sparked the Virginia legislature to pass a bill in 2013 that provides parents access to the online accounts of deceased minors.

The US Uniform Law Commission—an association tasked with determining which state laws should be adopted across the country—drafted a bill that would have extended those rights to any executor of an estate, regardless of the age of the deceased. But then Silicon Valley lobbyists got involved. After the bill was introduced by twenty-six state legislatures from 2014 to 2015, a business association that included Facebook, Google, and other internet companies began pushing an alternative version, which would require fiduciaries to get court orders to access deceased persons' accounts. The bill's proponents

ultimately caved to the pressure and introduced the Revised Uniform Fiduciary Access to Digital Assets Act (RUFADAA), a watered-down law that hews more closely to the internet companies' proposals. The legislation has since been adopted in forty-four states.

Canadians who find themselves in Henry's shoes, or who simply want access to their deceased loved ones' photos and iTunes songs, confront a different set of legal hurdles: a federal privacy law that is murky on the question of fiduciary access. In 2016, in an effort to clear up the issue, the Uniform Law Conference of Canada (ULCC) drafted the Uniform Act on Fiduciary Access to Digital Assets (UAFADA). Unlike the similarly acronymized American law, the Canadian version provides default access to online assets wherever a fiduciary would already have access to physical assets.

John Gregory, former president of the ULCC, says that, in theory, there is no need for laws like UAFADA and RUFADAA. The Western legal system has never really differentiated between tangible and intangible assets, so information stored online should be treated as an inheritance no different from documents in a filing cabinet or safe deposit box. The purpose of the Canadian version, he says, is to avoid complex and costly court cases by making explicit how that old-fashioned legal principle applies in a modern digital context.

The implications go far beyond rare, heart-wrenching cases like Henry's. A 2013 survey by digital-security company McAfee found that the average Canadian valued their digital assets—which include entertainment files, such as music, TV shows, e-books, and video games—at around $32,000. According to Gregory, our descendants shouldn't have to forfeit those assets. "Back in the eighteenth century, they weren't thinking of my magic sword in *World of Warcraft*, which I could sell on eBay," he says. Nevertheless, digital assets "are still assets, and if they're monetizable, I think the trustee should get them."

To date, no provincial or territorial legislature has enacted the bill. (Alberta has its own version, which gives fiduciaries

access in limited circumstances.) But, even if the provinces and territories were to adopt UAFADA, it might not be much help to the Henry family and others in their position: when the company holding a deceased relative's data is based in the US, as most large internet companies are, then the question of who controls one's digital afterlife is, ultimately, a matter of geopolitical chess.

As cases like Henry's stack up, they threaten to redefine the default rules of the data economy. Every lawsuit by a distressed family seeking access to a loved one's account is a threat, a crack in the regulatory wall that protects internet companies' core assets—our data.

And corporations will go to great lengths to protect that data. In November 2017, Google Canada, which Henry had named in her lawsuit, informed her that it had no power to provide Dovi's account information, which resided with its mother company in the US. After amending the court order to include Google and Alphabet, Google's parent company, Henry was told they wouldn't provide the information without a US court order because doing so would put them in violation of the Stored Communications

Act, a US law that regulates the disclosure of personal information held by internet companies.

A David-and-Goliath fracas ensued. In August 2018, Google presented the court with testimony from Albert Gidari, an American internet-law expert, detailing the reasons why Google could not provide Dovi's account information unless Henry could prove in a US court that "her son provided consent to such disclosure." With the help of pro bono lawyers at the courthouse office, Henry responded with a written cross-examination of the expert and an analysis of *Ajemian v. Yahoo!, Inc.*, a closely watched US case in which the court held that providing the family of John Ajemian (who died in a cycling accident) with the contents of his Yahoo account would not violate the Stored Communications Act. In 2018, Yahoo appealed to the Supreme Court, which declined to hear the case.

In her critique, Henry assailed Google's expert for implying that American laws have "endless extraterritorial application over the rest of the world." Should anyone seeking data belonging to a deceased relative be forced to travel from wherever in the world they reside and navigate the US court system to obtain this small courtesy from the overlords of Silicon Valley? In their response, Google's lawyers noted that Henry "has no US legal expertise or training" and characterized her critique as "an improper, inflammatory, and unfounded attack."

At least Google responded. Facebook ignored the court order altogether, forcing Henry to file a motion of contempt, which would compel the court to enforce the order against the company. Last September, I attended the contempt hearing at the Ontario Superior Court, in Ottawa, with Henry, whom I found sitting outside the courtroom with her daughter, Anikamadhu, and a couple of Dovi's friends who had come to lend support. A lawyer for Facebook soon arrived, greeting Henry awkwardly in his barrister's robe.

The bailiff opened the door and we filed into the courtroom. After everyone was settled, Facebook's lawyer, Gabriel Poliquin, rose to address the judge and said he had only been hired the week before and was seeking a postponement of the hearing because the company never received the original court order documents. Henry's face tightened as she stood to respond. She produced a stack of postal receipts from a large envelope and held them up to the judge—the court order documents "were delivered and signed for," she said, explaining that a different lawyer, named Elisabeth Neelin, had contacted her on Facebook's behalf in December 2017 regarding the case. "If Facebook had not received those documents, how would Ms. Neelin have been able to contact me?" she asked in a quiet, determined voice. "I would like to proceed with my motion."

The judge, Justice Stanley Kershman, was not the same as the one who had heard the case previously, and he spent several minutes shuffling through stacks of documents on his bench, attempting to familiarize himself with the details. Eventually he concluded that, regardless of whether Facebook had received the documents from Henry, she had failed to file some of the paperwork correctly and would have to redo it. In other words, back to square one—before she could file a motion of contempt, Facebook would have the opportunity once again to respond to the original court order, prolonging the battle.

As Kershman was wrapping up, one of Dovi's relatives, a tall, thin man in a three-piece suit, asked to speak. He wanted the court to provide reassurances that Facebook was actually taking the case seriously. The social network, he said, "is making a mockery of all of this. Facebook has billions of dollars. Facebook is able to keep us in court for years and years. Facebook has ignored what we are saying as if we are just some small ants." He continued, his voice rising. "Facebook is really doing something here that is not respectful of the Canadian legal system." Unmoved, Kershman said none of that negated the paperwork requirements and dismissed the court.

But, in general, Canadian judges seem to be sympathetic to the family's view. The premise that American tech companies are not subject to foreign authorities has recently been called into doubt by Canadian courts. As part of a London, Ontario, homicide case, a judge ruled that Facebook Canada had to turn over data to Canadian investigators even though that data was held in the US. A British Columbia case involving Craigslist, which does not have a Canadian subsidiary but operates in the country, determined that the company must provide data requested by Canadian authorities nonetheless.

Jill Presser, a privacy-law expert in Toronto, says that, while not every Canadian court case involving cross-jurisdictional access to data produced by Canadians has reached the same conclusion, current case law, on balance, "says it doesn't really matter where the data's located. What matters is whether the court has jurisdiction over the corporation that has possession of the data." Canadian courts, she says, have determined that "commercial decisions made by tech companies about where to store their data shouldn't be permitted to"—in the elegant parlance of legalese—"frustrate the administration of justice."

US courts have made similar rulings, and in 2018, Congress passed the Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data Act, which gives American law enforcement agencies increased powers to access US citizens' digital accounts held on overseas servers. Canada has yet to enact a corollary, says Presser.

Ultimately, it's a diplomatic issue—Canadian authorities may have to rely on their US counterparts to enforce legal action across the border. Even with the power of the Canadian legal system on Henry's side, Silicon Valley seems to be winning.

TECH COMPANIES hold tremendous power as gatekeepers of our online lives. But the gates, of course, have a purpose: privacy. Historically, legal scholars have concluded that privacy rights are extinguished upon death. However, some privacy advocates think that concept needs to be updated for the digital age. Ann Cavoukian, the former Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, sympathizes with

the Henry family but worries about the precedent a case like theirs could set. "When people have very sensitive activities taking place in their lives—in terms of personal history, sexual orientation, activities that their family members may not be aware of—surely that should be protected if that is the wish of the individual. If they were protecting it during their life, why would they want that shared afterward?"

When my grandmother passed away, two years ago, my family and I spent days sifting through her belongings, reading letters and thousands of other personal documents. Had we emptied her drawers without her permission while she was still alive, it would have felt like a violation of privacy. But this felt like a rite of passage. It was an emotional experience, a part of finding closure, but also a practical matter. We had decisions to make about what to keep and what to dispose of—which required knowing what was there. And executors of someone's estate have a duty to close bank accounts, notify creditors, settle debts, disconnect utility services, and so on, all of which requires access to sensitive information.

Jill Presser, the privacy lawyer, doesn't think it's ethically or legally defensible to transpose that scenario onto those whose lives have been, from an early age, tracked and recorded by internet platforms. Born in 1915, my grandmother was in her eighties when personal computers became standard in every home, and she had never used the internet when she died. Our digital footprints are far greater in scope and often more personally revealing than the tangible records that remain when we depart this world, Presser says. The smartphones in our pockets generally know where we are and more or less what we're doing most of the time. Much of our communication with others is preserved, which means that their privacy would also be at stake if our digital legacies were exposed.

"We're having conversations digitally that we used to only have orally, so when you look at someone's digital legacy, you are seeing things that, in many cases, would not have been available to you before, even when you read your mom's correspondence or diary," says Presser. "It used to be that mom would go to the library and nobody knew what she was reading; now you can go online and see her search history. It used to be that, if you had some really hot love letters, you could tear them up, burn them, or shred them; but now we leave digital traces that are almost impossible to delete. We can't assume that, just because we've got a blood relationship or a marriage tie to somebody, we should automatically be entitled, after they die, to look at everything they've ever done online."

Presser agrees that legislation is needed in Canada but doesn't think the ULCC's bill to provide default fiduciary access is the right approach. For her, it's more a question of where the lines should be drawn—executors of an estate gaining access to the deceased's online banking information for the purposes of settling the estate is one thing; access to a lifetime's worth of digital communication, web searches, and location information is another.

"The old rule that our right to privacy doesn't survive us really needs to be rethought," says Presser. "On the one hand, privacy has to remain a core value. On the other hand, there has to be the ability for a family member to chase down details of a loved one's untimely passing or otherwise gain closure when a family member passes away. It kind of tugs in two directions." She thinks it's premature to enact legislation. First, she says, "we need to have a more nuanced, in-depth conversation about what the legislative framework would look like."

John Gregory, the former ULCC president, sees such privacy concerns as overstated. The trustees of one's estate may have access to sensitive personal information, but they are legally bound to act in accordance with that person's wishes; or, in cases where a person dies without a will, in their best interest. As fiduciaries, they have no right to distribute that information or to enrich themselves from it, he says. "If my trustee goes into the back of my sock drawer and finds all my love letters from my mistresses, or my pornography collection, or whatever it is I don't want anyone else to see, they don't get to talk it around at the cocktail party. They have an obligation of secrecy. The privacy interest is protected by the law governing the trustee, so it doesn't have to be governed by the law applicable to the internet service provider."

John Wunderlich, a Toronto-based privacy consultant and digital entrepreneur, is concerned that the digital-legacy privacy debate obscures a more pressing issue: "Grandma's diary is no longer a book sitting in the attic—it's Facebook property. After her death, it's not her children who would inherit the rights to it. That's a profound, profound change."

That may sound like hyperbole, but access is arguably a proxy for ownership, and if a law prevents one from accessing something they own, such as an inheritance, their property rights have been effectively transferred to the gatekeeper—in Wunderlich's view, that's the world in which we now live, at least according to the internet platforms' interpretation of the law. The platforms' position, however, is that they are simply following laws meant to protect privacy.

"*Please*," exclaims Wunderlich. "How many billions do these companies spend on lobbyists? I'm all in favour of corporations following the rules, but with big industries, you always have to worry about regulatory capture. These are new industries—very large, very wealthy—and the regulations haven't caught up."

"The whole thing stems from a failure of our legal systems to catch up with the idea of digital identity."

Martha Flaherty
Cultural Ambassador

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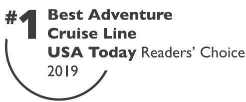

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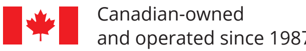
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In Wunderlich's view, the industry is not interested in protecting privacy so much as the value of the data it gleans from users. In the case of the Henry family, he says, "If the son had control of his digital identity, his mother could have inherited that and could exercise it in the same way that an executor exercises any other rights after death. I think the whole thing stems from a failure of our legal systems to catch up with the idea of digital identity."

HENRY'S TUSSLE with Google came to a head at a hearing last April, when she says the judge suggested it might be more expeditious to seek a US court order, as the company had asked, rather than fight them in Canada. She is currently pursuing that in California, where a similar case is unfolding—the family of Daphne Caruana Galizia, the Maltese journalist who became known for her lead role in the Panama Papers investigation before being killed by a car bomb in 2017, is seeking the contents of her Google account. Henry is hoping the case sets a successful precedent for her own.

She is awaiting Facebook's response in Ottawa, but a company spokesperson told me their position is the same as Google's—the Stored Communication Act ties their hands—so it seems possible that Henry will need to revive her motion for contempt. Then it would be a matter of enforcing the order on an American company. There are established procedures for doing so, says Robert Currie, a law professor at Dalhousie University's Schulich School of Law, but it's a lengthy and complex process—in other words, the legal fees are substantial. "We've got lots of experience with getting Canadian court orders enforced across borders. Legally, it's not a big deal, but it's expensive." I asked him if there was any chance a nonlawyer representing themselves in court could pull it off. "Oh—no, never."

What Henry lacks in financial resources and legal knowledge, she makes up for in perseverance. She's written letters to members of Parliament but so far has received little more than condolences in return. The office of Navdeep Bains, the minister of innovation, science, and industry, replied: "The Government of Canada expects organizations to comply with the laws of the countries in which they operate." But, "regrettably," it said, it was "not in a position to bring about a resolution to the matters you have described."

Dovi's digital assets remain locked in American server farms, but he did leave behind physical items that have offered the family a measure of solace. These include notebooks filled with handwritten poetry. With the help of one of Dovi's literary friends, Henry gathered a selection of his poems into a book, which she plans to self-publish—a long-time dream of her son's. Titled *Winter through Windows*, the volume portrays a version of Dovi that was never monetized by an algorithm and that his family didn't have to go to court to obtain: a young man, yearning to see the sublime in mundane corners of life, for whom the world was "paradise, with us in it."

BRIAN J. BARTH's work has appeared in publications including *The New Yorker*, the *Washington Post*, and *Mother Jones*.

"A must-read for fans of Zadie Smith."
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THIS LOVELY CITY
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FICTION

Shelter Seekers

BY GEORGINA BEATY
ILLUSTRATION BY WENTING LI

DEAR SCHOLARSHIP LIAISON OFFICER:

The $4,000 Daniel White Foreign Study Scholarship, administered through the government of Canada, funded three months in Argentina to study how one region is adapting its approach to housing in the interest of sustainability. This research was in support of my MA thesis in sociocultural anthropology. Though unconventional in form, long overdue, and in excess of the stipulated two-page limit, the final report that follows does, as required, account for my Research Activities, Problems Encountered, and Outcomes Achieved.

Leah Powell or Olivia Simon or whichever scholarship liaison officer is now managing this email account (and, if Ms. Powell or Ms. Simon have moved on, please convey my gratitude for their efficient and impersonal correspondence over the course of my tenure as award holder), I failed. The money is gone.

However, Article 3.6 in the Award Holder's Guide states that, "despite advance preparations, the researcher may not know where the search will lead." It is on this basis that I submit the following report. I hope you will deem I have, in a manner, reckoned with shelter in the Anthropocene.

MONTH ONE

I FLEW TO PATAGONIA as planned ($1,297). From the window of the plane, the needle-thin points of mountains punctured the clouds. Somewhere down there was the small community where I was to be a participant-observer. I would join a team of researchers measuring the climatic impact of different building methods. I belted in for landing, the Award Holder's Guide open on my lap. A monochrome portrait of Daniel White, the promising young anthropologist in whose honour my scholarship had been named, beamed up at me. A confirmation. I flipped a few pages and read: "Because it seeks to understand the unknown, field research often entails risk."

We descended into a densely forested valley, the shadow of the plane tracking over a preternaturally blue lake. I was prepared for any eventuality. I had packed my tent, camp stove, and sleeping bag. I imagined building clay houses, then nights by the fire after long days, drinking Fernet and Coke with the team. I even considered that, out of contact with my husband and immersed in fieldwork, I might feel a situational attraction to one of the impassioned, brilliant researchers in my proximity. I would not act on this attraction. I would comport myself like the Daniel White Foreign Study Scholarship recipient I was.

"People will be interested in your work as soon as you say 'Patagonia,'" said Dr. Felix Hernandez, my host-supervisor, who met me at the airport. "There's something people love about this place." He heaved my backpack into his trunk. "The nature, the mystery." He looked about my father's age, with wire-rimmed glasses and an elbow-patched cardigan. He drove me to his self-made home, built not of clay, as I'd expected, but of wood. The house was set into a hill, which a rambling garden climbed. He pulled a plum from a tree and offered it to me.

On his deck, beans bubbled away in a homemade solar cooker, sun through glass. Inside, the home was open concept, more as a matter of function than aesthetic. The floors were unfinished plywood. A kitchen occupied one corner, counters cluttered, seeds germinating in wet paper towel, a terrarium of crickets chirping (insects which, he later explained, he would grind to make protein-rich flour).

Hernandez's desk was stacked with papers, scientific journals, and books with gold-embossed titles (*A Tale of Two Cities*, *Hard Times*). In English (kept up, he explained, by reading Dickens), he bemoaned that people here protested gas prices but neglected to insulate their homes. "Mosquito minds!" he exclaimed. "Look." He pulled a piece of paper—a gas bill—from atop the pile, tapping where a column of zeros added up to one larger, bolded zero. "I insulate, and I haven't had to turn on the gas this year. But no one cares about the truth of the data!" He waved his hand as if the numbers were a swarm of gnats. "This is why we need you. Social science! You tell the story and people will care." His eyes were bright behind his glasses. "Have you read *Great Expectations*?"

I had not.

FOR LUNCH, Hernandez made huevos revueltos and fried up a squat zapallito until it glowed neon yellow. We talked

about our lives. It turned out that he had a son about my age who lived in San Francisco, and the son's wife was about to have their first child.

"Incredible!" I said, perhaps too loud.

(Leah, Olivia, though it may be impolitic to mention in a scholarship report, I wanted a baby. I wanted one as soon as possible—immediately, yesterday, and definitely upon my return home. I did not advertise this. In fact, I had discomfited many a dinner party by mentioning how irresponsible it was, at a climatic level, to bring children into the world.)

Hernandez showed me to the small bachelor place he'd found for me to rent ($1,500 over three months), an uninsulated addition behind a rural medical clinic. There was a hot plate and a single carcinogenic-looking pan, a little half bathroom, and a shower stall, minimal but operational. The murmur of consultations filtered through the wall.

There was no Wi-Fi, but I could text my husband, little thirty-five-cent blips, and I did, to say "Miss you!" to mitigate any pain of separation, which I assumed he might feel more than I, given that he was home and I abroad.

That night, I couldn't sleep. A dog began barking at 2 a.m. and others followed, high-pitched yips and low drawn-out howls. The next day, I noted the construction sites on either side of the clinic, empty but for the dogs (I counted six). I assumed they had been left to guard the lots, which seemed to entail constantly barking at invisible threats. Any silence over the coming months was filled with anticipatory dread of the next volley, which soon began.

By the end of week three, I couldn't understand why I'd yet to meet the team. I looked over our email history: Hernandez had indeed used the word *equipo*. Maybe I had further trust to gain before I would garner an invitation. I decided to be direct. I asked, "Where is the team?"

Veronica was now based in Chile, he said, and it was a shame I'd just missed Hugo, who was now studying the carbon emissions of different diets in northern Mexico. He gave me articles from various team members on the climatic impact of various activities necessary to life.

"Quando van a regresar?" *When they come back?*

"Come back where?" he asked, taking a bag of frozen crickets from his freezer.

It turned out that the "team" I had imagined was really just individual doctoral students, each supervised by Hernandez from afar. No nights around the fire. No houses to build. No romance. I maintained the bearing of an award holder: I did not show the disappointment whipping itself into small peaks of despair. Hernandez announced that he would be going to Santiago for a week to lobby politicians to mandate home insulation. There was still the town, ten kilometres away. I thought I could adapt.

Every piece of trash could just as well have been mine — my impact laid out, each item prefiguring its loss.

I went to the social-housing office, the independent radio station, and the library, asking, "Que haces el frente de cambio climático?" *What do you do in front of climate change?*

Most people looked at me as though I had asked what they were doing to prepare for the unicorn invasion. Finally I met Enrique, a subsistence farmer who had built his home on the side of a mountain. It had white plaster walls and dirt floors—a gradation rather than a threshold between outside and in. He told me that, on the farm, they were not so much making new decisions because of climate change as they were maintaining a traditional, low-impact way of life. He and his wife, Luz, gave me a tour of the property, the back of which overlooked a valley and the mountains beyond. This was a place where access to beauty was not yet predicated on wealth.

Luz invited me to stay with them for the night. "I'm going to be a participant-observer!" I texted my husband, who responded with three thumbs up.

Research Activity: Enrique and I slopped his pigs. The hogs were so big they seemed like prehistoric megafauna. I had to beat them back with a stick to get the food in their trough. They barked and snapped; they did not oink.

Enrique told me that, though there was corruption in Argentina, there was also liberty, community. They could put out a call on Facebook for building supplies—one person might have a door, another a window—and a house could rise from the dirt within a week.

As I lay awake on their sofa that night, everything felt possible. I texted baby names to my husband. "Wilde. Luz."

"You want to name our children Loose and Wild?"

I thought of him, of home, of his worn-out waffle-knit pyjamas.

"I miss you," I texted. And I did, Leah, Olivia, acutely, but I believe a Problem Encountered is that I erroneously equated the feeling of *missing*, which requires absence, with *love*, which demands, from time to time, presence.

(Leah, Olivia, to address an unexpected outcome, the marriage doesn't make it, which, I mean, anything can happen to a relationship, nothing is guaranteed, and the Daniel White Foreign Study Scholarship is just what happened to this one. I don't want you to think I'm holding this out as some kind of excuse, though I may bring it up from time to time as I continue to account for the ways I have failed to live up to the government of Canada, the memory of Daniel White, and you.)

MONTH TWO

I JUST NEEDED another, say, six case studies to justify the scholarship. I went looking, but people were just living their lives, making their individual decisions—there was no grand, coordinated approach to climate change, a problem people were not perceiving on a daily basis.

Hernandez returned and had me over for lunch. "Mosquito minds!" By and large, he told me, the people of Chile would rather get new wood-burning stoves (terrible for the environment but tangible, physically present) than better insulation (hidden within walls and therefore suspect). "I can't wait to see how you will turn the data into a story," he said, as if that had always been the plan, as if he was waiting for me to do the world's shittiest magic trick: transubstantiation of charts on climatic impact into *Great Expectations*. I don't mean to cast aspersions on Hernandez—any and all failings were entirely mine. I just did not know how to respond.

As we ate, I tried to keep saying *sí* at regular intervals to indicate attention. There had been a windstorm the previous night, branches thwacked the window of my room, the electricity fritzed, and the dogs hadn't stopped for a moment. Awake in the night, I'd turned to the Award Holder's Guide. At the back, following the glossary and endnotes, was a finely printed paragraph disclosing that Daniel White, beloved alumnus, had abruptly cut his first postgraduate field study short by taking his own life.

"You're working too hard." Hernandez knocked on the table. I snapped awake, having slipped on a patch of sleep. I wondered what he imagined I'd been doing. Six weeks in and so little to show. "You're young," he added. "Enjoy yourself. There's more to life than work."

I did not feel young. I asked if he had any more articles from the team.

I CAME UP WITH a new plan. I would write about Hernandez and his efforts to change his fellow citizens' "mosquito minds." Using his system, I would calculate my own climatic impact as a starting point, then I would use my research to communicate how anyone could calculate and shrink theirs.

I did note in the Award Holder's Guide that "the agency must approve any changes to the proposed activity." I did not send an update. I was not scared of you, Leah, Olivia, but of your function. I worried that, if I raised the spectre of deviation, another scholarship liaison officer would be introduced, a Rachel, and she would demand I repay the $4,000 immediately, which would leave me stranded in Patagonia—dogs still barking.

I texted my husband about the change in approach. He sent emojis of several hearts echoing off of one another, a pirate-ghost, a volcano, a dinosaur, a penguin. I found his enthusiasm and randomness hard to integrate and turned my phone off, not understanding that lack of action could also have an impact.

Consulting a pile of Hernandez's articles, I calculated my own annual carbon output. I expected to be on the low end, but it turned out that I was above average. I had nullified every low-emissions aspect of my life (poverty, veganism, nihilism) by accepting the Daniel White Foreign Study Scholarship and the travel it entailed.

Another sleepless night. I wondered what my impact would be if I poisoned the dogs. I imagined it would be a good thing, climatically speaking, given that pets add significantly to one's carbon footprint.

Around this time, Leah, Olivia, I spent $40 of my scholarship on the data

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required to google your names, which led me to your respective LinkedIn profiles and allowed me to see that you, Leah, have an undergraduate degree in philosophy and you, Olivia, an MA in public policy. I thought back to the email in which I'd sent my flight confirmation. Olivia, you had signed off with, "Have a great day!" I wondered if you might actually want to hear how it was going, if you might have some advice. I wanted to go home but couldn't countenance the two flights, three tonnes of CO_2 released into the atmosphere, to return empty handed. And a child? A further 1,500 tonnes.

Which was when I used more data to dial. And yes, I had drunk a beer, a one-litre bottle. I called the number listed in the Award Holder's Guide and encountered a labyrinthine welcome menu. While waiting for an option in the vicinity of my needs, I looked at Hernandez's article on the carbon output of different home-construction methods. The overall calculation took everything into account, including the carbon embodied by each worker's lunch, which is greater for methods that require more exertion, which require workers to consume more calories, which generally means a greater impact.

I opened a second beer and entered the first three digits of your respective surnames into the directory, but the system didn't seem to recognize them. Or maybe liaison officers aren't listed, to protect them from the intimacy seeking of award holders, and I do understand.

I felt better after the beer. I spotted an opening in Hernandez's method, a way of going deeper, of calculating impact at the most detailed level. The next day, Hernandez invited me for lunch, but I declined. Suddenly, I had a great deal of work to do.

MONTH THREE

LEAH, OLIVIA, I WOULD note that, in the Award Holder's Guide, there are allowances for pregnancy, allowances for an increase in carbon emissions, for beginnings, for growth, but there are no allowances for the diminishing of one's impact, for things falling apart. I wonder how Daniel White would feel about the way his legacy has been fed into the machine of infinite growth.

I calculated the climatic effect of each and every thought, of blinking, shitting, sobbing, and alternatively the effect of repressing a feeling. I worked day and night. What I didn't understand was how to account for the variables. What about an effect on another person that may cause them to take action, any number of actions, which then has an environmental impact, positive or negative?

If, for instance, my husband sends an email listing ten things he likes about me and I respond with, "I will talk when the work is done," and he says, "The work will never be done," and I send a tickertape of baby names, "Juniper, Willa, Roxanne, Lemon," and he replies, "How about you come home first?" and those messages zing between two hemispheres, what is the net effect of the choices he or I make in response, whether it's sleeping an average of four hours a night (as I did) or texting streams of emojis with no context (as he did) or continually travelling away from home and living in an eternal future in which I will be better and

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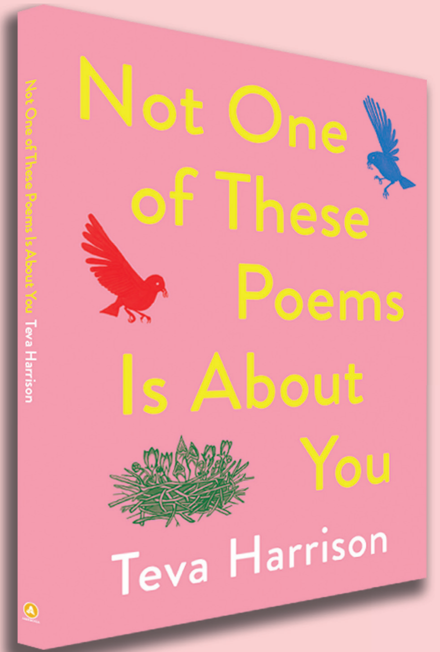

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— Shelagh Rogers, O.C., host and producer of *The Next Chapter*, CBC Radio

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more conscientious but only after I've finished being the Daniel White Foreign Study Scholarship award holder? Can one feel and feel, and will it all be climatically neutral as long as no action is taken and the feelings are not imposed on another?

Our effects, it turns out, are infinite and infinitesimal. Everything can be broken down into smaller and smaller units. I was lying very still in the grass, considering the carbon implications of different deaths, natural and unnatural, when Hernandez appeared in the back yard and yelled, "Get in the car!"

Suddenly, I noticed a stinging and looked down to find my arms flecked with ash. My pages of calculations scattered in the wind. Metres from where I lay, a rock the size of a baby's head bashed through the roof of my rented room.

Hernandez drove us back to his place, by which time it was raining tiny stone darts. We dashed from the car to the cellar. A volcano had gone off in Chile, he said, launching into a story about how Indigenous peoples had known not to settle here—Chilean volcanoes tend to deposit their debris on the Argentinian side of the mountains—but, of course, the colonizers thought they knew better and built anyway. "They thought the word *border* would be enough." I thought of the word *marriage*.

Hernandez rummaged around in the cold room for some food and wine, and we ate by flashlight. His daughter-in-law had gone into labour that morning, but there was no cell service down here, no way to check in.

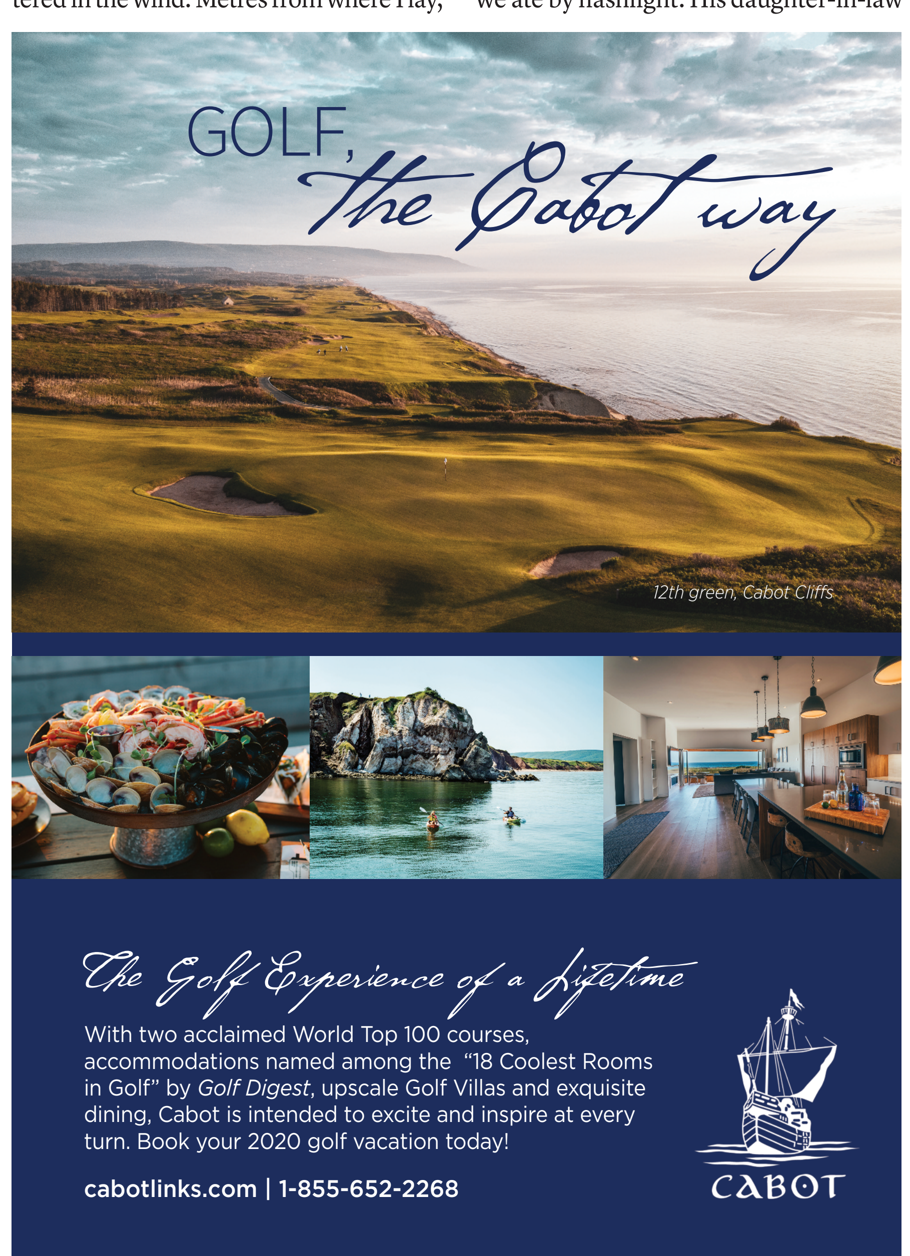
"How is the work going?" he asked. I hadn't spoken to another person in three weeks.

"No sé." I was still half-tracking my impact as I opened a jar of pickled beans. Anything greater than zero felt like failure.

He nodded, as if he'd always known the research was fruitless, his as much as mine. He drank his wine. "I can't wait to retire and work in my garden," he said. He told me an Argentine saying about how to have a good life: "Tener un hijo, plantar un àrbol, escribir un libro." *Have a child, plant a tree, write a book.*

The flashlight began to dim as the battery faded. Child, tree, book.

Problem Encountered: a tree cannot absorb the impact of the other two.



WHEN WE EMERGED from the cellar, it felt like time had stopped. The world was washed of colour, not so much white as blank, no distinction between sky and ground, horizon and lake.

For the first time as an award holder, I felt free. Any and all expectation was wiped away. We were in a vacuum: yell, kick, do your worst. The world was unreactive; any impact would be absorbed; nothing was too much.

I packed up and ignored the further rent paid on the apartment. I set out on a long dirt road, toward the bus terminal. The countryside was deserted, the feeling of a snow day, suspension, smoke in the air. The tall roadside grass was strewn with ash-covered trash: diapers, plastic bags, candy wrappers, a lone sock, half a sofa. Every piece of garbage seemed like it could just as well be mine—my impact laid out, each item prefiguring its loss.

I looked down to find a passport, navy blue on the grey-white ash. My photo was inside. All my nerve endings retracted in panic. I distinctly recalled zipping it securely into my pack. I gripped it tightly for the rest of the walk, but it still seemed possible to look down and find it gone.

Just before I reached the terminal, at the side of the road, the bottom quarter

of a dead dog protruded from a large black garbage bag. The red plastic tie on the bag cinched around the body in a bow. I wondered whether this was one of the dogs from next door, whether I had willed its death somehow, whether the diaper way back was mine too—from a baby I'd forgotten somewhere or from one I'd forgotten to have.

According to the Award Holder's Guide, "it is sometimes difficult to ascertain the beginning and end of a qualitative research project." This was not my experience. The wind whipped up the fine volcanic ash, particulate coating my lungs. I closed my eyes and let go of Daniel White, allowing him to move on to the next award holder.

MY RESEARCH leads me to conclude that a society that would make decisions on the sole basis of carbon impact is not healthier but is a collective of slip-thin nudists dwelling in cocoon-like sacs hung from the ceiling of a large communal room. They do not speak and deny all relationships—no love or hate—too much energy. They don't exercise and they subsist on vegetable broth.

Articles advising people against children or pets or meat and dairy if they care about climate change are provocative enough, but honestly, the best way to minimize one's impact is to cease to be alive. However, I've yet to read anything in the *Guardian* titled "Save the Planet: Kill Yourself," and I suspect this is an unacceptable conclusion for the government of Canada as well.

Leah, Olivia, this is not to assign blame, but if I had unrealistic expectations, I would gently posit that there is something about the scholarship-application format that encourages overreaching ambition, an idealized version of what is possible. I could have failed in an interesting way. I could have gone rogue, become a fringe survivalist, or travelled to Italy and taken a lover, spent $4,000 on hedonism and beauty. Instead, I just fell short. To atone to you, the government, and the memory of Daniel White, I propose a repayment plan—$33 a month for the next decade.

WHEN I FINALLY charged my phone, there were five minutes of dings, messages piling up. There had been flooding back home, and my husband had been dealing with all our possessions: water damaged, lost. I looked at the timestamps—it had happened five days earlier.

"Sorry," I texted. "Can I do anything?" He called and the real-time ringing felt electric.

"Where have you been?"

"Working."

"Jesus. Do you ever think about how your actions affect other people?"

"Yes," was all I could say.

GEORGINA BEATY's short fiction has been published in the *New England Review*, *The Fiddlehead*, *The Puritan*, and *Plenitude*. Her short story collection *The Party Is Here* is forthcoming from Freehand Books. She is based in Toronto.

Stick

BY M. TRAVIS LANE

"Bend like water; like water, bite."
Advice. But what am I?
A stick tossed on the current. I
can't bend, can't bite, can't
mark my way.

I've had my green leaves and my bloom.
Now dry, I sense the pull
of oceans I can't navigate,
nor can I choose one threaded flow
among the rocks, muds, effluent,

but like a stick a child has thrown
into a river, I bob and turn—
thrown, and thrown away.

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ARTS

Poetic Justice

Twenty-seven years after her death, Bronwen Wallace's poetry feels newly relevant in the #MeToo era

BY ANITA LAHEY

IN EARLY JANUARY 2017, sixty-nine-year-old Robert Francis was sentenced for the long-term abuse of his common-law wife of forty-five years. As reported in the *Kingston Whig-Standard*, Francis's extraordinary brutality had left his wife with multiple skull and rib fractures, at least one broken arm that hadn't been set, cauliflower ears worthy of an old-time boxer, and scars on her arms and feet from what appeared to be cigarette burns. The violence had possibly contributed to brain damage so profound she could no longer speak.

During the sentencing, Crown attorney Jennifer Ferguson adopted a highly unusual tactic—exhibiting verse as evidence. The poem offered up was, according to Ferguson, based on an incident in the life of Francis's wife, whose home, in the judge's words, appeared "to have been a torture chamber." Ferguson read aloud from a passage that included the following:

> This is for Ruth,
> brought in by the police
> from Hotel Dieu emergency
> eyes swollen shut, broken jaw wired
> and eighteen stitches closing one ear.
> This
> is what a man might do
> if his wife talked during the 6 o'clock
> news.
> "And I knew better," she tells us softly,
> "I guess I just forgot myself."
> Tomorrow she may go back to him
> ("He didn't mean it, he's a good man
> really"), but tonight she sits up with me
> drinking coffee through a straw.

Written by the late Kingston author Bronwen Wallace, these lines could be viewed as a type of reporting: they draw on Wallace's experiences as a counsellor at the local chapter of Interval House, a shelter for women and children. For the extract to resurface a full twenty-seven years after her untimely death from cancer, in 1989, and play a role in the sentencing of a man convicted of domestic abuse is a remarkable testament to Wallace's legacy as both a feminist and a fierce literary voice. Wallace used her poetry in a way that was then radical and today remains all too relevant: to bear

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witness and to nudge society toward something more livable and more fair.

Laudably, she didn't sacrifice her craft in the process. On the contrary: to read "Intervals," the long poem from which the court evidence was obtained, in company with the rest of her work in the new *Collected Poems of Bronwen Wallace*, is to be reminded why Wallace, by the time she died at the age of forty-four—only nine years into her publishing career—was being credited with fashioning something new. In disarming lines that make for addictive reading, she had successfully turned traditional poetic narrative, with its often distant, masculine voice and straight-ahead plot, on its head.

Edited and introduced by Carolyn Smart, Wallace's friend and fellow poet, the 389-page *Collected Poems* brings together Wallace's complete poetic output—the four books she published during her rapid literary ascent, the posthumous collection *Keep That Candle Burning Bright and Other Poems*, and some early unpublished work. Wallace was thirty-five when her first book appeared, in 1980, a co-publication with Montreal poet Mary di Michele called *Marrying into the Family*. (Her age is important to note: it's why the RBC Bronwen Wallace Award for Emerging Writers, which the Writers' Trust of Canada distributes annually, is for authors under thirty-five.) "To read the poems as they are collected here," writes Smart in her engaging introduction, "is to trace the journey of a writer discovering her own strengths."

Wallace was a storyteller. "When I think of the reader," she once said, "she or he is not on this side of the poem while I'm on the other side. The reader stands beside me, and we're reading the poem together." Her loping lines reenact the way conversation can happen between women, how they might take a plot point and circle it, examining every angle and tangentially related anecdote, until some truth or possibility comes momentarily into focus. Tumbling down almost every page of the *Collected Poems* is a succession of urgent divulgences, unanswerable questions, and criss-crossing observations and speculations, all of which made her, according to poet and critic Gary Geddes, "an archaeologist of the emotions."

Her poems, both in subject and style, ring powerfully amidst the #MeToo movement and the growing chorus of female voices around us. Italian author and pseudonymous sensation Elena Ferrante, with her series *The Neapolitan Quartet*, may have spurred an international shift with regards to the attention paid—and import granted—to friendship between women, but it's a shift that Wallace quietly set the stage for here in Canada almost four decades ago. Reading Wallace is a reminder that the sources of these complex conversations run deep—generations deep. As Smart writes, Wallace's "poems will welcome those who didn't know her to a voice that speaks to any decade."

The physical settings of Wallace's poems are homes in which the brutal elements of existence can be studied with fierce attention.

I FIRST encountered Wallace's poetry in 2000, through a gift of her second book, *Signs of the Former Tenant*. I was hypnotized by the evening light in "Red Light, Green Light," the book's opening poem, how it "seemed to round and soften" the day's heat and "gathered the sounds" of the children playing into itself. I loved how the narrator in "I Like to Believe My Life" wanted her life to be like a story, "slowly tidying itself." I moved on to other books, other poems, such as "Coming Through" (from her third volume, *Common Magic*), with its equating of a friend to a "country," which sets up the moving metaphor that the loss of such a friend can lead one into a kind of exile. I feel at home amid her juxtaposition of indoors and outdoors, her homely streetscapes, her ever-present neighbours and gathering friends. But it isn't nostalgia that ties me to these poems any more than it was nostalgia that propelled Wallace. Instead, as one reviewer wrote in 1989, Wallace was drawn to "the violent intrusions that disturb the surface of everyday life."

A striking percentage of Wallace's poems incorporate kitchens. In fact, if you add in porches, gardens, living rooms, and neighbourhood streets, her entire oeuvre could be heaped onto that pile of so-called domestic verse. But don't be fooled—life and death face off daily in these kitchens, the fallout griming countertops and caking onto pots. The physical settings of Wallace's poems seem comfortable for a reason: they function as homes in which the brutal elements of existence can be studied with fierce attention. Thrilling (read: meaningful, brave, productive) conversations between friends don't require mountaintops or war zones—they thrive in deceptively placid settings, where restless hands brush aside crumbs while the worst of life's torments are explored:

> What I love
> is how these stories try to explain
> the fit of things, though I can see
> your mood's for something more
> sinister.
> Like the reason Diane Arbus gave
> for photographing freaks, maybe?
> "Aristocrats," she called them,
> "they've already passed their test in life."
> Being born with their trauma, that is,
> while the rest of us must sit around,
> dreading it.
> Meaning you and me. *Normal*. Look
> at us,
> practically wizened with worry,
> hunched
> over coffee cups, whispering of cancer
> and divorce

As much as she was a writer, Wallace was also a feminist in the activist sense. She helped run a women's bookstore in Windsor, where she lived during the 1970s. After moving back to Kingston in the 1980s, she became involved with Interval House and taught writing at Queen's University. She wrote a feminist column for the *Kingston Whig-Standard*. She once spoke for abortion rights in the House of Commons alongside a group of

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women who chained themselves in protest. In a talk she gave in 1987, she spoke of the day when, as a student twenty-one years prior, she'd attended her first meeting about the "women's movement." She recalled, "For me, that meeting represented the first time I had ever been in a room full of women talking *consciously* about their lives, trying to make sense of them, trying to see how the unique and private anecdotes became part of a story that gave each of our lives a public and collective meaning as well."

Coming up a full generation behind Wallace, I can claim no corresponding turning point. What I remember, as far back as memory goes, is my mother and her friends, my cousins, and me and my own friends talking in exactly that way, fully engaged in sharing and examining the events of our lives, their contexts and substrata, seeking sense and meaning. It's a gripping, lifelong, all-in kind of project. It's exactly what Wallace undertook in her poems: not to represent or mimic these conversations, not to make of them metaphors but to stage them in verse, to extract from them a form—and perhaps a new way of being in the world.

Wallace's message is that poetry needs to accommodate the untidiness, the open-ended possibilities, of women's perspectives.

On page one of "A Simple Poem for Virginia Woolf," Wallace's attempt at "a salute" to Woolf is thwarted when her use of an egg as a metaphor reminds her of dirty frying pans and whether there are enough eggs left for breakfast. It's a short hop to the price of children's snowsuits, broken zippers, the daily hustle out the door. At first, it feels obvious, this interruption: of course the details of managing the household intrude on the female poet's mind just when she's paying homage to the very author who declared that a woman requires a room of her own in order to shut that clatter out. But follow Wallace's plain words—some chopped, some stretching across the page—and you'll arrive at a moment when the narrator confesses crying in the hospital parking lot, kicking a dent in her car's fender after being turned away from intensive care, where her friend lies in critical condition, because "the friendship of women / wasn't mentioned / in hospital policy."

It's hard to pinpoint the turn, but that's not to say it feels out of place. This is just how intimate exchanges veer from the broadly philosophical to the keenly personal and back. It has to do with the poem's failed effort to separate words "from the lives they come from." Wallace's message, in part, is that such efforts are misguided and that poetry needs to be prepared to accommodate the untidiness, the open-ended possibilities, of women's perspectives.

To have Wallace's poetic output gathered in this clean, full volume is a gift to readers and poets, likewise to CanLit and feminist scholars. In his obituary for Wallace in the *Globe and Mail*, Dennis Lee called her "new poetic instrument" a "folk-art form" and bowed down to her nerve as a "sophisticated" writer in taking that innovation on. Of her poems' narrative underpinning, he wrote, in admiration of their complete disregard for conventional storylines, "Mostly the plots consist of vivid, unresolved middles." Consider "Ruth" with eighteen stitches, sipping her coffee through a straw, who, tomorrow, "may go back to him."

What other resolutions might that plot have had than its tragic end: the woman now bedridden and in long-term care? It's such as-yet-unrealized endings—some not quite so dramatically different from the status quo but no less significant—that Wallace's poems, through their weaving of evidence into art, remind us to look for and aim to create.

ANITA LAHEY's most recent book is *The Last Goldfish: A True Tale of Friendship*.

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Empty Nesters

First we bonded over our unusual pets. Then we bonded over butchering them

BY YASUKO THANH

I'D DO ANYTHING for love. My boyfriend, Shon, bought a shotgun house in Princeton, BC, on the traditional territory of the Upper Similkameen people. I'm learning to love the small town, roughly four hours by car from Vancouver Island, where I live. I'm learning to see beauty in the old copper mine and the abandoned cabins that stand in waist-high weeds, though I've always had more of an affinity for cities. Concrete. Hard, even surfaces that leave nothing to the imagination.

When I visit Shon, he gives me pointers on catching frogs and grins when I plop one into the bucket with my bare hands.

He has a penchant for unusual pets. "Chickens," he said one day. By then, we'd co-parented four crows, a water beetle, and a Rocky Mountain wood tick we kept in a pill bottle. He asked if I had seen the photos he'd sent me. "They're *so* cute. You're going to love them."

We returned to his place late one afternoon with the first two chicks in a thrift store cage. I named them Eyeliner and Crybaby because Eyeliner looked made up and Crybaby's black markings reminded me of tear-drop tattoos. Shon's idea of a joke was to name the third Drumstick, the fourth Satan, and the next three after world dictators.

As with alcohol, when it comes to chickens, it can be hard to know when to stop. The next twenty birds, acquired over the following weeks, didn't have names. They never would get names.

The yard was soon a mess of uprooted bean plants and trampled peas. The backyard pond, once crystal clear, was now murky and empty of frogs, which had been swallowed whole by another of Shon's additions, two mandarin ducks.

Princeton is a down-to-earth town: people live and let live, but everyone draws the line somewhere. A zoning bylaw draws it at roosters. We were shocked awake one morning by cock-a-doodle-doos. We thought—had been conned into thinking—we'd bought only hens.

We stared at our two dozen dilemmas as they ripped apart the tomato bed. We couldn't keep them but also couldn't rehouse them.

"I'm too hungry to think," I said. The words left my mouth unironically, yet here I was, knee-deep in chickens, wondering what to make for lunch.

Suddenly, our plan was as clear as the pond had once been.

That afternoon, we gathered what we'd need for the task ahead. Armed with YouTube instruction, we set a table out in the yard. We found a garbage can lid in which to collect the blood. String with which to hang. A large white sheet, which we spread over the grass by the burn pit. Next to that, a pot of freshly boiled water. Everything was ready as Shon grabbed the first victim, Satan. Despite my misgivings—thinking soothing thoughts about the things we do for love—I held down the squawking bird while he beheaded it. Next came Mao, then Stalin, and later those without names, each tied upside down by their feet afterward, to the lowest branch of a small hazel tree.

Shon looked at his favourite, the rooster with the most stunning plumage, whom he'd at one point talked about keeping in a cage in his Vancouver apartment.

"You want the honours?" I asked.

He shook his head. "It's okay."

I didn't look into the bird's eyes, only at a precise spot on his neck. I decapitated the rooster as swiftly and efficiently as I could. Otherwise I might have ended up like Shon, who met the rooster's gaze and later lamented, "Did you see the way he looked at me?"

We plunged them into the water and brought them to the sheet, where we sat cross-legged in the sun and plucked. After we had cleaned and butchered the birds, I packaged the meat—minus that night's dinner—and, not without some satisfaction, which I imagined every homesteader must feel, placed the packages side by side in the deep-freeze.

Now, when I think back on that day, defrosting a leg or a breast in the sink, I wonder: Had I betrayed the trust of birds who saw me as their human friend? Should there have been love there too? But balance requires counterbalance, and not all love weighs equally. What we do for love is not always loving. The scales are constantly in flux.

YASUKO THANH is a novelist and short story writer based in BC. Her bestselling memoir, *Mistakes to Run With*, was published last year.

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