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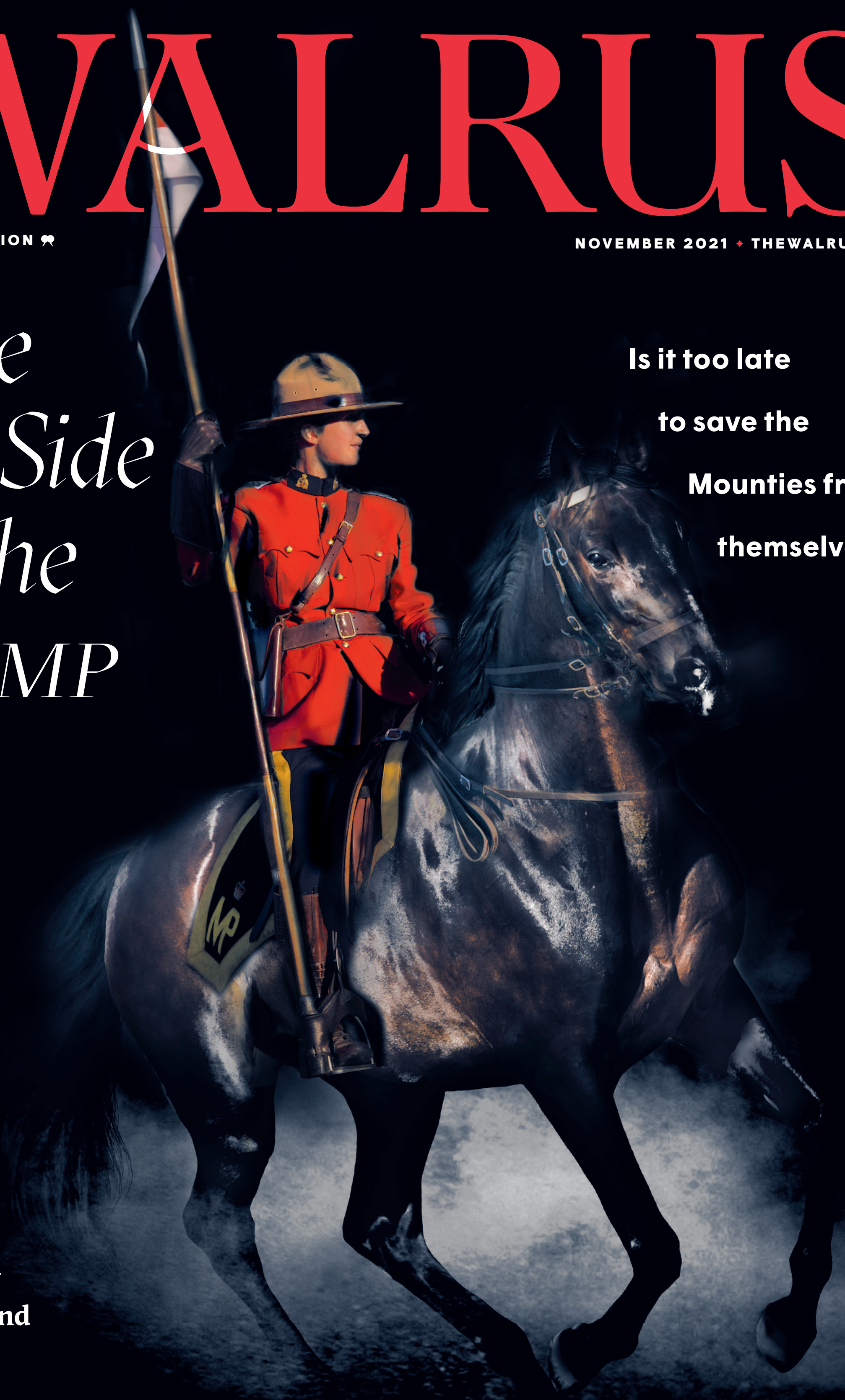

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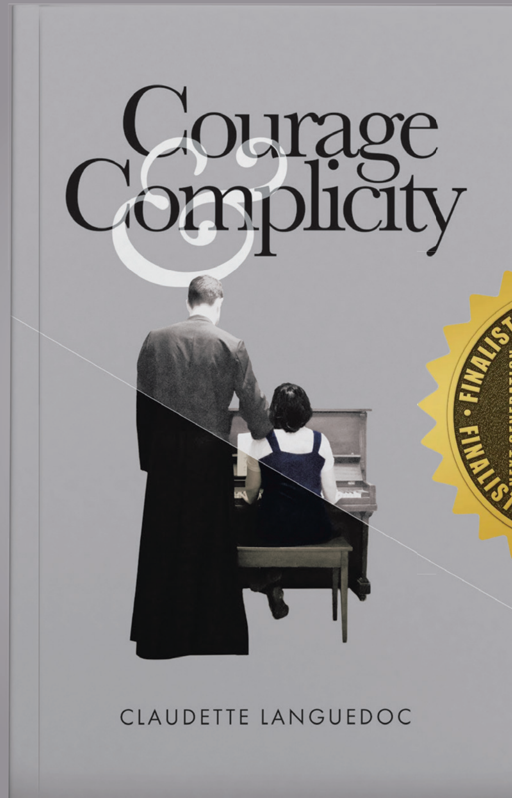

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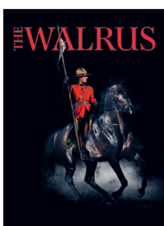

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Photo illustration by Paul Kim

Paul Kim is the design director at The Walrus.

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THE WALRUS

411 Richmond Street East, Suite B15,
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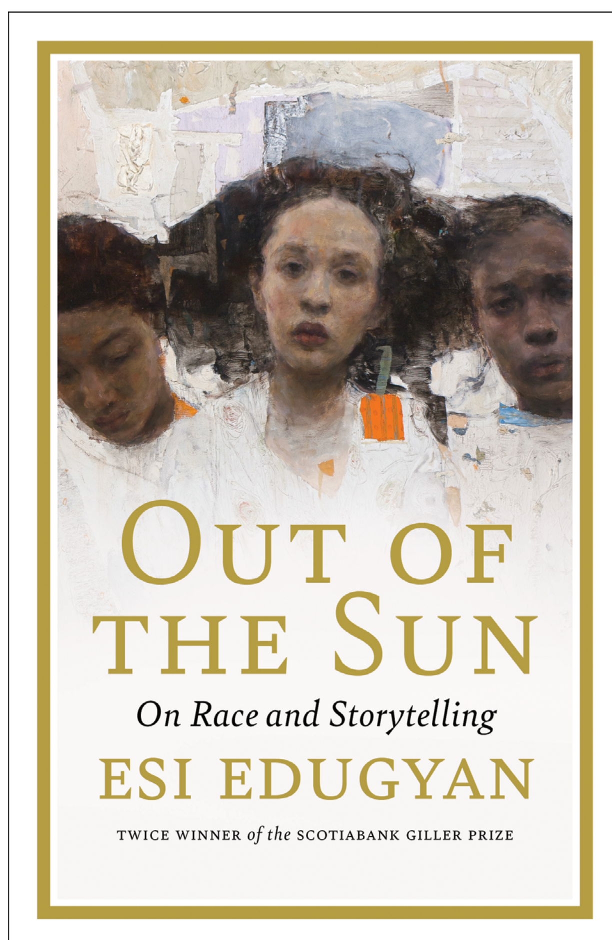
An insightful exploration and moving meditation on identity, art, and belonging from the two-time Scotiabank Giller prize winner and internationally bestselling author of *Washington Black*



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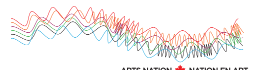

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Standing on Guard for Canada

When disaster strikes—from wildfires to floods to public health emergencies—the partners from Team Rubicon Canada and the Labatt Disaster Relief Program are ready to serve communities in crisis **BY TINA ANSON MINE**

"THE BEAST" WAS where it all started. On May 1, 2016, the historic Fort McMurray wildfire began burning in Alberta, eventually destroying nearly 1.5 million acres of boreal forest, homes, and industrial work camps. Watching in horror as the blaze grew to unheard-of proportions, earning its ferocious moniker, a small group of Canadian military veterans saw an opportunity to do their part on a grand scale.

By May 26, 2016, the group had set up Team Rubicon Canada, a disaster-response organization that now boasts a membership of 2,000-plus "Canadian veterans, first responders, and kick-ass civilians." It then deployed a volunteer team for its first mission, Operation Pay Dirt, to the Fort McMurray frontlines.

"Team Rubicon serves communities by mobilizing veterans to continue their service, leveraging their skills and experience to help people prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and humanitarian crises," says Ashley Pardy-Serre, director of development for Team Rubicon Canada. Known as Greyshirts, for their uniform, volunteers from across the country donate their time and specialized skills, domestically and overseas, in an effort to create what she calls "the most trusted, agile, and adaptive disaster-response organization in Canada."

The group's recruiting ethos may sound tongue in cheek—"Team Rubicon Canada looks for volunteers who are foolish enough to think they can change the world and smart enough to have a chance"—but its members take missions seriously. In five years, they have served thousands of people in eight countries around the globe.

In 2020, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic offered fresh opportunities for Team Rubicon to extend a helping hand to Canadians—and a surprisingly eager pool of new recruits. "When many organizations were struggling to maintain their volunteer force, Team Rubicon Canada was growing ours," says Pardy-Serre. "This was due in large part to our capacity to continue safely serving communities...and our ability to pivot our services to meet the vulnerabilities and challenges we saw emerge."

In spring 2021, Team Rubicon Canada formed a partnership with the Labatt Breweries of Canada's Disaster Relief Program, which also deploys volunteer teams to disaster zones to deliver clean, safe drinking water to residents and frontline rescue workers. The partners' first mobilization came in August when teams reported for duty

Labatt Disaster Relief Program Deployments

Since 2012, the Labatt Disaster Relief Program has deployed from coast to coast, offering assistance during natural disasters and public health emergencies. Its volunteer teams have delivered more than 709,000 cans of safe drinking water to communities in crisis, and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, produced and distributed 100,000 bottles of hand sanitizer to Food Banks Canada, frontline employees, and partners in the food and beverage industry.

2013

Calgary, AB
(flooding)

2014

Manitoba
(flooding)

Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Alberta
(forest fires)

in and around the wildfire-ravaged community of Lytton, BC. From debris removal to personal effects recovery, Greyshirts helped residents recover what was left of their homes and clean the slate in preparation for rebuilding.

Meanwhile, Labatt employee volunteers hit the ground in Lytton with a first delivery of nearly 26,000 cans of emergency drinking water for residents and first responders around the 156-square-kilometre blaze. "Our employees are known for their generosity and spirit of community support," says Jeff Ryan, Labatt's vice-president of legal and corporate affairs. "Through this deployment, we and our Team Rubicon partners can stand shoulder-to-shoulder and really make a difference to the communities we serve."

Until this year, the Labatt Disaster Relief Program had focused solely on canning, transporting, and distributing clean drinking water in the aftermath of wildfires, floods, environmental disasters, and extreme weather. But in 2020, it retooled a bottling line in its London, Ont., brewery and began producing hand sanitizer—100,000 bottles of it—destined for use by Food Banks Canada, partners in the bar-and-restaurant sector, and its own frontline employees.

Meanwhile, Team Rubicon launched the nationwide Neighbours Helping Neighbours Initiative within a week of the first Canadian COVID-19 lockdown. It encouraged safe, physically distanced acts of kindness by Greyshirts in vulnerable communities. The program also offered logistical support for COVID-19 mobile testing and vaccination sites, and delivered food to community residents, while continuing to coordinate natural-disaster response missions.

The two groups had worked in parallel before—giving on-the-ground support to communities and first responders during the brutal BC wildfires in 2018—but they see this new collaboration as the perfect opportunity to take action on shared goals and ideals. "For Labatt, it's a natural extension of its support for Canadian servicepeople and veterans, which began in the mid-nineteenth century," says Ryan.

The 2021 wildfire season in Western Canada was a severe one. But the partnership "has huge potential," according to Pardy-Serre, when it comes to getting help where it needs to go. With support from Labatt, Team Rubicon volunteers can focus more of their time on delivering water and providing front-line support to those who need it most, rather than fundraising. "Volunteers are excited," she adds. "They can feel proud to bring essential resources to communities that need them." ■

Greyshirts in Action

8
Number of countries to which Team Rubicon veterans have deployed, with an initial response time of 24 hours or less

50+
Number of missions Team Rubicon has completed, rebuilding communities affected by disasters, including hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes

157
Number of days Team Rubicon members were deployed on operations, from January to August 2021

2,000+
Number of Canadian Team Rubicon volunteers enlisted to serve in times of need

20,000
Number of volunteer hours served by Team Rubicon members since the beginning of the pandemic, equalling more than $1 million in impact for communities

40,000+
Number of COVID-19 vaccinations facilitated by Team Rubicon in the first half of 2021

To learn more about Team Rubicon Canada, visit team-rubicon.ca or follow @TeamRubiconCAN on social media.

2016

Fort McMurray, AB
(wildfires)

Prince Albert, SK
(oil spill)

Halifax, NS
(drought)

2017

New Brunswick
(ice storm)

2018

New Brunswick
(flooding)

British Columbia
(wildfires)

2020

Toronto, ON
(COVID-19 relief)

Fort McMurray, AB
(COVID-19 relief)

2021

Lytton, BC
(wildfires)

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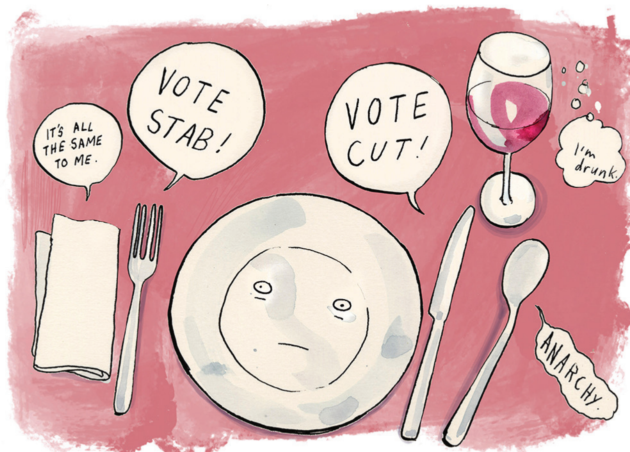
Editor's Letter

There's a tradition in my family that spouses don't tell each other whom they voted for. It was passed down from my grandfather, a political economist, and my mother taught it to me. The rule is meant to give those in close relationships permission to vote according to their own consciences. Not every member of my family abides by it, but I try to. At a time when social media discussion gets ugly all too easily, when dinner parties fall into awkward silence at the slightest political utterance, and when even the most respected media outlets seem dominated by sensationalist op-eds, the voting booth provides perhaps one of the few moments of ideological privacy we have.



The Walrus takes a similar approach to politics. The magazine's charitable nonprofit status was granted in 2005 under an educational mandate. According to the organization's founding documents, "While an article may involve a conclusion drawn from a reasoned analysis and balanced presentation of material facts, it must be generally free from significant bias." Ideally, the emphasis in our journalism is not on who is right about an issue or policy but on how and why individuals come to the conclusions they do. This doesn't mean the articles we publish aren't political, of course. But you won't find an endorsement for a candidate or political party in our pages.

A nonpartisan position may sound restrictive, but the policy has served us well. It's not simply because our audience includes readers from across the political spectrum but because we believe that good reporting transcends that spectrum. And, anyway, we tend to cover big-picture issues that go beyond the scope of one perspective and may well resist being resolved in any government's mandate. Increasingly evident throughout the pandemic, and especially in the weeks leading up to the September 20 federal election, is that the most significant challenges Canada faces—the climate crisis, pandemic recovery, economic inequality—will be with us regardless of who is in office.

Our cover story in this issue considers the future of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Few national symbols are as recognizable as Canada's Mounties, and in "The RCMP Revisited," Jane Gerster traces the force's evolution from a paramilitary established to displace Indigenous communities during Canada's westward expansion to its present-day status as an organization rocked by internal strife and external controversy. Can the RCMP be rehabilitated—in other words, can it be brought into the twenty-first century?

The actions of successive governments have contributed to the story of Deepan Budlakoti, a man who, despite having been born in Ottawa and twice issued a Canadian passport, is no longer considered a citizen by Canada—and has no place else to go. In "Citizen of Nowhere," Adnan Khan describes the social and political considerations that surround Budlakoti, a convicted criminal who has spent much of his adult life in and out of jail. Budlakoti's journey raises moral questions about our idea of what it means to belong. Does a country have an obligation to protect someone who doesn't live up to our ideal of citizenship? How far will we go to live up to the idea that "A Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian"?

"I want to like people again," says the narrator in "Liz Claiborne Sheets," a short story by Douglas Coupland. Humanity does not come out well in his darkly funny new collection, three stories from which appear in this issue. Coupland takes the subjects that divide us—COVID-19, gun control, the social construction of gender—and purées them in a blender. In caricaturing our missteps, the author of *Generation X* seems to suggest that no single institutional failure could have created the conditions on earth right now; the problem is us, the collective result of our individual decisions.

Like yours, no doubt, my world includes friends, family members, and colleagues who all hold different political views. That's why Thanksgiving dinner can get tense! At The Walrus, we've learned that, if something is worth arguing about, it's probably because it defies easy solutions. The answer to our next big crisis—or any of the crises we face right now—will require us not just to listen but to speak across the divide. That's an ability election cycles, with their easy soundbites and partisan shots, don't prioritize. But it's one that storytellers, with their desire to fill in missing context and explore misunderstood motivations, have long embodied.

—*Jessica Johnson*

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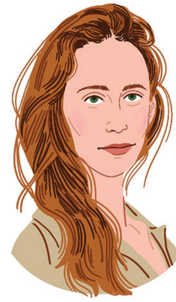

CHLOË ELLINGSON
Photography for "The Campus Mental Health Crisis," p. 32

"It can be really scary to be photographed. It requires so much trust because the subject never knows how their story is going to be reflected once it has been processed through another person's brain. But, whenever I take photos of people who have gone through extremely difficult things, as the students in this story about mental health on campuses have, I try to focus on their courage and resilience instead of reducing them to their struggles."

Chloë Ellingson is a documentary photographer based in Montreal and Toronto. Her work has been supported by the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, and The Magenta Foundation.

JANE GERSTER
"The RCMP Revisited," p. 44

"Back in 2015, I was looking into the unsolved murder of sixteen-year-old Krystle Knott, who was raised Métis and is from Duncan's First Nation. She had been missing for three years before the RCMP disclosed it to the public. I wondered why it had taken so long, and as I started doing research, I realized just how little I knew about how the most powerful police force in our country functions. It turned into a rabbit hole, and once I went down it, there was no getting out."

Jane Gerster is an independent reporter whose history of the RCMP, For the Good of the Force, *will be published by McClelland & Stewart in 2022.*

VIRGINIA KONCHAN
"Joyride," p. 50

"I wrote this poem, after Donald Trump left office, as a way of engaging with the post-truth era. We're living in a crisis of meaning, where fact gets pitted against fiction, but I think there's a role for poetry to play between those two extremes. Poetry is a felt truth, and while it may be associative, elliptical, and imaginative, that doesn't necessarily mean it's any less important than the news."

Virginia Konchan's work has appeared in The New Yorker, The New Republic, *and* The Believer. *Her third poetry collection,* Hallelujah Time, *is out with Véhicule Press this fall.*

ADNAN KHAN
"Citizen of Nowhere," p. 58

"The thing that interested me most about this story of a stateless man was how individuals and institutions interact and how people can get swallowed up by institutions that are supposed to protect them. It's a litmus test for Canadian values: we're really good at trumpeting multiculturalism and the greatness of Canadian citizenship, but here you have someone who is a citizen, by almost all accounts, and needs help, yet nobody in power wants to take a stand."

Adnan Khan is a Toronto-based writer. His debut novel, There Has to Be a Knife, *was published in 2019.*

JAMES LEE CHIAHAN
Illustration for "Citizen of Nowhere," p. 58

"As an artist, I prefer to work traditionally, on paper or canvas. There's something about the tactile, physical immediacy that makes me take more care and consideration with the creative decisions I make. When I paint, there's a permanence to each brush stroke—one you can't get when you're creating something digitally and can undo an action with two clicks of a button."

James Lee Chiahan is an artist based in Montreal. His past clients include The California Sunday Magazine, Emergence Magazine, *The Marshall Project, and The On Being Project.*

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Letters

HARD LESSONS

In "Students for Sale" (September/October), Nicholas Hune-Brown counters the commonly held belief that international students are privileged transplants by illuminating the crushing logistical, financial, and social hardships they face. As a former international student and a past reporter for The Canadian Press, I have also investigated these challenges and have come to similar conclusions. Throughout the pandemic, students arriving from developing countries have struggled to meet shifting vaccine requirements and have undertaken complex travel itineraries. While schools and governments show a keen willingness for students worldwide to return to Canada, they have offered limited support and information. Still, Hune-Brown leaves room for optimism, hopefully prompting a long-overdue conversation about the future of post-secondary education in Canada.

Rhythm Sachdeva
Toronto, ON

MORE IS MORE

Mireille Silcoff's "The Maximalist Home" (September/October), a defence of interior design trends that favour patterns and clutter, gave me comfort in my endless struggle to restrain creeping excess in my midcentury-modern apartment. Perhaps I can just let it go a little bit. Posted on my closet wall is a reassuring quote from interior designer Nicky Haslam: "I've never thought minimalism makes for much comfort. The space gets ruined by a stray piece of paper."

Michael Clague
Vancouver, BC

OFF THE MARK

Curtis Gillespie's profile of Mark Carney ("Mark Carney's Next Move," July/August) serves only to show that Carney is living in a fantasy world he was central in creating. During his tenure as governor of the Bank of Canada, Carney ushered in a housing bubble by cutting mortgage interest rates. And, while he was governor of the Bank of England, the gig economy proliferated, with workers requiring multiple jobs to make a living. We need to challenge Carney's legacy and the long-term damage his policies have wrought on Canadian and international economies.

Hendrik S. Weiler
Port Perry, ON

WATCH YOUR STEP

Reading Connor Garel's profile of artist Esmaa Mohamoud ("Taken for the Team," September/October), I felt fortunate to have been introduced to Mohamoud's work at her 2019 exhibition in London, Ontario, *To Play in the Face of Certain Defeat*, which grapples with themes of Blackness, sports, slavery, and gender. I heard the exhibition would feature a quote from Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and I spent much of my time at Museum London looking for the reference from Ellison's book on racism in twentieth-century America. Eventually, I realized that the quote had been laid out on the floor, designed to be intelligible only as guests were leaving the space. Below my feet read: "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.... When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me." When I realized that I had been effectively walking all over the statement, Mohamoud's message clicked for me. Garel writes that artists "don't care about your comfort"; nor, in spite of my embarrassment, do I think they should.

Laurel Martin
Winnipeg, MB

TUSK, TUSK

In the September/October issue, the article "Salmon Sickness" stated that Emiliano Di Cicco has researched PRV-associated diseases for the DFO in Nanaimo. In fact, he has collaborated with the DFO to research PRV-associated diseases in Nanaimo. The Walrus regrets the error.

"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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Listening to Learn

While much of the business world is just starting to wake up to the social injustices that surround us, Desjardins CEO Guy Cormier started paying attention years ago.

BY GLYNIS RATCLIFFE

If there's one thing Cormier knows, it's that he doesn't have all the answers. That's why the President and CEO of Desjardins spends so much of his time listening. But it's who he listens to that makes him unique among business leaders: he listens to young people and pays special heed to the social issues that matter to them. And then he takes action.

"You can't be on the sidelines, looking at the game without being on the ice right now," he says. "With the pandemic, we have a moment right now where we can press the reset button for a more inclusive, diversified economy and society for not only the next few years, but the next quarter century. We must work together."

Cormier believes Desjardins can be part of the solution—and he's not just talking the talk. Under his leadership, Desjardins has committed to climate change action by keeping operations carbon neutral, focusing infrastructure investments on renewable energy, reducing the carbon footprint of investments and setting a net zero emissions target. The company has also undertaken equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives, as evidenced by its commitments to the BlackNorth Initiative, participation on the Canadian Board Diversity Council (CBDC) and launch of the Empowering Women network.

The S in ESG

He's also a firm believer in the value of ESG (environmental, social and governance critiera). These standards are increasingly used by socially conscious investors to screen investments, and

Cormier considers these values intrinsic to Desjardins's co-operative model.

Desjardins was launched in 1900 by Alphonse Desjardins in response to a specific social injustice: French Canadians in Quebec were not allowed access to credit, or even to open their own bank accounts at the time. Finding solutions to social issues and long-term thinking is baked into the foundation of the co-operative model. Desjardins, across its business lines and across the country, remains true to its founding ideals of social justice, equity and sustainability.

"I'm always pleased to say that Alphonse Desjardins was a social entrepreneur 120 years ago, because that's what he was," Cormier says. "At that time it wasn't called ESG criteria. But the "S" in ESG was always really important."

He doesn't want his employees or the board to look at the results for the next quarter—he wants them to look at the results for the next quarter century. And the integration of ESG criteria does exactly that: it creates a focus on the future and on sustainable decisions.

"We, as business leaders, need to open our minds and listen to what they have to say. And not just listen—we have to give them more leeway to really influence us."

It's in their DNA

Cormier feels that the circular economy—what the federal government defines as a "way of doing business that retains and recovers as much value as possible from resources by reusing, repairing, refurbishing, remanufacturing, repurposing or recycling products and materials"—underpins how many young entrepreneurs do business. ESG isn't just a checklist; it's built into their DNA. Before they've launched their first product or service, they're already thinking about their company's social impact and how they can support other local businesses.

"These are the people who, in 40 years, will be managing our companies and will be our politicians," he says. "If we want to build a world that is better and stronger and more resilient, we must listen to what they want to say right now."

Cormier has prioritized young voices throughout his career at Desjardins, establishing a Youth Advisory Board when he was elected in 2016. The board is made up of 12 people aged 18 to 35 (four Desjardins employees, four cooperative members and four members from the Desjardins Young Intern Director program), each of whom serves a two-year term. During that time, they have access to the Desjardins board of directors and board of management and meet with Cormier four to six times a year to share what's on their minds. Most importantly, they participate in the decision-making process for all of the financial co-operative's projects.

"They've influenced so many of the decisions we made," Cormier says. "The people we already have in the room are great, but they were looking at problems through their own lenses; having someone from 18 to 35 in the room who is looking towards their own future helped influence decisions about climate change, technology, digital transformation, diversity and more. We, as business leaders, need to open our minds and listen to what the younger generation has to say. And not just listen—we have to give them more leeway to really influence us."

Change is coming, and Desjardins is listening to young voices to be part of that change. It's not a one-size-fits-all approach and it's not something that will be accomplished in one weekend—it's a step-by-step approach, according to Cormier. "I really feel that right now we are, as a society, looking at this roadmap for the next decade or the next quarter century, to see how we can build something that is more equitable for everyone." ■

SETTING THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

The business community can help young entrepreneurs achieve their goals. Guy Cormier explains how.

1

Listen.

Arranging to regularly meet with young people connected to your industry — whether they're consumers, participants, or young leaders themselves—can connect you to the lived reality of this generation, as well as their expectations. "It's so important to really listen and be open-minded when we receive this feedback," Cormier says.

2

Take action.

It's one thing to listen, but when business leaders then go on to throw barriers up before in order to avoid moving forward with suggestions, Cormier becomes frustrated. "We'll never be perfect," he says. "There's no overnight solution to these complex problems, so we have to have a step-by-step approach and try to be better."

3

Be committed.

Walking the walk means setting targets and actually trying to achieve them. "The younger generation—they're so clever, so fast, so quick," Cormier says, laughing. "They know within 30 seconds if you're faking it." They want to see companies and leaders that are really committed. Even if you don't solve every problem it's absolutely necessary to, at the very least, do what you set out to achieve and try to be better with every commitment you make.

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ENVIRONMENT

For the Love of Peat

Preserving Canada's wetlands may be our best defence against floods, wildfires, and a changing climate

BY EDWARD STRUZIK
ILLUSTRATION BY KYLE SCOTT

WHEN THE 2016 Horse River Fire began making its run toward Fort McMurray, wildfire fighters were shocked by its severity and speed. The region, once dominated by wet peatlands, had been drained to make way for a tree-planting experiment. As water was diverted, thick layers of peat—dominated by sphagnum moss, which can hold up to twenty-six times its dry weight in moisture—disappeared or were badly degraded. Thirsty, flammable stands of black spruce took over. The fire tore through the tinderbox of trees. "The Beast," as the wildfire was famously called, forced the evacuation of 88,000 people, at the last minute, through thick smoke and flying embers. While a natural peatland may not have halted the fire, it would have slowed or tempered the blaze.

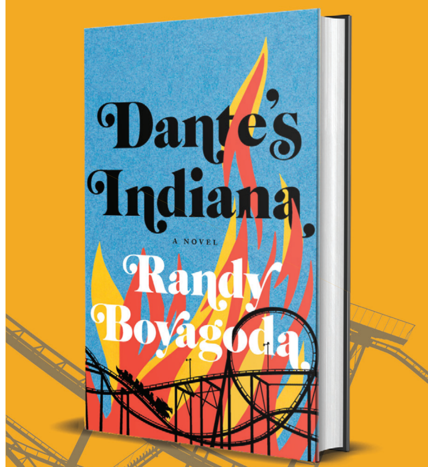
It was a classic example of unintended consequences—in this case, born from underestimating nature's genius. Canada holds between a quarter and a third of the world's peatlands, including acidic bogs and more alkaline fens as well as swamps and marshes. They can be found across the country, from British Columbia to the Northwest Territories to Nova Scotia, growing many metres deep into the ground. Due to their density of decomposed or decomposing plant material, one square metre of peatland in northern Canada holds approximately five times the amount of carbon as one square metre of tropical rainforest in the Amazon. But the country's peatlands have been so degraded by the construction of mines and hydroelectric dams, by oil-and-gas developments, and by urban expansion that we are losing an ecosystem crucial to the prevention of natural disasters such as forest fires—as well as destroying a key mitigator of climate change.

Peatlands have long been maligned. People have called swamp gases that glow at night "corpse candles," "will-o'-the-wisps," and "jack-o'-lanterns"—named for a man who, the story goes, sold his soul to the devil and was condemned to walk the bogs at night, carrying a lamp. For centuries, bogs around North America were drained to create agricultural lands; cut out of the earth, dried, and burned as fuel; or destroyed simply because bogs were believed to cause ill health in those who lived nearby. Into the twentieth century, doctors attributed malaria, cholera, and various chills and fevers to the miasma that emanates from these soggy lands.

Today, peat has become big business. Canada produces 1.3 million tonnes of peat annually, primarily by cutting it out of the ground in Quebec, New Brunswick, and the Prairie provinces. The country is also the world's top exporter of peat, much of which is used as a soil additive

"A *Divine Comedy* of our times ... Hysterically funny, but with an underlying sadness—such Heaven and Hell already coexist in America, and in this novel."

—John Irving, author of *The World According to Garp*



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by gardeners and farmers. Yet, despite peat's economic value, cities and utility companies across the country often face few repercussions for draining or degrading vast peatlands for residential developments, the construction of seismic lines and well pads, and the mining of bitumen—even though the federal government and some provinces demand that these projects don't negatively affect wetland functionality. In the Hudson Bay Lowlands, which are the second-largest contiguous peatlands in the world, the so-called Ring of Fire—approximately 13,000 active mining claim units held by eighteen companies and individuals—threatens to release massive amounts of carbon from approximately 325,000 square kilometres of peatland. In Labrador, not only will the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project inundate and destroy peatlands, but its transmission lines will slice through 1,731 fens and bogs. In an environmental impact statement, Nalcor Energy (now under Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro) claimed that "it is not practical" to assess the functional value of these peatlands.

It may not be practical for companies to consider, but the degradation of peatlands will mean the loss of the many virtues these ecosystems offer. Peat is the filter that separates microbes and contaminants from the water that most Canadians drink. In the 1980s, botanist William Niering challenged the prevailing view that peaty fens and bogs were waterlogged wastelands by calling them the kidneys of the landscape—a crucial organ of our environment. Peat also acts as a giant sponge, absorbing moisture when mountain rivers swell and flood their banks, as Alberta's Elbow and Bow Rivers did, catastrophically, in 2013. The worst flood in Calgary's history was so damaging because most of the peatlands in and around the city that might have sopped up some of the water had been drained to make way for residential developments. The flood would have been worse had alpine forests and intact peatlands, like the Sibbald fen, upstream in the Rocky Mountains, not held back as much water as they did.

In Canada, a small cadre of scientists has become masters at accumulating peat in degraded fens and bogs, such as the one in the Lac Saint-Jean region of Quebec. In the 1990s, Johnson & Johnson extracted from the area to produce a peat-based sanitary pad that was sold in eighty-five countries. When the company shut down the operation as its environmental messaging began to fail, it turned to peatland ecologist Line Rochefort, a former student of Dale Vitt, one of the first to successfully restore a fen in Canada.

Growing peat on land where the top layers have been extracted is not that complicated. It begins with what Rochefort describes as "building the basement before slapping on bricks and wood." Mosses are the cement she uses to build the foundation of that basement: sphagnum for bogs, brown mosses for fens. "Once you have the foundation for the basement in place," she says, "the rest will come." The rest includes edible mushrooms and wild blueberries, rare moths and butterflies, carnivorous orchids, woodland caribou, tree-climbing turtles, and countless more ecological features. Peat takes time to accumulate—as much time as a tree growing to maturity—but it keeps growing steadily while trees eventually slow down. And, unlike trees, which become vulnerable with age, peat layers that grow to depths of more than twenty-five centimetres become increasingly resilient to disease, drought, and fire due to their high moisture content and low levels of oxygen for bacteria to grow.

Rochefort has been involved in restoring more than 1,200 hectares in over 100 peatlands across North America, at a cost of between $3,500 and $4,000 per hectare. Planting trees tends to be slightly cheaper, in the range of $1,800 to $3,000 per hectare, but a typical replanted forest in Canada stores far less carbon. As more peatlands are lost, the vast stores of carbon within them are released: the amount of carbon that returned to the atmosphere as a result of the Horse River Fire, according to the FireWork air-quality forecast model, exceeded the carbon put out by both vehicles and industrial activity in Alberta throughout 2016.

While campaigning for re-election in 2019, prime minister Justin Trudeau pledged that 2 billion trees would be planted over the next decade—part of a federal goal of achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In effect, every tree would count against the country's emissions. While maintaining Canada's forested lands undoubtedly helps capture and store atmospheric carbon, there was no mention of peatland—a more effective way to both buffer the erratic effects of climate change and reach the net-zero goal.

Other countries are taking a different approach. Russia is investing heavily in restoring its peatlands to slow the runaway wildfire crisis that is causing so much carbon emission and air pollution. China has spent even more to restore peatlands in Sichuan province's massive Zoigê Wetland—approximately twice the size of Prince Edward Island—in an effort to conserve the water that hundreds of millions of people living downstream depend on. In the United States, the Fish and Wildlife Service is aggressively rewetting peatlands in the Great Dismal Swamp and the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, in the country's southeast, to protect endangered species and as a bulwark against rising sea levels and saltwater intrusions. And, in the United Kingdom and parts of Scandinavia, in order to meet climate change mitigation goals, grants and generous tax incentives are encouraging companies to *remove* trees that had once been planted for timber on former bogs and fens. The UK plans to ban the use of peat in gardens by 2024 as part of a bigger effort to combat climate change by maintaining its peatlands.

The Trudeau government remained committed to its 2 billion trees pledge even as the cost ballooned to $3.16 billion. Single-species planted forests hold inherent and increasing risks: no one really knows which species of tree is best adapted to various climate change scenarios that will likely result in more drought, wildfire, and ecological disease. Mosses such as sphagnum are much more resilient. They grow over vascular plants, like ferns, by taking up positively charged ions, such as calcium and ammonium, while releasing hydrogen ions that acidify the water and soil. As long as there is sufficient moisture, mosses will grow upward and outward, periodically shooting out capsules that contain hundreds of thousands of spores no more than several microns in diameter—expanding and spreading on their own.

Still, tree planting can seem a more glamorous way to mitigate climate change, with an obviously positive outcome that most Canadians have come to appreciate when driving or hiking through forests across the country. A fen, bog, swamp, or marsh is much more difficult for people to value. Peatlands burble and smell and appear to suck up anything that falls into them—all the while doing quiet work to slow wildfires, temper floods, and store carbon as a humble buffer for a changing world.

EDWARD STRUZIK is a fellow at the Institute for Energy and Environmental Policy at Queen's University and the author of *Swamplands: Tundra Beavers, Quaking Bogs and the Improbable World of Peat*.

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FICTION

Three Stories to Make Your Head Feel Different

BY DOUGLAS COUPLAND
ILLUSTRATIONS BY MELANIE LAMBRICK

GENDER REVEAL PARTY

I'M NOT SURE if it was ultimately a good thing, but here's how it went down.

The four of us had been isolating for six weeks and were going squirrelly like everyone else. Time dragged and then it magically sped up and then it dragged again. We basically abandoned the kids to play their brainless video games while Christian and I drank way too much. When we weren't drinking, I made lumpy sourdough baguettes and Christian locked himself in his workshop in the basement, a sort of isolation within an isolation. Families aren't meant to spend so much time together. They really aren't.

Are we nice people? Somewhat. We're not churchy or squeaky clean. We cared enough about each other at least to try to make it work. We didn't think we had any big issues to deal with, at least. My friend has a drug-addicted son who lasted about four days in lockdown before he took off. He slithered home a couple weeks later, coughing and feverish, and of course, his family took him in, and soon everyone was sick. What were they thinking? They should have locked him outside and thrown rocks at him from the windows. Instead, he got a hug and a houseful of people to infect.

Maybe, if the virus had actually turned people into zombies, we could have seen the real impact. It would have made isolating feel a lot more purposeful if we were fighting off zombie hordes. Sometimes, the whole pandemic felt like another Y2K. I knew people were dying, but for a long time, I didn't know anyone who had. Maybe I'm retroactively justifying.

The first thing that happened to shake up our new normal was that the parents of our kids' friends bought a trampoline and posted videos of their kids having the most fun any human being has ever had at any time in human history. Our kids, Brandon and Kellie, had only ever seen trampolines on TV and were desperate to go over and jump on this one, but Christian and I said no effing way. We thought elasticized nylon trampoline material was the equivalent of an IKEA ball pit. The kids might as well go to the mall and lick the escalator handrails.

But it's all about temptation, right?

One afternoon, my best friend, Macy, was having an online gender reveal party. We've known each other since kindergarten, and I was really sad she couldn't throw a real-life celebration. I'd spent half of my isolation zooming with her and my Chardonnay collection. The thought of not being with her in person at this big moment was too much to bear. So… I told my family I needed to take a sanity walk, a long walk of at least five kilometres. Nobody even gave me a second glance as I went out the door.

The stroll to Macy's was nice. If I squinted my brain, I could almost pretend it was normal everyday life again. When I got to her place, she was so happy to see me. I sat in her little courtyard area with only a glass sliding door between us—much better than a computer screen, that's for sure. When she set a bottle of Pinot Grigio and a glass outside her door for me, I teared up at the sight. I poured myself a glass and then toasted her through the window. Then I lost all track of time.

It turns out that, while I was gone, Christian also went out for a "mental health walk." His was a booty call with his personal assistant, Janeen, who lived in a condo about two kilometres in the opposite direction as Macy's place. He told the kids the same thing I did: "Off to do a walk, just like your mom!"

Christian was gone for maybe ninety seconds before the kids hopped on their bikes and teleported to the trampoline. To their credit, they did stay two metres away from their friends, and they took turns, but after an hour or so of bouncing, Kellie got motion sickness and had to go sit on our friends' deck until she got over it. Brandon kept bouncing, and like me and Christian, the kids lost all track of time.

Pretty much the moment the kids left, the soldering iron in Christian's workshop short-circuited and eventually set the house on fire. Ours was an old wooden house and was basically a torch. I noticed the smoke and heard the sirens as I walked home from Macy's. Brandon and Kellie caught up with me just as I rounded the corner. We saw Christian coming from the opposite direction.

The beam at the top of the staircase fell into the basement. It looked like an orange Popsicle lit from within. The four of us stood in shock as we surveyed the glowing remains.

The fire chief approached. "You the folks who live here?"

"Yes. I—yes," I said.

"All of you accounted for?"

"Yes…yes!"

"Were all of you out together?"

"Uh…yes."

"Can you tell me where you all were?"

"Out for a walk," I said.

"Okay."

Christian said, "Me too."

"It looked to me like you came from different directions."

"We didn't walk together."

"Ma'am, why do you have blue confetti in your hair?"

Christian looked at me. "You have blue confetti in your hair?"

"I was at Macy's gender reveal Zoom party. I was on the other side of a glass window the whole time!"

"Except when the confetti blew," my husband said.

"Fuck off, Christian. Where the hell were you?"

"I actually went for a genuinely real sanity walk."

The fire chief asked, "Sir, would CCTV cameras along the street confirm your story?"

Christian became flustered. "Uh, well, yes, I suppose."

"Were either of your children with you?"

"No."

I stared at them. "Where the hell were you two?"

"We went to use Sarah's trampoline."

"You *what*?"

None of us came out of this thing smelling like roses. Insurance did cover our losses, but we became the poster family for isolation shaming on the cover of the suburb's shoppers' paper. "Local Family a Cautionary Tale for Isolation Breakers." The one good thing that came out of it was that we bought the kids a trampoline. Not much of a silver lining, but it's something.

LIZ CLAIBORNE SHEETS

Any situation can blow up, of course, but things blow up more in my job than in most. I'm a Canadian border security guard, and I work the crossings from Washington state into British Columbia. Already, you're thinking I'm a cold, arrogant bastard who enjoys nothing more than fucking people over for no reason other than because I can—and you're absolutely right about that. But the thing you have to remember is that you people made me this way.

I went into this job actually liking humanity but soon found out that you people will lie about anything. All day, every day, all I see are liars lying to me. If that were your job, wouldn't you occasionally want to fuck people over for the fun of it?

On top of the wear and tear of all that lying, we're also bored out of our minds. At lunch, we create challenges to try to keep things interesting. Maybe we'll pull over only people in red cars for enhanced screening. Or maybe it's guys with ginger beards. Maybe it's people who are too friendly. I have found that the people who lay on the charm are the ones with a hundred bucks' worth of undeclared cheese in the trunk. These are by far the most fun people to fuck over because they know darn well that they are lying and (this is critical) they also feel actual guilt for having done something morally wrong.

I've let people into Canada who very likely had handguns and Semtex in the trunk, but they caught me on a good day, so lucky them. At least they were lying about something cool instead of $400 worth of Liz Claiborne cotton sheets or a small piece of genuine coral for an aquarium tableau.

And you can always count your lucky stars you got me and not Judith. Judith is the most dreaded border guard of all: she's a young woman out to prove that she can do the job as well as any man, like it's still 1974. Heaven help you if you end up in her lane while Brenda, the supervisor, is in Judith's booth, the two of them discussing the lunchroom's new Purell dispenser or something. You might as well turn off your ignition and put the car in park. And, when you pull up, you're going nowhere except maybe the alien probe station, where we stick LEDs up your ass, looking for drugs we know aren't really there. But you actually rolled your eyes at one of Judith's questions, didn't you? She will exact her revenge for your insolence.

Last February, when my aging parents ended up in my lane at the crossing, as per protocol, I had to recuse myself. Sadly for them, they ended up getting Judith… and Brenda. Perfect storm. Mom, at the wheel, kept pointing my way, as if being my mother entitled her to queenly treatment—a doomed strategy with Judith. Dad, on the other hand, always disintegrates in the presence of authority figures. He'd heard about Judith from me, and when he saw her name tag, he immediately got a bad case of flop sweat. He muttered and choked out all kinds of lies. It was painful to watch—like a hot dog trying to tell you how it was made. Also, unfortunately, he'd drunk a plastic keg of raspberry Gatorade on the highway home to Canada and badly needed to pee.

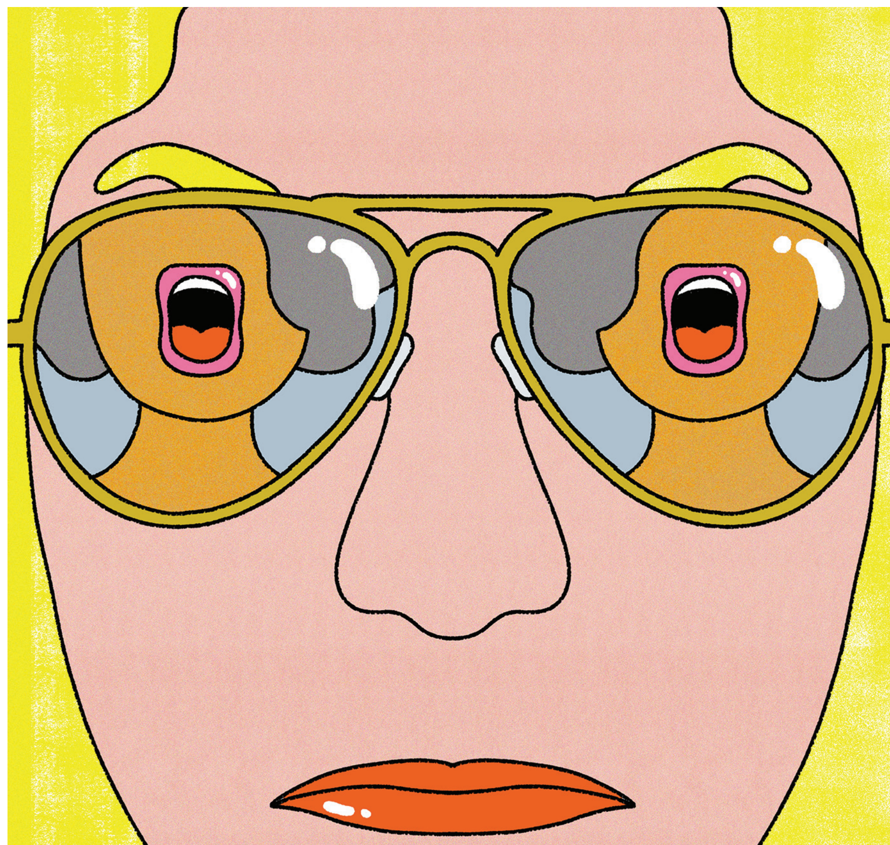
Dad managed to withstand Judith's laser-kill death eyes long enough to ask her if he could use the restroom. She said no, he'd have to wait until he and Mom cleared her station—which is actually

not true. Meanwhile, Mom had decided not to declare everything she had bought in Washington state and was wearing a full-on lying face. (Ask any border guard; they're a real thing.) Dad then began whimpering about relieving himself in the empty Gatorade bottle, and when my mom screamed that he had better not do that, Dad got out of the car and ran over to some shrubs on the US side. Judith and Brenda barked at him to return immediately to his vehicle, but Dad's seventy-six. What are you going to do, tase an old man to death for peeing? As he watered a rhododendron, the US code red alarms started shrieking like it was 9/11 again, and a trio of American border agents ran for him, slipping on their blue nitrile gloves as they came.

The whole thing looked kind of like the Zapruder film, with Dad ending up face down on the grassy knoll, hands cuffed behind his back. The whole border shut down. Judith, Brenda, and I ran over, the ladies yelling at Dad and me shouting at the Americans to cool their jets. A total classic donkey fuck. Long story short, Dad was convicted of indecent public exposure and is never allowed into the US again.

Last May, my parents flew to England and were hauled in for three hours of interrogation at Heathrow. Who knows how the US border authorities have flagged Dad, but I'm pretty sure he now carries a global data stain. All because he's nervous crossing the border and really needed to pee.

There's no moral to any of this except: pray to God you don't get Judith next time you go north and, really, just declare everything. Please. I want to like people again.



OLIVE GARDEN

OVER THE PAST sixty years, I've noticed that, if you tell kids they need to live a creative life, they rarely reproduce. Instead, they spend their days trying to generate proof to demonstrate to you that they listened and are fulfilling your command to be, I don't know, a fashion designer, an app creator, a painter…whatever. Combine this imperative with birth control and you've got no grandchildren and no population growth. You're essentially Japan. This happened with my own two children and with my friends' kids too, and I wish I could go back in history and push a magic "undo" button.

Historically, whenever the subject of grandchildren came up, our kids, Bryanna and Duncan (twenty-nine and thirty-two), always gave my husband, Rob, and me excuses along the lines of "Yes, but not until I finish this current project."

Rob and I went along with this, but as the years passed, the issue of grandkids felt increasingly urgent. By the time they were in their early thirties, the most I was hoping for was one tiny perfect grandchild from each of them. I guess one small source of comfort was that my brother, Nels, with his two non-reproducing kids, was in the same situation as me. At least I didn't have to look on in envy.

So, one weekend, we were at a summer family picnic at my brother's, and everyone got too drunk. Some neighbours had brought their kids along, and when those families left at the kids' bedtimes, there was an awkward child-free silence out on the lawn.

I ended up sitting with Nel's daughter, Chloe, a nice enough kid, single and pretty, who began telling me about a jewellery-making program she was signing up for.

"Chloe, sweetie," I said. "Forget jewellery and all that creative stuff. Just get knocked up."

"What?"

"Absolutely. Whoever the father is, he'll usually stick around. But, even if he doesn't, you've got a big family who'd happily help take care of it."

"You think so?"

"I do."

In my mind, I thought I was being ironic and salty: *Good old Aunt Jane!* And Chloe was laughing as I poured myself another glass of rosé.

Her brother, Darrell, saw us laughing and came over. "What's the joke?"

"Aunt Jane says I should get knocked up."

"And Darrell," I said, "you should knock someone up. Just have kids. The universe will take care of them."

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At this point, my memory gets kind of iffy, but I know I did share my theory about creativity and procreation before a sudden thunderstorm chased us all indoors.

Well, within half a year, Chloe was knocked up and Darrell had knocked someone up. I was happy for them, and I honestly didn't remember giving them my tipsy advice at the summer picnic until I got a furious phone call from my brother's wife, Sheila. "I can't believe you told them to have kids!"

"I didn't tell anyone to do anything."

"That's not what they say."

Oh shit. "I believe I merely shared my theory about creativity with them."

"What are you talking about?"

So I told her.

"You think that gets you off the hook here?"

"What hook? Sheila, cool down. They're adults. They have brains. After you're twenty-one, no one can tell you to do anything you don't want to do."

"Chloe works part-time at Baskin-Robbins. Darrell just got fired from delivering SkipTheDishes, which I think means he actually got fired by a robot. How are they going to support these miraculous new beings, Miss Know-it-all?"

The call ended on a testy note, but after I hung up, I realized I was jealous because Sheila was getting grandkids and I wasn't. Rob noticed that I was acting strange and asked what was up. I said it was nothing, but the jealousy began to eat me up and I realized I had to do something about it. So, one morning, I got in the car and drove to Bryanna's sound-mixing studio (she's a sound editor: creative!) and suggested that the two of us go to a surprise lunch.

"What's up?"

"Nothing," I lied, though I know I sounded jittery.

We went to an Olive Garden by the highway off-ramp.

Once we were seated, Bryanna asked, "Mom, what's going on? Do you have bad news?"

"No. It's just that…"

"What?"

"I'm sorry I told you that you should be creative when you grew up."

"Huh? I thought you were going to tell me you had cancer or something."

"No. I just wanted to say that it was a bad idea to tell you to follow a creative path."

"I—I don't know what to say. What on earth happened to trigger this? I mean—what the actual fuck?"

"Don't use vulgar language."

Coffee arrived and we ordered food I had a hunch would go uneaten. Then I explained my theory, and before she shot it down, I asked Bryanna to think of all of her friends who were in similar child-free boats.

"This is so presumptuous, Mom, I don't know where to begin."

"Humour me."

"Does Dad know about this idiotic theory?"

"I haven't really shared it fully with him."

"Fine. I'm going to leave this restaurant right now and call him and tell him I think you have dementia."

"Okay. Do that. But I still want grandkids."

And off she went, salad uneaten.

Bryanna's due next month. She's not married, and she's mostly not talking to me, but I don't care because I know she'll want a free babysitter. I still think I should never have encouraged her to take piano lessons. Or dance classes. Or anything else.

Heed this warning.

DOUGLAS COUPLAND is a Canadian writer, visual artist, and designer. He is a member of the Royal Canadian Academy, an Officer of the Order of Canada, an Officer of the Order of British Columbia, a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, and a recipient of the Lieutenant Governor's Award for Literary Excellence.

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THROUGH A TIRED EYE, BRUCE HORAK, TANGLED ART GALLERY (2019).

Redefining Artistic Ability

With its mandate to support opportunities for artists with disabilities, Tangled Art + Disability centres d/Deaf and disability-identified perspectives, and makes the experience of consuming art more accessible to a diverse public

BY AARON BROVERMAN

When visual and performance artist Gloria Swain presented her *HIDDEN* exhibition in 2020, she included a written acknowledgement that held space for fellow artists who couldn't attend due to invisible disability. The showcase of work by Black artists with disabilities was held at the Tangled Art Gallery in Toronto, a space that is dedicated to showcasing the work of artists with disabilities, including Swain, who identifies as Mad.

"That was such a poignant demonstration of disability justice," says Sean Lee, director of programming for Tangled Art + Disability, who has congenital scoliosis. "We've taken that to heart and included a care clause in our contracts to articulate that everyone's mental health and safety are the most important parts, not the deliverables of the exhibition. The artist will still get paid even if they cannot fulfill everything promised, or their show is delayed."

Tangled Art + Disability is not only a gallery—it's also a charitable organization dedicated to enhancing opportunities for artists with disabilities and promoting disability justice. Launched in 2003 as the not-for-profit Abilities Arts Festival, the organization's founding mission was to elevate discussion and awareness of art created by people with disabilities. The aim was to promote diversity and inclusion in the mainstream art world, while ensuring artists with disabilities were part of the larger cultural conversation.

As time went on, they discovered that an annual event was insufficient. While the exhibiting artists received exposure and leveraged networking opportunities during the festival, there was a dearth of programming for the rest of the year. "There would kind of be a lull," says Lee. "But then there was an opportunity to take on a gallery that people could come to regularly for consistent programming of people with disabilities, and to also enact accessible curatorial practices."

Tangled Art Gallery opened to the public in 2016 with accessible curation at the forefront of what they do. Exhibiting artists adhere to accessibility standards developed by the gallery that go far beyond the minimum set by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Artists are requested to display their art at a lower height and in accessible lighting conditions. Tangled staff work with the artists to create audio description and captions for those who are Deaf, a tactile element for those who are blind and sign-language interpretation by a Deaf person for written text. Performances are presented in a relaxed format to accommodate neurodiverse audiences.

While some artists may find these requirements daunting, those who showcase with Tangled are encouraged to creatively incorporate them into their work. "When there's a consistent space for you to come to as an artist, you can be more experimental and you can open yourself up to ideas of creative access or accessibility as an aesthetic component of what you do," Lee says.

MICHELLE PEEK PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF BODIES IN TRANSLATION: ACTIVIST ART, TECHNOLOGY & ACCESS TO LIFE, REVISION: THE CENTRE FOR ART & SOCIAL JUSTICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH.

Along with providing accessible space, Tangled Arts also offers professional development, networking opportunities, and seminars in their effort to empower disabled artists and amplify disability-identified perspectives.

To fund their work, they rely on ongoing financial support from the TD Ready Commitment. With Canadian arts funding being so precarious, TD provides welcome stability to Tangled Arts' staff so they can continue offering support to artists with disabilities in the form of grants, residencies, and partnerships with places like the Art Gallery of Ontario, The British Council, and The Canada Council for the Arts.

This support was especially important during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when accommodation for artists with disabilities became even more vital. "Being able to still participate and be part of an event even when I'm home has been fantastic for me," says Jack Hawk, Tangled Arts' outreach coordinator, who has autism. "That's something I hope doesn't go away. I hope there's increased funding for digital art."

The pandemic also offered Tangled Arts the chance to increase their digital presence by working with international artists, as well as with artists who are typically shut out from traditional forms of engagement. "We've worked with artists who are bedbound, and we were able to realise limitations in our own accessibility, which for me was an exciting opportunity," says Hawk.

Lee says Tangled Arts strives to support artists with disabilities in challenging a world that often values productivity over people. "Disability arts is one of the vehicles for social change that can really dismantle the kind of systems we're in right now," says Lee. "A lot of the past conversations for us as disabled folks were about showing that we could do it too and we could compete. Disability justice is about asking, 'What kind of world are we trying to compete in and why are we trying to compete there at all?'" ■

SPOTLIGHT

THREE ARTISTS LEADING THE DISABILITY ARTS CONVERSATION

BODY FARM, VALENTIN BROWN, TANGLED ART GALLERY (2019).

VALENTIN BROWN

The 2019 winner of Tangled Art + Disability's Won Lee Fellowship, Brown is a psychiatric survivor and trans artist with a disability based in Hamilton, Ontario. Valentin's practice using mixed media and sculpture work highlights the ways disability arts and culture disrupt personal narratives. In 2019, Brown's exhibition *Body Farm* featured a giant tactile autopsy of body parts laid out on a table called *Big Softie*. It was meant to empower those who've been historically othered by society because of their bodies.

PETER OWUSU-ANSAH

As a Deaf artist, Toronto-based Owusu-Ansah's work is grounded in his exploration of communication without words. Inspired by zooming in on the pixels in one of his digital pop art projects, the Ghanaian-born artist showcases hypnotic and vibrant pixel grids. His work is showcased across Canada and appeared at Tangled Art Gallery as part of *Somehow We Stay Attuned* in 2018. In 2021, he won the Murray and Marvelle Koffler Founder's Award at the Toronto Outdoor Art Fair.

VANESSA DION FLETCHER

Vanessa Dion Fletcher is a neurodiverse Lenape and Potawatomi artist who creates using video, textile, and performance. Her work questions what defines a body both physically and culturally using innovative materials like porcupine quills, natural plant dyes, menstrual blood, and Wampum belts. In 2021, she won the Mayor's Purchase Award at the Toronto Outdoor Art Fair.

Canada's colleges and universities are offering more wellness programming than ever before, yet rates of student mental illness continue to rise

EDUCATION

The Campus Mental Health Crisis

BY SIMON LEWSEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHLOË ELLINGSON

In the summer of 2012, Sope Owoaje, then fifteen, travelled from Brampton, Ontario, to her hometown of Lagos, Nigeria, to attend her cousin's wedding. In Yoruba culture, weddings are extravagant affairs. Owoaje recalls that her father, a Lagos resident and executive at the central bank, paid for the entire event and walked the bride down the aisle.

Following a church ceremony on the third day of the festivities, Owoaje and her cousins returned to the family home for one last celebratory dinner. Her dad's car arrived a minute later, trailed by four strange men on motorcycles. Suddenly, a motorcyclist darted in front of the vehicle, cutting it off, while the other three crowded in. Owoaje watched as one of the men pulled out a gun and shot her father through the window of the car. "The bullet missed his chest and hit his upper arm," Owoaje says. "Everybody around me screamed. My dad had a rush of adrenaline. I saw him speed past me with his window shattered."

He drove himself to an emergency ward, where doctors hurried him into surgery. Despite the injury, he recovered fully, and the family chalked up the violence to an attempted carjacking. But, when Owoaje returned to Brampton, she felt changed. She withdrew from social life and her grades slipped. She replayed the shooting in her head and felt unsafe everywhere she went. "I was scared to be in rooms where I couldn't see the entrance," she says. "I needed to keep track of how many people were present, who was coming and going, and where the doors were located."

When she was in grade twelve, her mother took a new job and moved the family to Iqaluit. The wide streetscapes of her new hometown gave Owoaje a sense of restfulness, and Inuit culture, with its storytelling traditions and reverence for Elders, reminded her of her Yoruba upbringing. She often visited the Elders' Qammaq, a community centre where seniors gathered to talk. An Inuk woman in her nineties told Owoaje about how the residential school system had broken her family, and other people described being taken by ship to tuberculosis asylums where their friends died and were buried in unmarked graves. Owoaje began to understand trauma—how it stays with you and manifests in unpredictable ways.

In Iqaluit, she began to heal, but when, in the fall of 2014, she moved to Winnipeg to study life sciences at the University of Manitoba, her anxiety returned. During orientation week, she had a fever that consigned her to her thirteenth-floor dorm room. When she emerged, it appeared that everybody except her had made new friends. "I was more lonely than I'd ever been in my life," she says. For lectures, she'd show up early to pick an optimal seat—sufficiently close to the exits to enable a speedy escape but far enough away that she wouldn't be in

THIS ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED WITH THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF THE OCUFA FELLOWSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION JOURNALISM

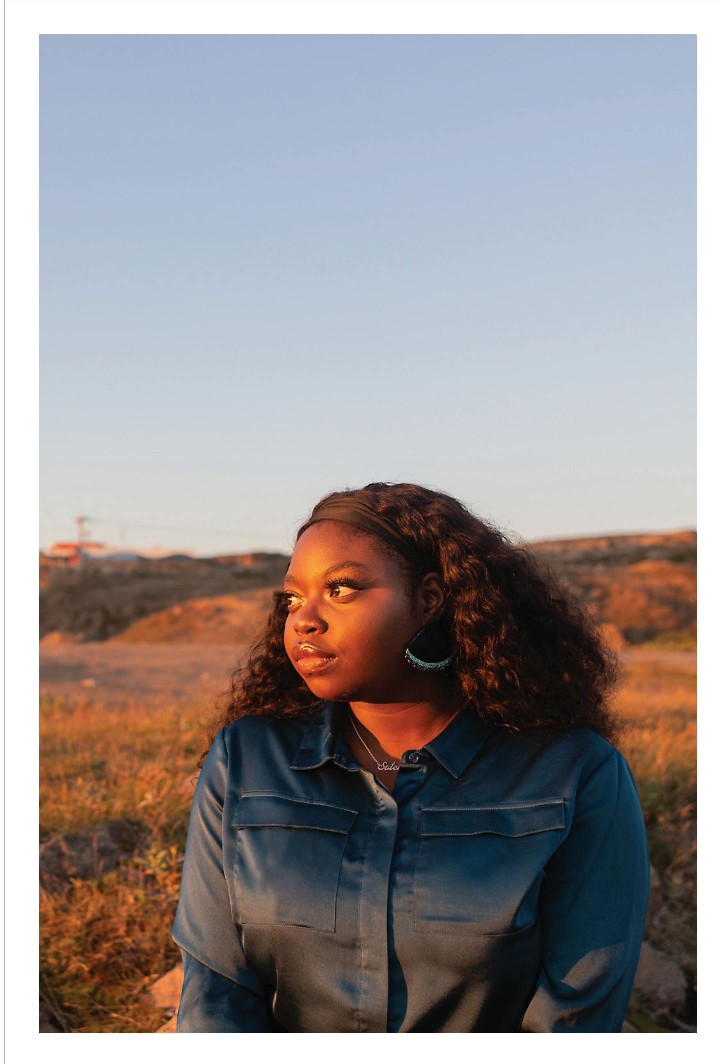
the line of fire if a shooter came in. "If I got to class and saw that somebody had taken my spot," Owoaje says, "I would go back to my dorm room furious with myself." She had expected university to be exhilarating, but instead, she felt terrified and unexcited to learn.

She wanted professional help but couldn't find an online link to student mental health services. She called the campus medical clinic instead and, after three weeks, received an appointment. "I told the doctor, 'I need mental health counselling,'" Owoaje recalls. "And he said, 'Sorry, we only deal with physical issues here.'" Clearly, she'd gone to the wrong place, but he didn't mention where the right place might be. (In an email to The Walrus, a spokesperson for the University of Manitoba wrote that the school offers "an integrated continuum of care, and a 'no wrong door' philosophy to ensure students are directed to the services they need." The spokesperson did not comment on the specifics of Owoaje's experience.)

Owoaje felt rebuffed, as if the university were chastising her for failing to keep herself together. What she didn't tell the physician was that even getting to the clinic had been an ordeal. "It was at the end of a long, dark corridor," she remembers. "I knew that, if I went far enough down that hallway, I wouldn't be able to see the exits."

Although Owoaje's story is extreme, her frustrating experiences with the university health bureaucracy are common. Over the last decade, reports of postsecondary students trying and failing to secure psychological services have become ubiquitous. Pundits and psychiatrists now talk about a mental health crisis on campus, and it isn't hard to see why.

In 2019, the National College Health Assessment, which surveys students at Canadian postsecondary institutions, found that almost 70 percent said they had felt "overwhelming anxiety" in the previous twelve months, and more than half said they were living with debilitating depression.



SOPE OWOAJE
Nunavut

The same study found that over 16 percent of students had seriously considered suicide, an increase from 10 percent in 2013. Reported suicides on campus are a fraction of the overall numbers, but even these figures are shocking: six at the University of Ottawa during the year leading up to April 2020 and another suspected five at the University of Alberta during the two years before that. Since 2018, a single building at the University of Toronto—the Bahen Centre for Information Technology—has had three student deaths in its atrium alone.

Universities have responded by expanding their mental health resources, running resilience workshops, and hosting meditation sessions. But Owoaje's experiences—and those of numerous other young people—suggest that many institutions still misunderstand the crisis, which has little to do with a lack of wellness programming or mindfulness training and a great deal to do with shifting demographics and the changing role of the university in our society.

When we imagine the typical student who seeks psychological services on campus, we might picture a young adult who is struggling to handle the stress of assignment deadlines and exams. We don't picture somebody like Owoaje, who continues to suffer side effects from a traumatic event she lived through. But people arrive on campuses today with a wide—and ever-widening—range of life experiences.

In 2001, 14 percent of postsecondary students in Canada identified as visible minorities; by 2019, that figure was 44 percent. Over roughly the same period, the number of new international students in the country jumped from 70,000 to 250,000. Statistics Canada does not collect class-based data on postsecondary enrolment, but one 2010 survey shows that half of students—compared with one-quarter in the mid '70s—worked part-time jobs while studying.

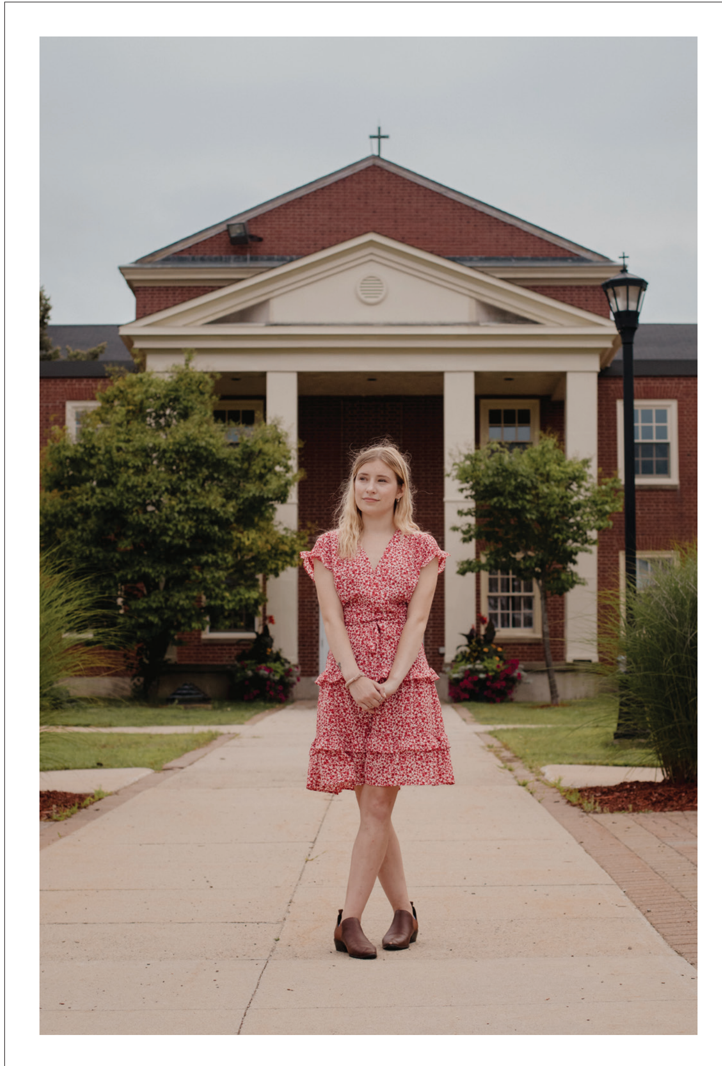
Clearly, a student seeking mental health support today can be affluent or

PHOTOGRAPH (ABOVE) BY MACINTOSH PAVIA

poor, Canadian or foreign born. And, while some are struggling with the circumstantial stresses of university life—independent living, time management, friend-group formation, and academic pressure—others are contending with highly individualized experiences. Psychologists have long known that the results of such traumas often manifest between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, just as students in our crowded postsecondary system embark on what has become a financially precarious, emotionally exhausting phase in their lives.

Critically, the campus mental health crisis predates COVID-19. Of course, nobody would argue that the pandemic has been good for psychiatric health. As universities have transitioned to remote learning, students have found themselves isolated from friends, health care providers, and support networks—the latter being particularly important among queer and trans youth, who may depend on one another for self-affirmation. It's tempting to assume that, as campus life normalizes, the crisis will return to the prepandemic status quo, but the status quo was dire to begin with. When it comes to student mental health, the worst that can be said of COVID-19 is that it exacerbated a problem it didn't create.

ASHLEY HAS BEEN a perfectionist for as long as she can remember, a tendency she attributes, in part, to her relationship with her father. She recalls that he belittled her constantly. "He'd tell me I was stupid and worthless and destined to die alone," she says. "I thought, 'If my own father is saying these things, they must be true.'" To prove him wrong and to establish a sense of control, she threw herself into her studies, seeking not just excellence but flawlessness. If she got 95 percent on a test, she'd soon be crying in the washroom. (To protect her identity, Ashley's last name has been withheld.)



ASHLEY
New Brunswick

Her parents separated when she was young, and she was shunted between two homes. At thirteen, she returned from a trip abroad and abruptly announced that she was cutting ties with her father. She didn't want to live with him or see him for weekly visits, and it soon became clear that he would no longer fund her future university education, a realization that increased her academic anxiety. Like many Canadians aiming to get a degree, Ashley now faced the prospect of taking on years of debt. "I told myself I needed to work my ass off to get a scholarship," she says.

In 2018, she arrived at St. Thomas University, in Fredericton, to study criminology and psychology. She had received a full scholarship—a clear victory, although it didn't feel like one. To keep her funding, she needed a 3.7 GPA, and to get into law school, she needed to do even better. Reasoning that a strong resumé couldn't hurt, she packed her schedule with courses, extracurriculars, and part-time retail jobs. Her days felt joyless and exhausting. The insomnia and nightmares she'd experienced as a teenager returned, as did chest pains, loss of appetite, and recurring crises of confidence.

She'd been warned that university grades tend to be lower than high school grades, but she wasn't prepared for her first A-minus, on a 300-level criminology course she'd taken in first year. Was it good enough, she wondered, to warrant a partially or fully funded law school placement? She'd always been one of the highest achievers she knew. If she was no longer that, what was she? Had her high school successes been a mirage? Had her father been right about her all along?

A great deal has been written about why students today experience extreme self-doubt and anxiety, but many of these theories neglect to reckon with trauma or familial and financial pressures. The crisis is sometimes attributed to social media. Online discourse, after all, can be toxic and polarizing, image-based platforms like Instagram wreak havoc on self-esteem, and tech-mediated connections are a dismal replacement for in-person relationships. Another explanation

focuses on a growing child-rearing trend among middle- to upper-class families—sometimes called intensive or helicopter parenting—in which parents subject their children to constant supervision and extracurricular activities, depriving them of opportunities to build resilience and emotional independence.

Both hypotheses offer convincing if not fully satisfactory explanations. The social media theory attributes problems at Canadian schools to tech companies in faraway Palo Alto and Beijing, and the intensive-parenting theory fails to account for students, like Owoaje and Ashley, who weren't raised in the kinds of hypercompetitive households where such parenting practices are prevalent.

> "I learned that, if you go to the health and wellness centre and say, 'I'm dealing with depression and anxiety,' they'll respond, 'You're not in critical need of support,'" Sarah says. "But, the moment you say, 'I have a plan to kill myself,' they'll throw you in handcuffs."

To fully understand the present crisis, one has to appreciate a fundamental and often overlooked fact: higher education is not what it used to be. Not only do we have a more diverse student body with equally diverse psychiatric needs, we also have an academic culture that has changed profoundly in the past six decades, making the university experience more stressful than it once was. The classic liberal conception of postsecondary institutions as places where young people take a kind of sabbatical from life—read the great books, engage in endless debates, and learn to see themselves as citizens—has given way to a new model, more narrowly vocational in focus.

If you attended a Canadian university in, say, 1961, you were probably white, Canadian born, and part of a small, economically secure demographic. (That year, there were only 130,000 full-time students in the country. Today, the number is nine times that.) What's more, you were probably pursuing your studies out of intrinsic rather than vocational motivations. "It was easier back then to have a middle-class lifestyle without a university degree," says Alex Usher, president of the consulting firm Higher Education Strategy Associates.

In the decades that followed, things slowly shifted. First came the economic downturn of the 1970s, which brought a new era of class stratification. The prosperity gap between an increasingly credentialized professional elite and a less-educated economic underclass began to widen and hasn't stopped since. Then came the early '90s recession, which saw both dramatic cuts in government funding to higher education and two-fold increases in tuition. By this point, universities had become both less affordable and more necessary than before. "The cost of education went up," says Usher, "but people became more—not less—likely to enrol, because white-collar labour was now valued so much more relative to unskilled labour."

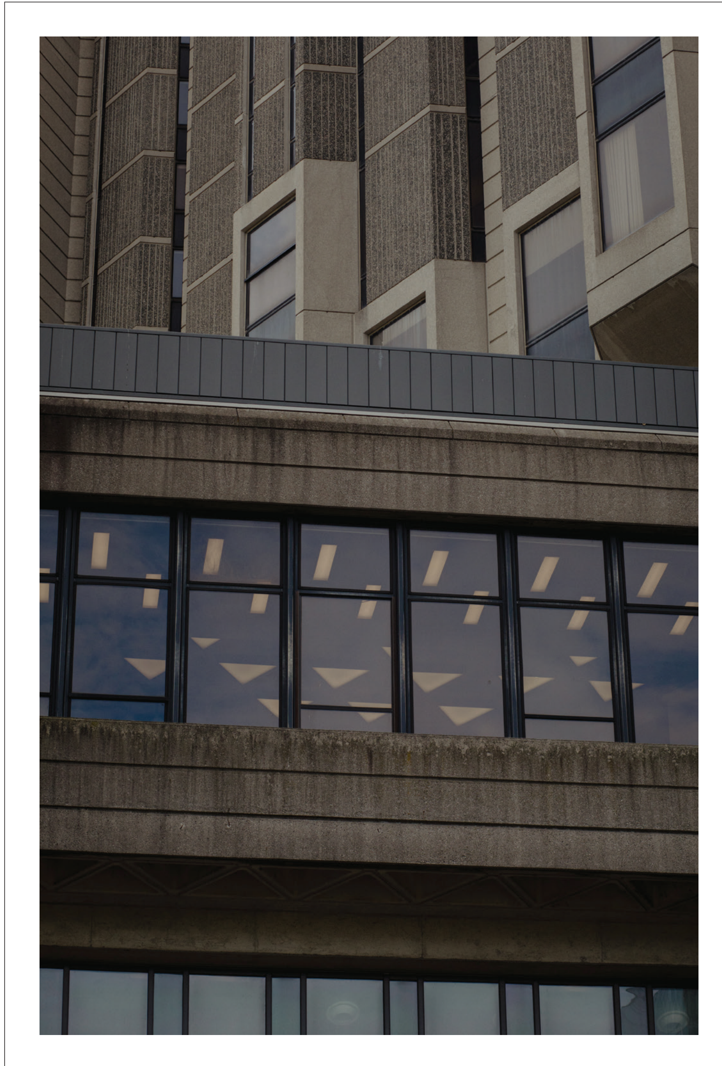
In the twenty-first century, skyrocketing property values further increased students' cost of living in some parts of the country. By 2018, average student debt at graduation had more than tripled since the early '80s. Schools also got bigger as millennials came of age and universities began aggressively courting international students, who pay vastly more in tuition than their Canadian peers. Between 2000 and 2019, total enrolment at Canadian universities increased by 78 percent, placing new demands on student support systems. Today, the combined population of just three schools—the University of Toronto, York University, and the University of British Columbia—exceeds the number of people enrolled in the entire Canadian system six decades ago.

As campus populations grow, students have reported depersonalized classrooms, making university culture more alienating than before. The National College Health Assessment survey notes that, in 2019, 70 percent of Canadian students experienced extreme loneliness. Rising enrolment numbers have also contributed to a sense among young people—perhaps more illusory than real but strongly felt nevertheless—that they are jockeying in a crowded arena for a dwindling number of jobs. By historical standards, the employment market

for university graduates in Canada is far from terrible, but students nevertheless fear joblessness. "When young people become extremely anxious, their ability to evaluate future probabilities becomes skewed," says Steve Mathias, a psychiatrist and the executive director of Foundry, a network of youth mental health clinics in British Columbia. "Students will say things like, 'If I fail this test, I'll become homeless and destitute.'"

These combined stressors put immense pressure on young people to prioritize scholastic pursuits over other opportunities—for aimless reading, say, or romantic and sexual exploration—that campus culture can offer. Like their American counterparts, Canadian students now compete fiercely for prestigious undergraduate placements—software engineering at the University of Waterloo, commerce at the University of British Columbia, health sciences at McMaster University—and then more fiercely still for a limited number of postgraduate slots, many of which require A-level transcripts. "We have an education system that starts talking about university in elementary school," says Joanna Henderson, director of the Margaret and Wallace McCain Centre for Child, Youth, and Family Mental Health, in Toronto. "Students are expected to build their postsecondary applications by taking leadership roles, getting top grades, and excelling at STEM. They work tremendously hard to arrive at this destination only to realize that it's not an end point but a beginning."

By prioritizing high achievers, Henderson argues, universities are selecting not only for diligent candidates but also for those who view scholastic success as central to their identities. For such students, a bad grade can be destabilizing. When that grade appears on an exam worth 80 percent of a final course mark, or when it comes from a harried teaching assistant who doesn't offer in-depth feedback, students can feel like they are



losing a game whose rules were never explained. Imagine being told all your life that you are ahead of the pack and that you must stay there, both to secure a stable future and to get a return on the investments that family members or granting agencies have made on your behalf. Then, imagine falling behind, for reasons you don't understand, at the precise moment when staying on top feels more critical than ever before. Furthermore, imagine that you are contending with profound loneliness, past trauma, and financial insecurity, all while working a part-time job with the usual mix of erratic hours.

Such stressors can lead to sleep disruption, irregular eating, and substance abuse—all of which correlate with mental illness—or they can trigger preexisting psychiatric conditions. They can deplete reserves of neurochemicals, like dopamine and serotonin, needed to sustain a sense of well-being, or they can flood the brain and body with cortisol, the stress hormone, which, in excess, can push people into near-constant states of anxiety, making it difficult to conceptualize daily challenges in a proportionate or healthy way. They can also lead to identity confusion and an acute sense of shame. "When you think about predictors of suicide, an important in-the-moment factor is relationship disruption," says Henderson. In her clinical practice, she often sees young people who are upset about their university grades—and who, when expressing these feelings, immediately mention their families. "They say things like 'My parents are going to be so disappointed in me' or 'My parents are going to kill me.'"

Of course, university has always been challenging, but Juveria Zaheer, a clinician scientist and medical head of the emergency department at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), in Toronto, says that the stakes seem higher today than ever before. For many students, an undergraduate degree can feel like a four-year, $30,000 gamble. "There's a reason adults have dreams that they've missed an exam," says Zaheer. "It's a primal fear. Young people are actually living those nightmares."

During her shifts at the emergency department, Zaheer frequently sees youth patients in severe psychiatric distress. "When they get to us, a lot of difficult things have already happened in their lives," she says. "They come not with one problem but with several—intense suicidal thoughts, panic attacks, deteriorating social relationships. Often, I'm the first psychiatrist they've seen. It's worrisome that so many young people are making their initial presentation for mental health care at an emergency department."

It's hardly surprising, though. Just as post-secondary institutions have misunderstood the causes of this crisis, they have miscalculated the solutions. In Canada, Zaheer argues, upstream funding for mental health supports on campus could help prevent serious mental health presentations at acute care downstream. Canadian mental health care is funded primarily by federal contributions to provincial health budgets. But the system is two tiered: anybody with a health card can see a doctor who's licensed to prescribe psychotropic medications, but psychological services, like cognitive behavioural therapy or interpersonal psychotherapy, are mostly covered by workplace insurance plans or must be paid for out of pocket. (There are exceptions to this rule. The system sometimes offers free counselling to people who've been hospitalized for mental illness, and nonprofit clinics across the country, many with limited means, also deliver affordable therapeutic services to patients in need.)

Like the Canadian system writ large, campuses provide too little by way of sustained, patient-focused support. At many schools, sessions with mental health counsellors go either to students in acute distress or to those who've waited their turn in the queue. In extreme cases, students may wait up to two months for basic counselling. Outreach is a problem too. A 2020 survey of six Canadian universities showed that only 56 percent of students were even aware of the mental health services their campuses offered.

Moreover, the services themselves aren't as flexible as they could be. Most involve a fifty-minute meeting (or a limited number of such meetings) booked in advance. "Some people can do remarkably well with short-term interventions," says Amy Gajaria, a child-and-adolescent psychiatrist at CAMH. "But there are other people—those who've been dealing with mental health challenges since childhood or those with trauma and comorbid substance-abuse problems—for whom even two or three months of counselling isn't enough."

When treating young adults, clinicians need time just to arrive at a diagnosis. If an eighteen-year-old first-year student suddenly starts drinking heavily and burning through scholarship money, is she having a manic episode or behaving like a teenager who's finally away from home? "A lot of illnesses present in young-adult populations," Gajaria says. "But there's also diagnostic uncertainty because the brain is still evolving. It's best to get to know a patient over several months, but our system isn't set up for us to do that."

She adds that, on campus, specific types of services are woefully undersupplied, like dialectical behavioural therapy, which can treat borderline personality disorder, or trauma therapy, which is complex and time intensive. There's also a lack of culturally relevant services: counselling in languages other than English, therapies that are integrated into spiritual practices, or Indigenous programs that involve spending time on the land. Of course, universities and colleges can always refer students to off-campus resources, but these, too, are overstretched and underfunded, and private care can easily cost $200 per session. "The wait for publicly available trauma therapy can take up to two years," says Gajaria. "Should we really be asking an eighteen-year-old in distress to wait that long for treatment?"

Mathias, the Foundry executive director, argues that what's missing from campus services—and from the Canadian system more generally—is a sense of balance. "Our system provides a narrow

scope of interventions to young people who have lost a great deal of their function to mental illness," he says. "But we don't assign resources to those who are just starting to struggle or who are struggling just a bit. Young people are falling off a cliff. We're putting doctors and hospitals at the base to catch them, but we're failing to prevent the fall itself."

This is what happened to Sarah, a life sciences student at the University of Toronto. (To protect her identity, Sarah's real name has been withheld.) When she stepped into the exam room for her first midterm test, in organic chemistry, she felt nervous but ready. She'd studied diligently, attended every class, and uploaded her lecture notes to the course website for the benefit of fellow students. But the ambience of the room was stifling. "I have a fear of crowds," she says. "I could hear people shuffling around me, and I could feel their stress." The proctor set the test in front of her, and her mind went blank. "I looked at the page and thought, 'I don't know any of this. It's like a foreign language.'"

A week later, the professor returned the test and posted anonymized grade data on the overhead projector, revealing that Sarah had scored 35 percent, one of the lowest marks in the class. She ran from the lecture hall crying. As an international student from the Middle East, Sarah feared that, if she failed too many courses, her visa might be revoked. The exam incident soon metastasized into a general sense of disquiet—a similar, if heightened, version of the anxiety she'd experienced for much of her teenage life.

At an appointment with the school's health and wellness centre a few weeks later, she explained to a campus doctor that her mental health was spiralling. "I asked, 'Can I see a counsellor?'" she recalls. "He said, 'Not really. There's a wait list, and it's for people who need more help than you do.'" He suggested she might have ADHD and gave her a prescription for clonazepam—a tranquilizer in the benzodiazepine family—for which a known side effect is depression. "Suddenly, I was crying every day," Sarah says.

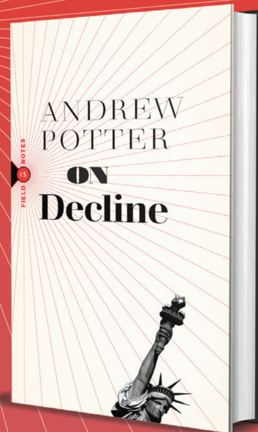
SARAH
Ontario

In her second semester, she switched to mirtazapine, an anxiety medication, at which point she developed irritable bowel syndrome. At the time, she assumed the IBS was caused by the medication, though she now suspects that the link might be coincidental. Nevertheless, the condition was so severe that she could rarely sit through a full tutorial or quiz. "It was horrible," she says. "I'd gone from anxiety to depression to IBS in a single year. I was like, 'What's going to happen next?'" She did manage, however, to register with accessibility services and receive additional time to complete her exams, at which point her grades improved.

In her second year, she moved out of residence and into an apartment in Toronto's Kensington Market neighbourhood. To make rent, she took a night job at the university, a position that required her to walk to campus at 11:30 p.m. On the way, she was often followed, cat-called, or verbally harassed. "A lady yelled, 'I'm going to fucking shoot you in the head and rape you, bitch,'" Sarah recalls. "I'd never experienced that kind of language before. I felt like it was my fault, like I was doing something to bring out that anger in people." Her IBS made social life difficult. "Other people could go out and eat together," she says, "but I couldn't get through a meal." Her exhaustion compounded her loneliness, anxiety, and shame, until she found herself back at the health centre, telling a doctor—a psychiatrist this time—that she no longer wanted to live.

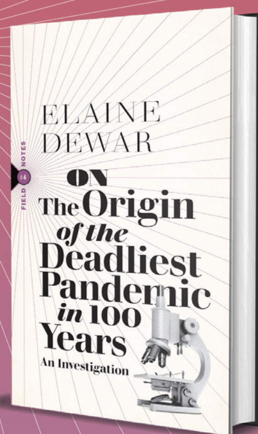
When Sarah had first presented at the clinic, a year earlier, she'd been surprised by the lack of urgency the staff had shown. This time, however, the psychiatrist sprang into action. She got up, called campus police, and told Sarah she was committing her to the in-patient ward at CAMH. "I asked, 'Is it okay for me to go there myself?'" she says. "And the psychiatrist said no." When the police arrived, she says, they put her in handcuffs and walked her to the back of a cruiser. It was among the most degrading experiences of her life.

Examining history and failures in public policy exposed by COVID-19, acclaimed scholar Andrew Potter asks: what if there is something to the notion of "the decline of the West" after all?



A SOCIETY IN CRISIS

Prize-winning author and journalist Elaine Dewar spins a compelling whodunnit on the origins of COVID-19 and how leading science journals got it wrong.



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In an email to The Walrus, Sandy Welsh, vice-provost of students at the University of Toronto, said that such incidents, involving police and handcuffs, are uncommon. "In situations where a student requires urgent care from specialized mental health support services, University staff will work with the student to arrange voluntary transportation to hospital, whenever possible," she wrote. "Campus police may be called upon to assist with transporting a student to hospital when all other options have been exhausted." She added that the university is currently reviewing its policies and procedures for handling such emergencies.

Nevertheless, at the University of Toronto, this incident—and others like it—quickly became campus lore. Students warned one another about the risks of seeking mental health services. Sarah was outraged not only for having been treated like a criminal but also for having been denied earlier therapies that might have made such extreme interventions unnecessary. "I learned that, if you go to health and wellness and say, 'I'm dealing with depression and anxiety,' they'll respond, 'You're not in critical need of support,'" she says. "But, the moment you say, 'I have a plan to kill myself,' they'll throw you in handcuffs."

Universities and colleges were never intended to be psychiatric institutions, and administrators are perhaps justified in wondering whether the mental health crisis is theirs to solve. But the fact remains that the undergraduate years are an incredibly tumultuous period in a person's life. "About 70 percent of mental disorders first arise in adolescence and young adulthood," says Emily Jenkins, a professor at the University of British Columbia's school of nursing who specializes in substance use. "This phase coincides with students' arrival on campus and often their departure from home, which, in itself, can be destabilizing." Surely, Jenkins argues, this implies some obligation on the part of the academy toward the young people in its care.

Of course, universities can't tackle the problem alone. Gajaria, the CAMH child-and-adolescent psychiatrist, argues that Canada urgently needs a sustained federal and provincial investment in psychiatric care. (Ahead of the fall federal election, the Liberals, the Conservatives, and the NDP committed to increasing funding for mental health care. The Liberal Party also said it would support the hiring of up to 1,200 counsellors at universities and colleges.)

Postsecondary institutions will never be able to provide the full suite of mental health services, but they should be able to give swift referrals to clinicians and counsellors in the public sector. "The worst part of my job," says Gajaria, "is knowing what my patients need but being unable to get it for them." Parents, too, can help mitigate the crisis by talking to their university-age children about mental health and by reminding them that low grades and academic adversity aren't signs of personal failure but, with the right support, could be opportunities for emotional growth.

Universities are increasingly investing in a range of early intervention therapeutic services with the goal of eliminating wait lists and reducing the number of extreme crises. (To their credit, several schools, including McGill University, the University of British Columbia, the University of Victoria, and the University of Regina, have made major strides in that direction.) In the past decade, campuses have begun facilitating open discussions about mental health, but such dialogues often focus on the safest subject matter: stress, burnout, and self-care. When a school provides leather-crafting workshops and therapy dogs to help students manage anxiety—as the University of Toronto does—but then forcibly sends other students to hospital in police cars and handcuffs, it sends a message: some types of mental illness will be supported here while others will be treated like crimes. "As soon as campus administrators hear words or phrases like *suicide* or *psychosis* or *eating disorder*, they lapse into risk-management mode," says Henderson, the McCain Centre director.

"They say, 'Oh my God, I'd better take action or something bad is going to happen.' They need to recognize that turning a young person away from early intervention services is also a risk. Calling the police is a risk. You can end up traumatizing the student."

Beyond that, schools might innovate. Different universities could experiment with different approaches, all the while collecting data on what works and what doesn't. In time, these experiments may yield a set of best practices to be deployed nationally. Perhaps they will include initiatives at the University of British Columbia and McGill University to create a centralized hub—a single office, like a port of entry—where students get an adviser who sets up appointments for them and helps them navigate the campus health bureaucracy. Or perhaps such best practices will include the University of Ottawa's initiative to train teaching and administrative staff in basic mental health care. The goal isn't to turn professors into therapists; rather, it is to show them how best to communicate with students in distress and to give them an up-to-date list of campus resources.

Our large, multicultural campuses require an equally diverse approach to mental health, with bespoke services tailored to individual student needs. "The point of psychotherapy is meeting the clients where they are."

Among the most successful programs are those that recognize the diversity within student bodies and zero in on specific communities. In 2005, the University of British Columbia opened a satellite campus in the Okanagan Valley, on unceded Syilx Okanagan territory. Two years later, it pledged to admit all Indigenous applicants. Those who didn't have the grades or high school education to warrant a direct admission could instead join the Access Studies initiative, a year-long program that combines university-level courses with "upgrading courses" in English or math, intensive one-on-one tutoring, weekly workshops on well-being, and Indigenous cultural activities. All Access Studies students are assigned an academic adviser who coaches them as they progress through the program. At the end, they're eligible to either continue at the University of British Columbia or transfer to any other university in the province.

Ian Cull—a former associate vice-president of students at the Okanagan campus, a member of Dokis First Nation, and an architect of the Access Studies program—sees such initiatives as an alternative to the approach that many universities adopt. It is unreasonable, he argues, to expect all students, even those who've faced tremendous adversity, to arrive on campus and demonstrate instant mastery over the academic, social, time-management, and health challenges that await them.

Has the Access Studies program been good for mental health? Cull argues that the completion rates speak for themselves. In the 2020/21 school year, the retention rate for Indigenous students at the Okanagan campus was 84 percent, compared with 89 percent for domestic students at large, and the gap is narrowing. "Our Access students progress through their degrees at roughly the same rate as non-Indigenous students," he says. "Even the most underprepared Access students are performing as well, by second year, as those who come here through our normal admissions procedures." Similar programs can be found elsewhere in Canada. The University of Manitoba has its own year-long Access Studies program targeted at Indigenous, racialized, and rural students, as well as those who are newcomers or face economic barriers. The University of Toronto also has a new initiative that aims to recruit prospective Black and multiracial medical students via summer internships and a specialized admissions process.

Like Cull, Omar Patel, a Muslim chaplain, believes he's found a way to meet the needs of students who are underserved by mainstream campus culture. In 2012, he returned to Canada after completing his divinity training in the UK and South Africa. "I was looking for ways to bring spirituality to the public, particularly young people," he says. "In the time of the Prophet Muhammad, mosques were places of counselling and therapy. People would come to the Prophet to discuss marital and social concerns. But the mosques of today are

primarily focused on prayer. They've lost their connections to the original prophetic mosque."

To help bridge that gap, Patel did a master's degree in pastoral care at the University of Toronto and took courses at the Toronto Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling Education, eventually becoming a registered psychotherapist. In 2015, he began working at the university's Muslim Chaplaincy, where he led Friday prayer services, offered regular counselling sessions, and acted as a liaison between campus administrators and students.

Patel argues that Muslim students reticent to visit the health and wellness centre may be more trusting of religious leaders like him, who are uniquely positioned to address culturally specific conundrums. What, for instance, might a Western-trained, non-Muslim psychotherapist say to a Muslim student who wants to sever relations with an abusive parent while at the same time honouring the Prophet Muhammad's exhortation to love and forgive one's kin? Or what might such a psychotherapist say to a student who, because of obsessive-compulsive disorder, is spending half an hour on ablutions for prayer, a process that should take two minutes?

"If a student from a religious Muslim background sees a counsellor who has no connection to the faith," says Patel, "the student must devote a huge chunk of time to explaining their background. So the problem the student came in with, which should be the focus of the session, doesn't get proper attention." Patel acknowledges that Western psychiatry works well for many students, but he argues that, in today's universities, no single model is sufficient. His opinions are backed by data: a 2009 metastudy from the journal *Psychiatric Services* shows that, when it comes to psychiatric care, culturally competent approaches reduce disparities in treatment outcomes between minority and majority populations.

OMAR PATEL
Ontario

Initiatives such as Cull's and Patel's may be happening on the margins of the mainstream campus health bureaucracy, but administrators would do well to pay attention to them. Our large, multicultural campuses require an equally diverse approach to mental health, with bespoke services tailored to individual student needs. "The point of psychotherapy," says Patel, "is meeting the clients where they are."

Sarah left CAMH three days after being committed, only to find herself back at the health and wellness centre, back in handcuffs, and back at the hospital, this time for a month. After her second discharge and a suicide attempt, she registered in an outpatient program at CAMH and finally got access to the thing she'd wanted all along: regular appointments with a cognitive behavioural therapist. "I learned that your thoughts affect your emotions and your emotions affect your thoughts," she says. "I learned a new vocabulary to label my emotions and to tell people what I'm going through." By articulating her feelings, she could distance herself from them. The suicidal thoughts, panic attacks, and IBS abated.

During Ashley's first semester at St. Thomas University, a counsellor on campus asked her a question nobody had put to her before: Was she suffering from PTSD because of her father? Ashley was skeptical (Isn't PTSD for soldiers?), so she read studies on the condition and asked friends for input. In time, she came to accept the diagnosis. Knowing the cause of her anxiety enabled her to better manage it. Today, she has a mental list of warning signs—joylessness, loss of appetite, loss of interest in physical activity—that alert her when she's overworked and on the edge of burnout. She will always be a high achiever, she reckons, but success doesn't have to come at the expense of happiness.

Owoaje eventually decided not to finish her program at the University of Manitoba. She returned to Iqaluit, where she enrolled in the nursing program at Nunavut Arctic College. It was then that she reconnected with Hunter, a high school acquaintance who had been friends with

her brother. On their first date, Owoaje and Hunter saw *Black Panther* at the Astro, the only cinema in town. Hunter had visited the theatre earlier that afternoon to pick a seat where Owoaje would feel safe. Although she'd barely known him before, she felt that she was reuniting with an old friend. She told him the reasons for her PTSD, and he helped her reconnect with her community. "We'd drive around town," says Owoaje, "and talk about everything we'd missed in each other's lives." (To protect his identity, Hunter's real name has been withheld.)

Hunter was usually cheerful, with an infectious, dimpled smile, but he carried within him a profound kind of pain. When his mood darkened, he'd turn silent. On bad nights, Owoaje would hold him wordlessly for hours until the storm passed. On good nights, he'd tell her about the activities that helped him reestablish a sense of well-being: hockey, basketball, and hunting, an Inuit tradition he found therapeutic. "Seals have delicate hearing. They pick up on every footfall. So you have to be quiet for hours," says Owoaje. "You learn patience and humility, and you practise being alone with your thoughts." With Hunter, Owoaje found what she'd been missing at the University of Manitoba—a sense of connectedness with another person.

Two years after her return to Iqaluit, Owoaje took a solo trip to Paris, London, and Rome. For the first time since they started dating, she and Hunter would spend weeks apart. Hunter's community, meanwhile, had been selected to go on a narwhal hunt, a rare opportunity. (To preserve the species, the government of Nunavut regulates the number of narwhals that can be culled each year.) He was exhilarated at the prospect of catching a narwhal, an achievement that would surpass anything he'd done as a hunter. He and Owoaje sometimes spoke of the hunt as a healing practice because it allowed him to make plans and look forward to the future. "I said to Hunter, 'Promise me that you'll be fine and that you'll be here when I come back,'" she recalls.

She knew that Hunter's mental anguish could flare up unexpectedly, but she does not know the specific factors that led him to take his own life while she was abroad. She got the news of Hunter's death via social media, and on the plane back to Iqaluit, she was inconsolable.

Since then, Owoaje has thrown herself into activism. She started a Nunavut chapter of Jack.org, a national organization dedicated to youth mental wellness. In June 2020, she helped organize a protest outside the Nunavut legislature, calling on the government to increase funding to front line support and establish a mental health facility in the territory. She also ran a massive survey at Inuksuk High School about student mental health needs. The most common need: regular access to a trained counsellor.

Because of her work, she often finds herself reflecting on the duty of care that exists—or should exist—between students and the educational institutions entrusted with their well-being. Had she received the support she required at the University of Manitoba, she wonders, would her experiences there have been salvaged? Had she been less lonely, would her trauma have been easier to manage? She hopes future students will no longer have cause to ask such questions.

Once in a while, she visits her favourite spot, on a hilltop near the school, where she and Hunter used to watch the snowmobiles on the land or the fishers in their boats. If they saw one of his friends heading out on a hunt, they'd often spin a yarn about him getting trapped in a snowbank or firing his gun in the air to scare off a polar bear. Owoaje imagines that Hunter is still with her. He might point out a boat on the water. "I bet they're going to catch enough Arctic char for the entire community," he says. "Yes," she adds, "or maybe they'll catch a narwhal." ≋

SIMON LEWSEN has contributed to the *Globe and Mail*, *enRoute*, *The Atlantic*, *Foreign Policy*, and *MIT Technology Review*. He teaches writing at the University of Toronto.

CHLOË ELLINGSON is a documentary photographer based in Montreal and Toronto.

The Pickup Skater

BY MATT ROBINSON

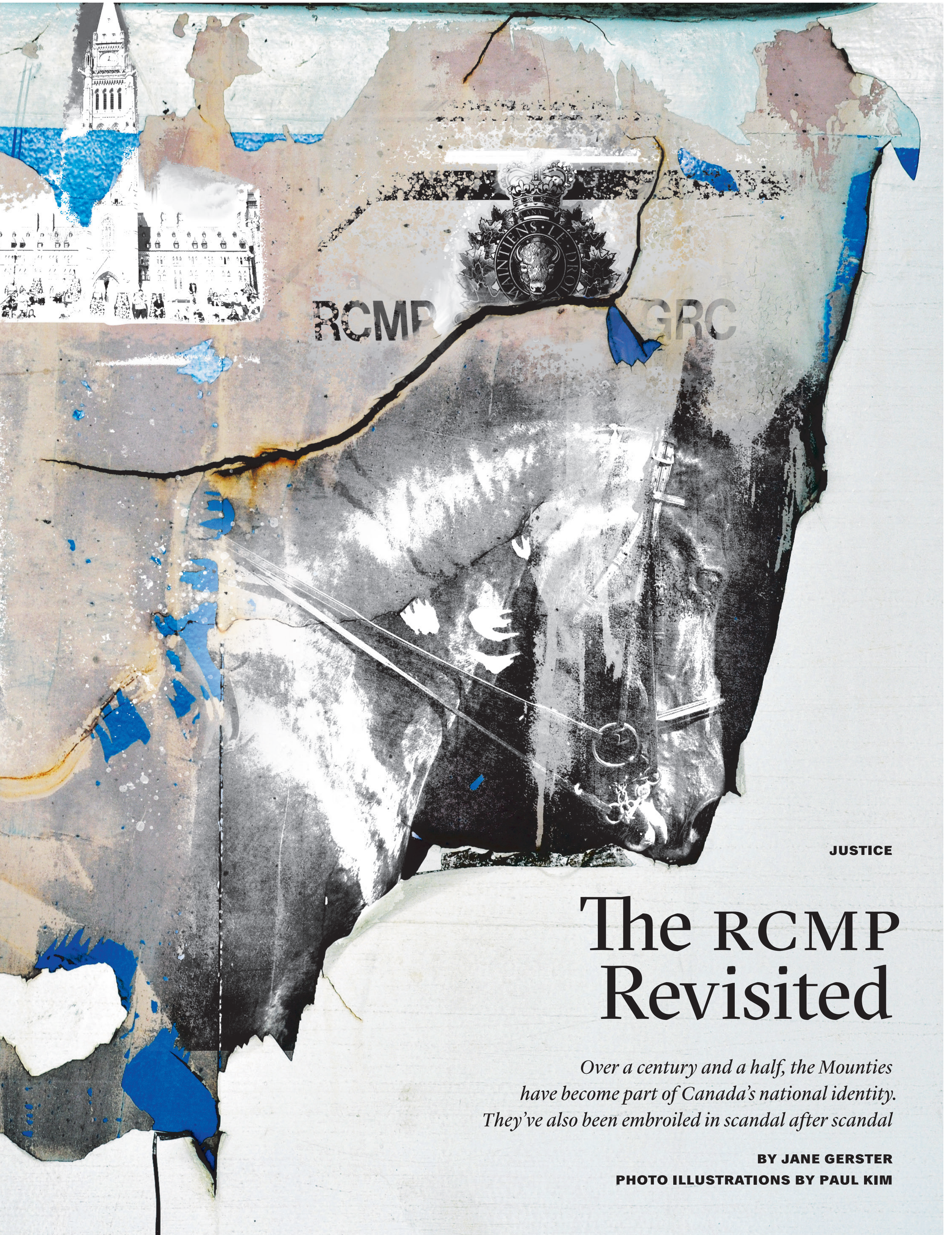
Dapper as fuck, Dugger's boy's Thursday's
rink-rattling dandy: skate-sharp, a sauced fashion
plate spun round & wound tight as that fancified cashmere,
as a cool qiviut or the la-ti-da'd knits that fashion
those haberdashed suits he sells fast & hard as short-side
fakes laughed past the gassed, sprawling d-men unspooled
at the hash & left in his wake. His passes—those on-ice
em dashes—as silky or fit-to-be-tied as jaunty cravats
that match the frou-frou'd neon galoshes the staid boys
in the room rib him hard about over beers. That's not near all
of it, though: there's the shot sneakily quick, deadly as jeers
from Fairview's methadoned side streets after ticks on an evening's
near capped-out clock's face have finally gone tock. Fancy
man about town, our Ross's known as much in the room
for the rarified shock of his cornered cologne's waft each week,
save the odd trip gone, down south, for more work on the tan.
It's the mouth of the man, the wry-smiled schlocky asides,
that other edge work, as much as deceptive skate's strides, that
set him apart, leave him floating in & around this room
or that. We all tip a cap.

Late last year, Charlene Bagley shared an emotional video. In it, she calls her dad a hero and vows that she will find out exactly what happened to him. Her father, Tom Bagley, was one of the twenty-two people gunned down in Portapique, Nova Scotia, in April 2020.

In the nine-minute recording, Bagley speaks about the toll taken by eight months without her father and what it feels like to still have no concrete sense of how he died. “I continue to wake up daily with visions of what I think happened based on the very little information that we’ve received, trying to piece together the story that seems so unbelievable,” she says. “The story we’ve been told from the very beginning has changed many times. There are so many holes that one would wonder, ‘Is there something they’re trying to hide?’”

Late at night on April 18, a gunman attacked his partner in their home in the beach community of Portapique, about a ninety-minute drive north of Halifax. He burned the house down, killed his neighbours, and continued on a thirteen-hour killing spree while dressed in an RCMP uniform and driving a mock RCMP cruiser. The RCMP, which is in charge of policing in the area, relied on social media to alert the public, issuing a single tweet advising of a weapons complaint in Portapique at 11:30 p.m. Its next tweet went out shortly after 8 a.m. the following morning, this time describing the event as “an active shooter situation.” Rather than call in the nearby Truro police, the RCMP summoned its own reinforcements from Halifax and New Brunswick, both farther away. Meanwhile, the gunman’s rampage continued for several more hours before he encountered, in a bit of policing serendipity, an RCMP tactical team at a gas station in Enfield.

“There is an enormous amount of questions and uncertainty about what the RCMP did,” says Sandra McCulloch, a lawyer representing the families of the victims in a proposed class action



JUSTICE

The RCMP Revisited

Over a century and a half, the Mounties have become part of Canada's national identity. They've also been embroiled in scandal after scandal

BY JANE GERSTER

PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL KIM

against the RCMP and the attorneys general of Nova Scotia and Canada. The RCMP didn't send out enough officers given the severity of the crime, their lawsuit alleges, and the force should have known it. "The RCMP failed to accept and act on credible information," reads the statement of claim, which also condemns the force for using Twitter instead of the new provincial alert system, releasing tweets that didn't match the information given in 911 calls, and failing to call in local police, who could have responded more quickly.

The proposed class action is led by Andrew O'Brien and Tyler Blair. O'Brien's wife was killed; Blair's father and stepmother were killed and their house was set on fire. Their criticism of the RCMP isn't restricted to those critical thirteen hours of the rampage itself. They condemn the force for failing to investigate past allegations that the gunman possessed illegal weapons and that he had been physically abusive to women, including his long-time girlfriend. Their lawsuit alleges the Nova Scotia attorney general failed to ensure that there were enough RCMP officers in some counties and that those officers had sufficient resources to do their jobs.

They contend, too, that the RCMP's communication since the attack has been "high-handed, self-serving and disrespectful and is deserving of punishment." Specifically, they say families were misled about the circumstances of their loved ones' deaths and allege that, in one case, a car was returned with gun casings and body parts still inside.

Questions of accountability, timeliness, sensitivity to victims, and the RCMP's ability to work well with other police forces have precedent: they all came up before Portapique, perhaps most famously in the case of Robert Pickton—the largest investigation into a Canadian serial killer, which spanned years and involved hundreds of investigators.

Pickton was arrested by Coquitlam RCMP in BC in 1997 and charged with attempted murder following a violent attack on a sex worker. At the time, both the RCMP and the Vancouver Police Department were well aware that women from the Downtown Eastside were going missing and being killed at alarming rates and that many of the victimized women were Indigenous sex workers. The RCMP corporal handling the attempted murder case clearly believed there was a connection between Pickton and the missing women, so even after the Crown stayed the charges in 1998, he made surveillance requests premised on the idea that Pickton was picking up women in Vancouver and taking them home to kill them. Pickton "was the logical suspect," an inquiry would later determine. But it took five years to charge him with the murders.

In 2010, Vancouver's deputy police chief, Doug LePard, released a scathing 400-page report reviewing the force's joint investigation with the RCMP. He wrote that much of the information Vancouver police had collected about Pickton—"sufficient to justify a sustained investigation"—was passed on to the RCMP for action that never followed.

"RCMP management appears to have not understood the significance of the evidence they had," LePard found. When two Mounties did interview Pickton, in January 2000, LePard wrote, Pickton denied killing women but was cagey when it came to whether DNA from the missing women might be found on his property. Neither Mountie asked any follow-up questions. An offer from Pickton to search his farm was another dropped lead.

Overall, the investigation was "a disaster," says Rob Gordon, a criminologist at Simon Fraser University. "The RCMP saw themselves as being cock of the roost, and these municipal forces were lesser mortals," Gordon says. "That's a well-recognized problem that keeps surfacing and then disappearing again."

IN THE YEARS that followed Confederation, John A. Macdonald had a problem. Settling the Northwest Territories had become a national imperative: if Canada did not match the westward expansion of the United States, it risked being overwhelmed. Reports from the area weren't promising. In his 1872 annual report, the adjutant-general of the Canadian militia painted a picture of "white men…living by sufferance, as it were, entirely at the mercy of the Indians." How were new settlers supposed to farm? How were their cattle to roam freely?

Canada's solution was to create the North West Mounted Police, in 1873. Initially intended to be a temporary force, its purpose was to stake Canada's claim to the territories. To that end, mounted policemen stood sentry at treaty signings, and they enforced a pass system that kept First Nations confined to reserves despite the Mounties' own misgivings about its legality. So singular was this focus that, for a time, the Canadian government moved management of the force under the Department of Indian Affairs.

Macdonald's design was deliberate. He called the North West Mounted Police a force instead of a corps to avoid any chance that the US might think Canada was trying to sneak west an army; he dressed them in red to invoke the British army and Queen Victoria, whose friendly relations with Indigenous peoples Canada wished to call upon; and, inspired by the constabulary the British used to rule over Ireland, he made them a paramilitary so they could serve as a de facto government on behalf of politicians back in Ottawa. (Paramilitaries are generally defined as forces that operate like unofficial armies, trained and structured as if they are going to war.)

In the nearly 150 years since they were founded, the Mounties—officially renamed the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1920—have gone from a couple hundred men putting out prairie fires, managing diseases, and subjugating Indigenous peoples to a full-fledged national police force. Today, the RCMP employs around 30,000 people: roughly 20,000 police officers plus additional support staff who cover everything from human resources to research and analysis to IT.

The force operates in many jurisdictions across the country and is run by a commissioner, who is the highest-ranking member of the RCMP. The commissioner is appointed by and reports to the federal government; current

commissioner Brenda Lucki's appointment was announced by prime minister Justin Trudeau, and she reports to the minister of public safety and emergency preparedness, most recently Bill Blair. (Blair declined to discuss this story; a spokesperson for Lucki wrote that she was "unavailable for interviews.")

Locally, Mounties investigate run-of-the-mill crimes in cities and towns too small or too poor or too cheap to pay for their own police forces. Provincially, they police rural communities and patrol highways in most jurisdictions (everywhere outside of Ontario, Quebec, and pockets of Newfoundland and Labrador). Federally, they investigate terrorism and other threats to national security, and they serve as bodyguards for politicians and designated VIPs. They also police reserves through tripartite agreements with specific First Nations, the appropriate provincial or territorial government, and the federal government.

The RCMP as an institution was not built to do most of these things, never mind all of them at once. It was designed as a paramilitary the Canadian government could wield as part of its nation-building project, not a regular-duty police force with the deep community relationships and flexible, adept officers required to not just investigate crime but prevent it. So much has changed, yet the RCMP has clung to its founding conception across three centuries—and the federal politicians who are ultimately responsible for the Mounties have let them.

And why shouldn't they? The Mounties, still, feature indelibly as part of Canada's iconography. In 2013, 87 percent of Canadians surveyed told Statistics Canada that they believe the RCMP is important to their national identity, ranking only three things higher: the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the flag, and the anthem. Hockey was down in fifth place. A sport affectionately seen as a Canadian way of life figures less in the country's identity than the national force.

For almost as long as there have been Mounties, there has been a brand to go along with the actual officers, romanticizing their morality—a brand invoked not just by the RCMP itself but by cultural creators of all kinds. In twentieth-century novels, the Mounties' early days are stripped of context and transformed into adventurous tales of white men testing their hardiness against the Prairies, their mere presence encouraging even the foolhardiest of criminals to reconsider their actions. The Mounties have been featured heroically in TV shows (*Due South*) and amusingly in cartoons (*The Dudley Do-Right Show*) and had appeared (as per the RCMP's own web page dedicated to its depictions, titled "Our image") in "more than 250 English language movies" by the 1950s alone. At no other organization in this country can you pull on your dress uniform and instantly become an emblem of what it means to be Canadian.

That standard narrative has been confounded, more recently, by a much darker version of the RCMP, which has spent the last two decades lurching from crisis to crisis. The difficulties are complex and fall into several categories.

One recurring problem—which dates back decades—is the quality of the RCMP's investigations, many of which have been bungled with disastrous results. In 2013, the force manufactured a terrorism case against a couple in BC. Famously, the force's shoddy investigative work in another terrorism case resulted in unverified information being shared with the US, leading to Canadian citizen Maher Arar spending a year being tortured abroad. The RCMP's continual struggle to understand racialized communities contributed to its failure to both prevent the 1985 Air India bombing—the worst terrorist attack in

PHOTO CREDITS (ABOVE, PREVIOUS SPREAD): ABRAMOVA KSENIYA / ISARAVUT / ISTOCK
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Canadian history—and properly investigate it.

The second problem is a workplace culture that is inculcated and preserved within the RCMP's nineteenth-century paramilitary structure. The resulting well-documented internal dysfunction bleeds into the public realm through a firehose of class action suits seeking recompense for bullying, harassment, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, racism aimed at civilians, racism aimed at colleagues, and other issues that the RCMP has failed to adequately address. It has also led to decades of study and thousands of pages of reform proposals issued by a wide range of experts, almost none of which have led to substantive change.

The RCMP's third major problem stems from its volume of work and the complicated scope of its mandate. From First Nations to municipalities to provinces and territories to national security, the Mounties' attention and resources are divided. This makes it difficult for the force to prioritize, which in turn prevents it from focusing on those areas where a national police force is truly required, like investigating terrorism.

Accountability mechanisms meant to provide oversight of the RCMP exist, but they have no teeth: none has the legal ability to force the Mounties to comply with its recommendations. The federal government does have the power to force change, but to date, politicians have largely opted for less-substantive reform. And court victories that would seem to serve as a check on the force are often hollow: in July, for instance, the BC Supreme Court found in favour of a press coalition objecting to RCMP restrictions on reporters covering old-growth-logging protests in Fairy Creek, but the decision only called on the RCMP to reevaluate its actions, not to change them. Within a month, another journalist was detained.

There is good, undoubtedly, being done within and by the RCMP. History is dotted with Mounties who have sought to de-escalate conflict, to do what is best for the community over what is best for Ottawa, to investigate on their own personal time in order to solve sensitive cases with ticking clocks. "I suppose it's always the case with policing, as it certainly is with intelligence, that you hear about the failures—you don't hear about the successes as much," says Reg Whitaker, a professor emeritus in political science at York University whose research has focused on political policing in Canada. "But clearly the problems that have led to the demands, the increasing volume of demands, for structural change and greater accountability and so on—those clearly should prevail at some point."

All bureaucracies are complicated and built to self-perpetuate; reform is often slow, and troubles are difficult to pin down to one or two simple causes. But, with the Mounties, the stakes are higher and the problems more acute: policing is, without hyperbole, a life-or-death matter, and paramilitaries are some of the most reluctant to change of all bureaucracies due to an inherently secretive, soldierly mentality that prioritizes government aims over individual rights and views offenders as enemies. The very structure of a paramilitary institution, to borrow from two American policing experts, "subverts democratic policing."

The fundamental challenge, say the historians, criminologists, and journalists who study the RCMP, has long been getting Canadians to see past the red-serge image: the powerful mystique that has helped cement the RCMP's position as a national symbol is also what renders it particularly, stubbornly difficult to reform. As journalist Peter C. Newman wrote in *Maclean's* in 1972, "Confusion between what is true and what bureaucrats would like to be true is the occupational hazard of any institution which, like the RCMP, expends a great deal of its energy projecting an image. Undue emphasis on the image protects the force's officials not just from the real world but from their own consciences."

The RCMP is responsible for handling just 22 percent of requests for police help, including 911 calls, nationwide. But Canadians who've never encountered a Mountie in real life still have an *idea* of what the Mounties are—and, crucially, that's often a very different impression than the one held by people who are directly policed by the force. In Canada, the Mounties are "the sacred and the profane," says University of Ottawa criminologist Michael Kempa. "If you mess them up, you offend people's sacred sensibilities. If you get it right, you don't really impact very many people's profane experience of policing in Canada."

By the early twentieth century, First Nations had been corralled onto reserves and the Mounties were looking for more work. They found it by pitching themselves as a proper national police force. The force's commissioner sold the federal government on the idea of a coordinated paramilitary with "freedom from local influence." The force's longevity seemed all but assured by 1928, when Saskatchewan negotiated a contract with the RCMP, replacing its provincial police force with a detachment of Mounties.

It was cheaper for the province to outsource its law enforcement, and it still is: the federal government subsidizes the Mounties by 30 percent (provinces and territories pay the remainder). The Great Depression spurred Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, and Alberta to follow suit. In 1950, British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador made the change too, leaving Ontario and Quebec as outliers. Within provinces that employ the RCMP, the force was further subcontracted to cities and small communities that wanted its services. Over a period of about twenty-five years, the RCMP cemented coast-to-coast, multilevel power.

It's power that the federal government hasn't shied away from using, right from the earliest days of this contracting arrangement. In 1935, hundreds of unemployed workers began a protest march, starting in relief camps in BC and heading to Ottawa. Over the explicit objections of the Saskatchewan government, the federal government ordered the RCMP to stop the protest, dubbed the On-to-Ottawa Trek, in Regina. The result was a deadly police riot.

To a certain extent, every police force operates as a paramilitary. Indeed, the volume of civilian police forces adopting military tactics, gear, and protocol has, of late, raised alarm bells across North America because militarization changes how police act by changing the terms of their job. But, even among an increasing cohort, the Mounties are unique. Their paramilitarism is built into their operational core such that they function with an army-like attention to rank that might make sense during a terrorist attack but not when policing delicate personal scenarios, not all of which can or should be resolved with arrests.

Paramilitaries are also inherently political—fighting against governments or for them. As such, the RCMP has a well-documented history of struggling to differentiate between legitimate threats to national security and lawful political dissent. The RCMP's countersubversion unit catastrophized its way through the Cold War, terrorizing suspected communists and destroying their livelihoods on the thinnest of evidence. In 1971, a senior Mountie, worried about the difficulties of spying on lawful political parties, posed as an FLQ cell member and advised the militant separatists against giving up their arms and joining the Parti Québécois to fight for separatism through nonviolent means.

In 1978, after the RCMP's illegal activities blew up—literally, then figuratively—the Quebec commission tasked with investigating was forced to fight to the Supreme Court to do its job. The country's top court issued a decision that not only hobbled the provincial commission's work but carried ramifications that continue today: the federal government's right to manage the force "is unquestioned," the court ruled. "No provincial authority may intrude."

The RCMP maintains that its contract-policing agreements with provinces and municipalities are beneficial because they "allow for the seamless sharing of intelligence and high-level cooperation between all levels of policing." This is not borne out by history. The largest mass killing in Canada took place on June 23, 1985, when Canadian Sikh militants planted a bomb on Air India flight 182. Everyone on board was killed: 307 passengers and twenty-two crew. In 2010, former Supreme Court justice John Major released his final report of the public inquiry into the bombing. In unpacking the "cascading series of errors" that led to the attack, Major highlighted the myriad ways RCMP operations had been neither seamless nor collaborative.

Major documented how, both before the bombing—when there were multiple, specific indicators that a homegrown attack was imminent—and after it, the RCMP resisted "inclusive decision-making" and provided information, internally and externally, that "was often insufficient." During the nearly twenty-year investigation, other police forces, frustrated with being poorly spoon-fed intelligence by the RCMP, asked Ottawa if they could skip the middleman and go directly to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, which was tasked with collecting intelligence.

The mystique that has helped cement the RCMP as a national symbol is also what renders it particularly, stubbornly difficult to reform.

The Mounties wear many hats—probably too many hats, Major suggested in his report. (Among the world's democratic police forces, the RCMP is the only one that operates across so many jurisdictions.) He recommended that Canada consider removing the RCMP from its contract-policing role—leaving local policing to local governments and provincial policing to provincial governments—so it could do a better job safeguarding national security.

Those who study policing reform and, in particular, Mountie history have frequently made similar suggestions that the RCMP narrow the scope of its work. To drive the point home, Christian Leuprecht, a Royal Military College and Queen's University professor, memorably described the RCMP to me as the McDonald's of police agencies. Whether you're in Nova Scotia, Manitoba, or British Columbia, the Egg McMuffin is still an Egg McMuffin. The problem? Not everyone wants McDonald's. And those franchises that want to tailor their menus to the communities they serve need corporate's approval, and corporate has an image to think of, a budget to manage, and a head-spinning number of balls in the air.

"I don't think the Mounties are currently particularly well structured to deliver on the needs, values, and expectations of local communities precisely because they are a very hierarchical, top-down organization," Leuprecht says. After all, by definition, community policing is decentralized—the opposite of a paramilitary structure—to allow for local communities to dictate their own priorities (such as ensuring the force's demographics match the community's or deciding which neighbourhoods may require a greater police presence) beyond traditional crime-fighting.

In 2009, a year before Major's report encouraged the federal government to reevaluate contract policing, Kash Heed—who had, before entering politics, spent three decades as a Vancouver police officer—was appointed BC solicitor general. And Heed wanted the RCMP, which had been operating there for almost sixty years, out of the province. The force emanates this "superiority," Heed says. In his experience, he found them as rigid and uncompromising as the expert reports indicate.

While Heed wasn't able to follow through on removing the RCMP from BC, the force didn't entirely quell its critics. When fresh twenty-year provincial contracts were signed coast to coast, provinces walked away with new powers when it came to things like policing standards and staffing levels. Notably, the contracts include an "escape clause"

Joyride

BY VIRGINIA KONCHAN

Go ahead, take it, the observable universe.
Take its buying, sighing, and dying rituals:
around here, we let the dead bury the dead.

That's the only way to get ahead, I'm informed:
buy into the urban myths of freedom and merit.
How lovely, how nice. My failed social utopia

for a song: your kingdom for my body's dark horse,
apocalypse awaited with bated breath but not believed.
I came into this world bringing only paper, rope, shadow.

I left riddled with compulsion, habituation, conditioning:
collateral damage of misfired bullets. Whose weaponry?
All questions tend toward rhetoric when one is salivating,

twitching: inundated by micro-sensations, electric shocks.
Poem as hormone. Poem as nostalgic aftertaste of affect.
Poem as necessity, vice. I will not speak if to speak

means repeating myself. Poem as traumatic wound
around which we circle, like repentant elephants.
What to enthrone as value: the human voice?

Poem as horror, libretto of organized crime.
The typewriter's carriage returns to the start:
all that drug money, gold glint on gangster dice.

that allows any province, territory, or municipality to give two years' notice if they want to create their own alternative force—a clause that Surrey activated in 2018 and that Alberta is now deciding whether to invoke.

THE PARAMILITARISM underlying some of the most headline-grabbing RCMP scandals shapes every aspect of the force—starting with recruitment. To join the RCMP, a person must be at least eighteen years old, be a fully licensed driver, and have the equivalent of a high school diploma. There are medical assessments and physical standards to pass and some questions about willingness to take on the job. (Will you agree to spend half a year training in Regina? To be relocated anywhere in Canada? Will you be okay holding a gun? Using physical force?)

Future Mounties also need to pass a battery of tests to prove their aptitude. The first looks at personality, evaluating independence, industriousness, and methodicalness, as well as extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experiences. The second is an assessment of seven skills the force considers "essential in executing" a regular officer's duties: memory, composition, logic, judgment, comprehension, computation, and observation. An average of 10,000 people try to prove their fitness every year, according to the force, although its struggle to maintain its ranks seems to indicate most don't pass.

A 2020 in-house assessment of RCMP recruitment deemed it inadequate for ensuring "the achievement of its goals and objectives." Changes to increase recruitment didn't seem to have been rooted in any particular evidence, and many weren't monitored to ensure they were working. Attrition rates rose 11 percent during the 2010s, though staffing needs grew by 8 percent during roughly the same period. The force's attempts at diversification have stalled, with some Indigenous officers citing racism within the ranks as their rationale for giving up the red serge. Earlier this year, the RCMP issued a request for proposals to revamp its entrance exams, acknowledging that the existing system "potentially favours one group over another" and "demonstrates inherent cultural biases."

Once an applicant is accepted, it's off to the RCMP's training academy at Depot Division. Unlike the recruits who go on to make up municipal police forces, RCMP cadets are all sent away for their training, living and learning in an environment that's detached from the communities they will eventually serve. This, observers say, fosters a very single-minded and homogeneous approach to policing and creates, within cadets, a deeper tie to the RCMP as an institution than to the people they police.

Mounties are forged at Depot in a paramilitary environment the force says is necessary to ensure they leave with "a high level of self-discipline." Leuprecht, the Royal Military College professor, testifying to a House of Commons public safety committee in 2020, noted that Depot "socializes a certain type of command and control mindset"—do what your superiors tell you to do because they told you to do it, even if it's wrong.

That mindset was on display in a twenty-minute video, published by

a news website in February 2020 and shared on various RCMP social media accounts, highlighting "what sets the RCMP apart." In it, a superior tells a cadet, "There's no room for meek and mild in this job." You see Mountie recruits learn to march like a military band as trainers bark at them for scuffed belts, crooked pocket flaps, and feet not quite in alignment in the drill hall.

"A cow sacrificed their life for your belt," a drill instructor tells a trainee. "Look what you've done to it."

"Do you need to see a chiropractor or something?" barks another. "Put your feet forward."

Later, another instructor criticizes the height of a recruit's tie clip and asks him, "Why are those things important in our uniform?"

"Public perception of us," the recruit responds.

"What happens if we have poor public perception?" she presses.

"Lack of faith," he tells her.

When critics raised concern over the techniques in the video, the RCMP demurred, saying it was a snapshot that omitted the less camera-friendly classroom discussions about mental health and community relationships. But that defence reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of paramilitarism. Not only are paramilitaries inherently political, but over decades of studies, researchers have found they are tied to political repression because they inculcate an us-versus-them mentality that turns every issue into a question of national security requiring a forceful response and just enough secrecy to make postmortem evaluations difficult. Studies also tie paramilitarism to corruption, brutality, and inefficiency.

Combined with the Mounties' symbolism, this dynamic can not only impede efforts at reform but be corrosive: at times, concern over the force's reputation has harmed its own officers and undermined decision making, dissuading the RCMP from making responsible choices when doing so could lead to bad press.

Sergeant Pierre Lemaitre was the RCMP spokesperson on call the day, in 2007, that Robert Dziekański was in the process of immigrating at the Vancouver airport. Dziekański, who spoke no English, became increasingly agitated as he struggled to figure out how to exit customs. Several hours later, the RCMP was called after a distraught Dziekański broke a folding table against a glass wall and a computer against the floor. After a few moments of attempted conversation, Dziekański grabbed a stapler, which the Mounties took as threatening; one of the officers tasered Dziekański, who died at the scene. The information investigators gave Lemaitre about the incident, which he then relayed to the public, was not entirely correct: among other things, more officers responded to the situation and tasered Dziekański more times than had initially been described—a situation that became apparent once a video of the encounter was released.

The RCMP has a well-documented history of struggling to differentiate between legitimate threats and lawful political dissent.

According to a statement of claim in the civil suit his wife brought, Lemaitre's superiors forbade him from correcting the public record. He was demoted and transferred—the second time he paid a price for trying to be transparent and accountable. (On a previous occasion, he'd filed a sexual harassment complaint, on a journalist's behalf, against his superior and was soon transferred out of the unit.) The toll on his mental health was so severe that, in July 2013, Lemaitre killed himself.

In June, Parliament's public safety committee issued a report calling for "a complete overhaul" of the RCMP's culture and training, acknowledging the ways in which paramilitarism constrains the actions of even those with the best intentions. It also recommended the creation of a proper training college with fresh teachers and new national standards emphasizing de-escalation training and cultural competency. In his testimony to the committee, University of Toronto law professor Kent Roach said RCMP officers "are paid as educated professionals" yet managed via a "quasi-criminal discipline process." Instead, he said, they should "be subject to licence suspension just like teachers and lawyers are."

This was far from the only time federal officials had been told the force should operate less like an army. Roach's words echoed comments made by David Brown in a 2007 report following the RCMP's pension-fund scandal, by Liberal MP Judy Sgro and former Liberal senator Grant Mitchell in a 2014 government report prompted by sexual harassment allegations, and by former Supreme Court justice Michel Bastarache in a 2020 report. Historians and critics have been raising concerns through their own research for decades longer.

As has been the case with all these earlier calls for reform, the parliamentary committee's report has no force behind it: the Mounties are not obliged to follow its recommendations and, to date, have given no indication that they intend to do so.

IN THE EXTREME, failure to reform takes a toll not just on the RCMP's investigative capacities but on the Mounties entrusted to lead those investigations. Abuses within the system have cost Canada good police officers and strong leaders, sidelining some of the very people the RCMP could most benefit from.

On paper, Suki Manj was the kind of leader a modernized RCMP would want. Manj had been a Mountie for almost two decades, most recently in BC's Lower Mainland, when, in 2014, he was promoted to inspector and posted to lead the Lloydminster detachment, along the Alberta–Saskatchewan border.

For the first year, Manj appeared to be well respected by his officers. A 2015 evaluation depicts him in mostly glowing terms. Colleagues described Manj as passionate, able to articulate his ideas in ways that "often create excitement in his followers," and good at providing rationales for tough decisions. One wrote that Manj had "completely changed the attitude and daily function of our detachment in the past 10 months."

Manj told me he'd never seen a detachment in quite such disarray as Lloydminster when he arrived. He soon got the impression that his superiors didn't have much time or inclination to help him adjust to his new role. He says they took a hands-off approach while making him feel somehow at fault for not running every change he made by them. Near Christmas 2015, when Manj began to suspect that two people in the detachment were romantically involved and asked them to declare it, per the force's workplace relationship policy, the environment in the detachment fell apart.

By January 2016, people inside and outside the RCMP office were buzzing about a relationship between the Lloydminster office manager and one of the detachment's constables. However, neither the constable nor the office manager—both of whom were married to other people—were willing to admit it. Manj felt he had no choice but to force the point so the relationship could be properly evaluated for potential conflict of interest. The issue consumed the detachment: it was, as one sergeant summarized, Team Manj versus Team Office Manager.

In May 2016, Manj and the office manager in question were each called into meetings with Manj's superiors; during hers, the office manager continued to deny the relationship. The damage to Manj's leadership was done. That month, Manj says, his superiors told him he would be transferred; he felt it was implied that he should make it look like the move was his idea.

After a year that he describes as "complete and utter punishment," the RCMP levelled code of conduct charges against Manj and his wife, Tammy Hollingsworth, a corporal in the Lloydminster detachment. (Neither Manj nor Hollingsworth reported to each other; she had gotten sucked into office politics by virtue of her friendships with the office manager and the constable's estranged wife.) The charges alleged, among other things, that Manj had failed to abide by his superior Shahin Mehdizadeh's instructions to "just leave [the relationship] alone" and that he had included false and misleading information in a statement. Hollingsworth faced similar charges, specifically that she had "abused her position, power and authority" as a Mountie by "conspiring" with her husband and others to learn intimate details about the constable involved so that she could pass them along to his estranged wife. Both Manj and Hollingsworth were suspended. (Neither Mehdizadeh nor an RCMP spokesperson would comment on specific details pertaining to Manj's career.)

RCMP officers' actions on- and off-duty are regulated through a code of conduct system. The force has one year from the time it becomes aware of a possible breach to investigate it; depending on

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the severity of a violation, Mounties can be reassigned, suspended with or without pay, or, in the most severe cases, fired.

In 2019, two separate conduct boards found in Manj's and Hollingsworth's favour. The adjudicator in Manj's case confirmed that the relationship between the constable and the office manager had indeed been taking place, and the adjudicators in both his and Hollingsworth's cases slammed the RCMP for how it had used the code of conduct process. They derided the force for misinterpreting evidence, taking statements in an unreliable manner, and relying on the word of the sergeant, who had made several "quantum leaps" in coming to the conclusions that she did. "Honesty, which is a core value of the RCMP, would have resolved this whole affair," decreed the adjudicator in Hollingsworth's case.

Manj and Hollingsworth's situation is not the only troubling one. In 2014, the RCMP brought in changes to its disciplinary system that were intended to make the process by which it handled contraventions of its code of conduct "remedial, corrective, and educative." They weren't successful, according to a 2017 report by the force's Civilian Review and Complaints Commission (CRCC), the independent federal agency responsible for handling public complaints about RCMP conduct. Per the CRCC's report, the 2014 changes left many RCMP officers and the CRCC with the impression that "code of conduct violations are being used to target and intimidate members, particularly if they raise concerns about harassment." The CRCC also raised concerns about the selective application of discipline, having heard "instances of retaliation and abuse of authority." This type of organizational culture, the CRCC wrote, drags down good mental health, the integrity and efficiency of operations—even "the effectiveness of the organization as a whole."

Despite the conduct board clearing him of wrongdoing, Manj hasn't been back to work. Until recently, he was on what the RCMP calls "off-duty sick" but what one police psychologist cited by the CRCC said should more accurately be called "off-duty mad," describing it as a leave that members take to escape "a toxic work environment, high levels of employee stress and a culture of fear." As of June 2021, the number of Mounties on off-duty sick leave for six months or longer was 713. (The force doesn't track how many of those cases stem from code of conduct issues.)

In 2019, the Liberal government created a new civilian advisory board, separate from the CRCC, to give the RCMP advice in addressing harassment, problematic workplace culture, and other management issues. (If you are losing track of all the boards, committees, and commissions that have been tasked with advising or overseeing the RCMP, that is likely because they have multiplied considerably over the years.) Like most of the other accountability mechanisms, it doesn't have the power to compel the RCMP to make changes.

Even now, University of Ottawa criminologist Michael Kempa says it's not apparent—at least from public-facing comments—that senior Mounties or the federal politicians in charge of them

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understand the magnitude of the reforms that are required.

Manj recently came to the same conclusion. In July, he signed forms to officially end his career as an RCMP officer. "No way I could go back to that company with the leadership," he says. "It's a gong show." Hollingsworth remains on off-duty sick leave. She filed a lawsuit in 2019 accusing the force of malicious prosecution; her case is ongoing.

A DECADE AGO, the RCMP's lone civilian commissioner, William Elliott, announced a rare coup for accountability: in situations where a Mountie's actions led to a person's death or serious injury, provincial watchdogs (whose job is to decide whether criminal charges are warranted) would investigate. This gave provinces considerably more power to hold RCMP officers accountable for serious errors. Previously, in such cases, the Mounties themselves would investigate—which is still the case for other alleged wrongdoing, including everything from inappropriate use of force to bias against Indigenous people. ("Police investigating police" is the term generally used for this practice; most outside experts view it as biased and unfair.)

For a 2020 academic paper about the "dynamics of accountability," Krista Stelkia, a Syilx/Tlingit researcher at Simon Fraser University with a degree in criminology, interviewed thirteen representatives from various oversight agencies within BC to outline the differences in oversight procedures between Mounties and their local counterparts. A majority of those interviewed (with the notable exception of the RCMP participants themselves) found the Mountie process ineffective and inadequate.

If a citizen lodges a complaint against a municipal police officer, it's investigated by an in-house professional-standards unit, under the scrutiny of an independent watchdog, with a provincially mandated six-month deadline. By contrast, if a complaint is lodged against an RCMP officer, the Mounties' in-house professional unit conducts its own review with no independent oversight and a one-year deadline that the force is known to have blown through.

The divergence between Mounties and their local counterparts is so great that one agency representative spoke to Stelkia of Mounties' eyes widening when they were brought into other police-force investigations and saw how thorough the process was. They go away and realize, "Oh, this is not going to be a cakewalk," he told her.

Once the RCMP completes its investigation of a complaint, if the member of the public who filed the complaint is unsatisfied with the response, they have recourse through the CRCC. Though the civilian-oversight agency cannot compel the RCMP to change its policies or practices, it can issue public reports into allegations of wrongdoing. The RCMP is required to participate in these CRCC investigations, but its average response time is seventeen months. (In 2019, the RCMP signed a memorandum of understanding with the CRCC promising to meet new timelines; like all other recommendations called for by the CRCC, it is not legally binding.)

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Sometimes, the RCMP takes so long to respond to requests for information that similar subsequent complaints emerge from new sources. That happened last year, when the BC Civil Liberties Association filed a complaint to the CRCC about the RCMP's enforcement tactics in Wet'suwet'en territory, where some First Nation members and their supporters have been blocking the construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline. The CRCC declined to investigate the complaint for a reason that was "unprecedented," says Carly Teillet, a community lawyer with the BC Civil Liberties Association: because it was still waiting for the RCMP's response to its investigation following twenty-one similar complaints, which had been filed by anti–shale gas protesters in New Brunswick, in 2013.

The CRCC released its final report from the New Brunswick complaints last November. It commented on significant red flags in the RCMP's participation in the investigative process, finding that the force had made a "lengthy, point-by-point rebuttal of the Commission's findings, without additional factual information being provided." Instead, the CRCC noted, "the RCMP sought to substitute its own views of the evidence for those of the Commission, and to provide its own conclusions about the reasonableness of its members' actions."

In other words, the RCMP's participation in an independent oversight process consisted of casting doubt on its overseers without providing them with any information to back up the force's own version of events.

The CRCC is not the only investigative body to raise concerns about RCMP oversight. When the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) released its final report, in June 2019, Mountie apathy for investigating such cases was evident throughout. One mother recounted how the RCMP wouldn't take her statement when she went to report her daughter missing. Such a delay, when time was of the essence, meant she might never get answers. Others spoke about how they couldn't seem to get Mounties to speak to them respectfully during some of the most difficult moments of their lives. Others traced Mountie misconduct back even further. In 2013, when the Qikiqtani Truth Commission published a special report focusing on its policing findings, it described how, between 1950 and 1975, "some RCMP used their position of authority to coerce Inuit women into sexual acts."

The MMIWG commissioners were unequivocal in their conclusions: "The RCMP have not proven to Canada that they are capable of holding themselves to account."

If there ever were a window for RCMP reform, it opened in 2007, after independent investigator David Brown publicly declared the force "horribly broken." Four years earlier, a human resources employee had sounded the alarm over problematic hiring practices, nepotism, contract splitting, and misappropriation of funds within the force. A subsequent auditor general's report revealed that the RCMP had inappropriately used $3.1 million from the pension fund on human resources projects.

Brown, who had previously been the head of the Ontario Securities

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Commission, was brought in by then prime minister Stephen Harper to dig into how a scandal of that magnitude was even possible. "After sifting through the various versions of the events, the picture of the RCMP and its culture that has emerged is one of mistrust and cynicism," Brown wrote, noting that there was an evident breach of trust between the rank-and-file and Mountie management.

Not only had the commissioner of the day, Giuliano Zaccardelli, and his team failed to respond to the scandal in a "transparent, timely, effective or thorough" manner, Brown ruled, but the members who had dared to expose the scandal "suffered personally for their efforts." In the case of the officer who brought the wrongdoing to Zaccardelli's attention, the commissioner was "prepared to cut a swath through the career of an officer who was highly regarded on the basis of a single meeting." Zaccardelli had immediately ordered that the officer be transferred, and the message to Mounties across the country, Brown wrote, was "one brings bad news to the Commissioner at one's peril."

From the moment Brown made it apparent that the RCMP's governance structure was broken, there was—for a time—some momentum for change. In 2008, the federal government created a reform council that produced a series of reports over the following two years. The government also brought in the force's first and only civilian commissioner, William Elliott, for a tumultuous term that saw Elliott accused of threatening and bullying his deputies. The government handed the reins back to a seasoned officer in 2011—just as women in the RCMP began breaking their silence on sexual harassment and sexual assault within the force.

"There was a moment where the Harper government probably could have done something and it would have been lasting," says Kempa, the University of Ottawa criminologist. There were enough senior people on the "change management team who I interviewed that clearly understood what was going on. And then it fell apart."

The window closed in 2013, when Harper's government received royal assent for Bill C-42, the Enhancing Royal Canadian Mounted Police Accountability Act. Bill C-42 introduced a modernized code of conduct system (the same one Manj says was used to punish him and Hollingsworth) and enabled the CRCC to review RCMP activities at will, without waiting for a specific public complaint. While the bill did include some reforms, it went only as far as changing elements within the overall system—it left the system itself intact. The RCMP remained a paramilitary organization, one without the robust external oversight experts have long said is necessary.

As Bill C-42 became law, then commissioner Bob Paulson introduced a new action plan, ready to tackle what he would later call the "very serious issue" of harassment within the force, while at the same time denying that there was a systemic problem with sexual harassment. That action plan "appears to have foundered," the CRCC remarked in its 2017 workplace culture report, adding that "the RCMP has since moved on to the next initiative, with little regard as to whether the actions previously identified have been implemented, are leading to meaningful change, or, indeed, have further exacerbated the problems they are meant to address."

In June, questions of transparency, accountability, and the RCMP's priorities came roaring back into headlines when *Frank Magazine* published some of the 911 calls made during the mass murder in Portapique. (The calls have since been taken offline, but transcripts remain.) In the first recording, made at 10:01 p.m., an operator is told by Tyler Blair's stepmother that her husband has been shot and that there is a police car in front of her house. In the second call, fifteen minutes later, Blair's brother says that his mother has been murdered and that the man who did it drove away in a police car. The recordings clearly call into question the timeline of the attack that the RCMP offered publicly, in which the force indicated it had not "confirmed" that the gunman was driving a police car until 6 a.m. the next morning.

Soon afterward, the RCMP issued its first update on the investigation in six months—not to respond to the substance of what had been released but to condemn the publication of the 911 calls. According to a subsequent statement, the RCMP asked the Ontario Provincial Police to investigate the leak. It, too, did not address the revelations themselves.

What is novel and hopeful in the Portapique investigation, though, is that the federal government's initial plan for an independent review of the mass murder—a process that would not have been able to compel evidence or force witnesses to testify—triggered sustained public outcry, forcing the government to make a swift reversal. "We have heard calls from families, survivors, advocates, and Nova Scotia Members of Parliament for more transparency," said public safety minister Bill Blair in a statement announcing a full-fledged public inquiry—one that is able to compel the production of evidence and the testimony of RCMP officers.

The inquiry's final report is due in November 2022. It's clear that many Nova Scotians are outraged by the RCMP's response to this killing spree. While the public inquiry was a good move politically, Gordon, the Simon Fraser University criminologist, says only time will tell whether its examination of the Mounties' handling of the murders will draw connections with the systemic and cultural issues impeding RCMP reform across the country.

Even if it does situate recent events in their full context, the Portapique report will likely find itself reiterating what many before it have already thoroughly explained. So the question remains: Will another inquiry and another report spark enough momentum for more genuine reforms? "People are very upset by what happened, the conduct of the RCMP in particular," Gordon says. "Whether it will produce any bigger and better results is really hard to say." ■

JANE GERSTER is an independent reporter whose history of the RCMP, *For the Good of the Force*, will be published by McClelland & Stewart in 2022.

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POLITICS

Citizen of Nowhere

Deepan Budlakoti was Canadian one day, stateless the next. Who is responsible for someone no country wants to claim?

BY ADNAN KHAN
ILLUSTRATION BY JAMES LEE CHIAHAN

DEEPAN BUDLAKOTI'S immigration troubles began with a brawl.

In 2009, he was living in the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre, serving a four-month sentence for breaking and entering. One day, after Budlakoti had been tossed into solitary confinement for fighting with other inmates, a corrections officer asked about his citizenship. On its face, the question wasn't strange: the centre is often tasked by the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) with sorting through immigration detainees.

Budlakoti answered that he was Canadian. Born in Ottawa on October 17, 1989, he grew up in the city. His parents moved from India four years before his birth, brought on as cooks and cleaners for the Indian High Commission (IHC). He was thus Canadian by right of *jus soli*, or "law of the soil," according to which any child born within a country automatically becomes a citizen of that nation—a principle Canada adheres to.

Citizenship by birth, however, doesn't apply to the children of diplomatic staff. The officer flagged Budlakoti's case for review. In May 2010, immigration officials decided there had been a mistake. The Citizenship Act was clear: because employees of foreign governments aren't subject to the laws of the country they work in, they aren't entitled to *jus soli* provisions. Budlakoti was not, and had never been, a citizen. He was stunned. Canada was the only country he'd ever known. His parents were Canadian; his younger brother was Canadian. He had a birth certificate and, over the course of his life, had been issued two passports. If he wasn't Canadian, what was he?

At twenty-one, Budlakoti suddenly found himself reclassified as a permanent resident—a status that came with risk. A criminal record could have him thrown out of Canada, and later that year, while he was out on parole, his crimes grew more brazen. He was arrested for drug and weapons trafficking and sentenced to three years in jail. Budlakoti's case was sent to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), now tasked with deciding whether to deport him. He fought back. In a bid to reverse his permanent resident status, Budlakoti's legal team provided evidence that his parents had quit the IHC in the summer of 1989, months before he was born. The former high commissioner confirmed it. An Ottawa-area doctor also verified that Budlakoti's parents had begun working for him that summer.

The government produced its own documents. They showed not only that Budlakoti's father and mother had been employed by the IHC in December 1989 but that his parents' diplomatic status had only been officially revoked in January 1990, two and a half months after Budlakoti's birth. Watching all this unfold, Budlakoti felt himself come apart. For every affidavit that supported him, something else undermined his claims.

At the December 2011 hearing, the IRB sided with the government and, because of the "serious criminality" of Budlakoti's conduct, ordered him removed from the country. After completing his firearms sentence, in December 2012, he was transferred to the CBSA, now responsible for carrying out the deportation order.

That order turned out to be toothless. There was nowhere for Budlakoti to go. He no longer had travel documents and had no permission to enter any other country. India refused to take him. It had no reason to. Budlakoti was never an Indian citizen, nor did he have special grounds to become one. He had no connection to the country and barely spoke Hindi. He had lost his eligibility for Indian citizenship when his parents, deciding to make their home in Canada, opted against registering him with India. Budlakoti had become, in effect, stateless.

By April 2013, the federal government—having run out of options short of recognizing Budlakoti as a citizen—agreed to release him to his parents under strict conditions, which included a 9 p.m. to

9 a.m. curfew. His documents were invalidated, meaning he could no longer work legally or access social or medical services. Officially, he was permanently awaiting deportation. Budlakoti had been cast into what his immigration lawyer, Yavar Hameed, has called a "legal black hole."

In the years since, Budlakoti has been fighting to stay in Canada. He contends that the details of his parents' embassy employment are too murky for the government to rule against him; that too little thought has been given to the fact that he was raised entirely in Canada and within its institutions; and that, even if there had been a mistake, it would largely fall on his parents. Budlakoti believes his criminal record is being used as a basis to strip away his citizenship. Portraying himself as a target of bureaucratic overzealousness and racism, he has toured the country on trips paid for by crowdfunding campaigns and has spoken at university campuses alongside prominent immigration and refugee lawyers.

In 2013, a group of sympathetic activists and academics who call themselves Justice for Deepan, or J4D, sprang up in Ottawa to raise awareness of his story; in 2015, members placed "Deepan for Citizen" lawn signs throughout the city. Budlakoti has appealed to the United Nations and visited politicians' offices. He has appeared on radio, local TV—anywhere that would have him. His ordeal has even been made into a short film called *Stateless*. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Amnesty International, and former Green Party leader Elizabeth May have all written letters of support.

It doesn't help Budlakoti's situation that he can't seem to stay out of trouble. In October 2015, only a few months after the conditions of his deportation order were eased for good behaviour, he was ticketed for going sixty-five kilometres per hour over the speed limit in a rented Chevy Camaro. Then, later that year, he was arrested on drug-trafficking charges. In his apartment, police found a semiautomatic handgun, $3,000 in cash, and 144 grams of cocaine. In 2017, he was arrested again, as part of a major anti-gang operation. Labelled a "key player" by Ottawa police, Budlakoti faced a total of eighty-three gun-related charges. According to court filings, he sold weapons to an undercover informant.

Budlakoti's behaviour frustrates supporters, but it also raises troublesome questions about the way we value citizenship and the advantages it provides. How would it stretch our sense of justice to protect someone like Budlakoti? What does it say about a country if it fails to?

"No one else can ever understand the full extent of what I'm going through," Budlakoti says over the phone from the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre, where he has been in custody since 2017. His voice betrays little emotion, and while polite, he has no interest in small talk. He has been speaking about his citizenship ordeal for so long that it has produced a distant self-awareness, as if he were discussing someone else. He describes his cell conditions—shared, with no access to fresh air or daylight. He is shackled when he visits doctors and strip-searched going to and from the courthouse despite being under surveillance for the duration of the trip. Normally lean, Budlakoti has become gaunt, having lost fifty pounds in prison. His legal battles bring his days into sharp focus. "If I don't move forward," he says, "it will drive me, basically, to suicide."

Those battles have scored very few wins. After the IRB decision, his team took the case to the Federal Court. They argued that, according to international conventions, Budlakoti's statelessness obligated Canada to provide him with citizenship. The Federal Court ruled against him in 2014. Budlakoti wasn't stateless, the court said, because he hadn't exhausted all possibilities—including formally applying for Indian citizenship, even though his criminal record virtually guarantees that he would not receive it. Budlakoti lost his appeal the following year. His defence team believes Budlakoti's criminality marred his chances; before the case was even heard, the Federal Court of Appeal judge told Budlakoti's lawyer that his crimes were a strike against his character. After the Supreme Court refused to hear his case, in 2016, Budlakoti turned to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, asking it to hold Canada to account.

"He's always kind of in survival mode," says Daniel Cayley-Daoust, a longstanding member of J4D and someone Budlakoti counts as a close friend. "If people can't follow that pace, it's hard to tag along." Cayley-Daoust first learned about the group through his activism against Canada's migrant-detention system, an experience that made him acutely aware of what it means to be an individual bereft of institutional support. In October 2013, with money a constant worry, Budlakoti's legal team filed a Federal Court application forcing the government to process a one-year work permit. During this period, he drove a tow truck. When his employer refused to accurately tally his hours, endangering his eligibility for employment insurance, Budlakoti mobilized his union to picket and conduct an all-day "phone zap" that involved union members overwhelming the company with phone calls. Along with fundraising, Budlakoti supplemented his income with day-labour gigs, delivering patio stones and barbecues, taking on roofing jobs, and reselling internet purchases.

"Lots of people get wronged by the state and they give up," says Stacy Douglas, a legal studies professor at Carleton University who felt compelled to join J4D because she believes the Canadian government has put Budlakoti in an egregious situation. "It's too hard. You owe thousands of dollars, you lose year after year after year. It's only tenacious people who win."

That tenacity hasn't always been media friendly. On the public-access TV show *Talk Local Peel*, in an episode uploaded to YouTube in 2014, a caller berated Budlakoti on-air. "He committed a crime to begin with," she said. "The cockiness, he needs to get rid of. He shouldn't start now dictating what he thinks and what he sees and how the court should be."

In person, Budlakoti can be aloof. According to policy worker and J4Der

Karl Flecker, he once insisted on wearing sunglasses indoors for a press conference, seemingly unconcerned about how distant they made him appear. The fact that his legal issues have dragged on for over a decade hasn't helped either. "The length, struggle, and complexity of the case," says Flecker, "wore people down quicker than it should have." Underlying Budlakoti's defiance, he suggests, is panic. Budlakoti is not, Flecker says, "reaching out with tender fingers but with grappling hooks, because he's hanging on."

Despite it all, Budlakoti seems immune to doubt or criticism. A practised speaker, he rarely strays from his message: the absurdity of his ordeal. Budlakoti concedes that his parents failed to include him in their application for citizenship in 1995. But their assumption, based on what they knew and had been told, was that he was already Canadian. That error—one that even the Federal Court of Appeal described as "beyond his control"—has left him adrift, without nationality in his own country and with no place else to call home. In 2018, the UN found that Budlakoti was Canadian and was entitled to the same rights and protections as all citizens. Yet the government seems perfectly willing to let him languish indefinitely.

There have been other setbacks. In 2016, Budlakoti suffered burns across his body while helping repair a friend's truck. A GoFundMe page launched by J4D shows a bloated right hand with peeling skin. "My face was peeling and blood everywhere. My legs were all burned, my thighs and my calves. It was a bad situation," he told the *Ottawa Citizen* a month after the accident. The online campaign raised $7,109 of the $6,000 goal, but Budlakoti had no access to insurance and no steady income, and his hospital bills remain unpaid.

Then there are the self-inflicted wounds. Budlakoti's 2016 drug-trafficking charge was a blow to J4D, nearly fracturing the group. Douglas was frustrated after receiving the news of Budlakoti's arrest. "It was a kick to the gut," she says. Another member, feeling betrayed, left. But, for those who remained, Douglas says, the arrest brought home the fact that Budlakoti is not an easy case and that he can't be thrown away because he's difficult or somehow undesirable.

Budlakoti can be grudging about claiming responsibility for his situation. "What can I say? They're supporting me; they're helping me," he says, referring to J4D. "If they feel like I committed a crime and I messed up, I can't really say anything, right?" He acknowledges his poor choices and blames his circumstances. The J4D members who still support Budlakoti largely view his criminal behaviour through the lens of his childhood trauma. Budlakoti had a troubled relationship with his father. Elementary school teachers, worried by bruises on his body, alerted the Children's Aid Society. He was eventually taken in as a ward of the state in his early adolescent years—he bounced from group home to group home and was sexually abused. He ran away, to sleep on benches and forage for food at friends' houses. "Either I survive or I die," he says. "Those are the options that I had as a child."

Budlakoti's status was caught during a period of Conservative obsession over bogus citizenship claims.

Budlakoti's history of neglect, his legal team argues, should be factored into his case—an argument borne out by James Deutsch, previously a staff psychiatrist at the Hospital for Sick Children and today a psychiatry professor at the University of Toronto. Deutsch examined Budlakoti in both 2014 and 2017. "I frequently see criminal behaviours as a component of coping and efforts to recover from experiences of chronic rejection and abuse in young males," Deutsch wrote in his 2014 report. He also acknowledged that Budlakoti's legal plight—a situation that, again, appears to have no end in sight—may be exacerbating the PTSD caused by his upbringing. "Prolonged incarceration can often reinforce the prior traumas," he wrote.

In a 2020 article published in *The Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, Budlakoti argues that, just as the Canadian government failed to keep him safe when he was under its care as a child, it continues to demonstrate an indifference to his "humanity" in its refusal to acknowledge his citizenship in the country where he was born. "I am not disposable," he writes.

THE SO-CALLED error in Budlakoti's status was caught during a period of Conservative obsession over protecting the country from bogus citizenship claims and immigration cheats. After Stephen Harper took office, in 2006, his government began to make changes to the naturalization process that, according to one policy expert, made citizenship "harder to get and easier to lose." Those changes included overhauling the citizenship test with tougher questions (which tripled the failure rate) and raising the application fee from $100 to $530. A tip line was introduced in 2011 to report dubious citizenship claims, and an investigation into marriages of convenience—in which a citizen weds a foreign national solely to help them immigrate—was launched; potentially 11,000 citizens were under watch. Of those, 286 were given notice that their citizenship statuses were in danger. In 2012, Jason Kenney, citizenship and immigration minister at the time, even told the CBC he would favour modifying *jus soli* citizenship laws.

By then, Budlakoti's criminality had flattened him into a caricature that neatly embodied Conservative fears about immigration, security, and citizenship fraud—he became, he told reporters, "a scapegoat." Indeed, in the early days of his case, members of the Conservative Party were not shy about expressing their feelings toward him. "This convicted criminal has never been a Canadian citizen," said a spokesperson for Chris Alexander, then the new minister

of citizenship and immigration, in 2013. "He should not have chosen a life of crime if he did not want to be deported from Canada."

One year later, Alexander introduced Bill C-24, the Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act, which, among other provisions, allowed the government to strip citizenship from dual citizens convicted of terrorism and treason. Its purpose, Alexander explained, was to "remind individuals that citizenship is not a right, it's a privilege." The bill, which became law on June 19, 2014, received broad criticism, much of it focused on the fact that the stated revocations wouldn't be decided in front of a judge but would be left to ministerial fiat. Groups like the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association argued that, by creating a second class of Canadian nationals, Conservatives were chipping away at the very principles of citizenship.

The idea of being second class resonates with Budlakoti and is bound up with deeply felt allegations that his treatment has been racist, something he also experienced growing up. "You do something and get punished for it," he says. "Versus another person who does the exact same thing but happens to be white."

He points to the case of Alexander Vavilov. In 1994, Vavilov was born in Toronto to Russian spies who moved to Canada under false identities. Vavilov grew up believing he was Canadian, having no idea of his parents' real identities until their 2010 arrest by the FBI. This set off a chain of events similar to Budlakoti's case. When Vavilov filed for a new passport, he was denied: a bureaucrat decided that Vavilov was not eligible for *jus soli* entitlements because he had been born to foreign government staff. As in Budlakoti's case, a 2015 Federal Court ruling agreed with this reading of the law. But, unlike in Budlakoti's case, the Federal Court of Appeal ruled in 2017 that the law should apply only to those with diplomatic immunity. In 2019, the Supreme Court—which, per protocol, gave no reason when it refused to hear Budlakoti's case in 2016—upheld Vavilov's citizenship as valid. Vavilov won, Budlakoti believes, thanks to a key difference that divides their experiences: he is white.

Why wasn't the same legal logic applied to his case? asks Budlakoti. Beyond a diplomatic passport, there is no evidence that his parents, as domestic workers, were extended any special privileges, much less immunity. Ultimately, the courts didn't believe that Vavilov was culpable for his parents' error: a baby, after all, can't apply for citizenship by itself. That Budlakoti is expected to shoulder this responsibility seems, to him, cruel. There were several instances, while he was a minor, when the error could have easily been corrected. From the issuing of his birth certificate, through his multiple passport applications, and all the way to him being taken as a Crown ward, no official disabused his parents of the notion that their son was Canadian. Only when Budlakoti was vulnerable was the mistake weaponized.

"The unfairness here," says Audrey Macklin, professor and Rebecca Cook Chair in Human Rights Law at the University of Toronto, "is that the government created a situation where Deepan and his parents relied on the government's affirmation of his citizenship, and now, Canada says, 'Gotcha!'" That unfairness, Macklin argues, trumps all other legal considerations and should force Canada to reconsider its whole approach to Budlakoti's case.

The complexity of Budlakoti's situation deepens the longer he remains in limbo. There is no obvious procedural remedy for the discrepancy between his parents' account of their employment and the document trail the government provided. In the decade since the IRB decision, no practical objective has been achieved by revoking his citizenship. It neither erased his crimes nor rehabilitated him. He's still here. For J4D, India's outright rejection of Canada's attempt to send Budlakoti there was a powerful statement. Canada could not simply deny its obligation to its own citizen.

It was this obligation, at least in principle, that the Liberals appeared to take seriously. In 2011, Justin Trudeau wrote a letter offering assistance to Budlakoti, and Budlakoti recalls a positive meeting with Liberal MP Greg Fergus. During the 2015 election, Trudeau promised to repeal Harper's Bill C-24, linking it to his election slogan "A Canadian is a Canadian is a Canadian." But, once in office, the Liberals removed the Bill C-24 provisions related to terrorism offences while keeping intact the ability to revoke citizenship without legal hearings. In their first year, they revoked 184 citizenships—almost as many as in the previous twenty-seven years combined. Among those affected, according to the CBC, was a Canadian who arrived in the country as a nine-month-old but whose father had not reported a criminal conviction in his home country. Also served notice was a woman who had fled an abusive husband in Iran but labelled herself single on her application for permanent residency.

It wasn't until a 2017 Federal Court ruling dismantled the act that the Liberals began taking serious steps toward addressing the question of citizenship. But it seemed the mood had shifted regarding Budlakoti. After Budlakoti's 2016 arrest, Baljit Nagra, a J4D member and a criminology professor at the University of Ottawa, met with Fergus alongside Cayley-Daoust and Budlakoti's immigration lawyer. "You could tell he was like, 'I get it. I agree with you guys that this is ridiculous.' But he was also like, 'Deepan needs to stop and stay out of trouble.'" (Fergus didn't respond to interview requests.)

As Nagra says, "I don't think any politician wants to touch this. Even though you can tell, when you talk to them one-on-one, they realize that this is wrong. But they don't want it to be on the headlines: so-and-so MP is trying to get citizenship for a criminal who sold drugs and guns." A year after Fergus's warning, Budlakoti would be charged, once more, for selling drugs and guns.

Last December, the eighty-three charges from Budlakoti's 2017 arrest were reduced to eighteen. He accepted the weapons-trafficking charges. The evidence was overwhelming. All five firearm sales had

been under surveillance, in areas that ranged from a storage locker to the parking lot of a Farm Boy. An application to stay the proceedings based on entrapment and abuse of process was tossed out this May. The court noted, despite an argument that his statelessness created a unique vulnerability, that Budlakoti could have walked away from the situation at any time.

Still, at thirty-one, Budlakoti keeps fighting. "If I give up," he says from jail, "they win." Sentencing is on hold until the court sorts out his allegations of human rights and Charter violations related to his recent custody—he has, he says, been subjected to hundreds of strip searches in the last three years, and his mental health plan is not closely followed. He has tried to make the best of his current stint. He organized a widely reported hunger strike for improved living conditions, has spoken out about Ontario's expensive prison phone system, and has written editorials to have prisoners released on account of the dangers posed by COVID-19. For supporters, his activism engages the highest principles of citizenship—an argument Deutsch, the psychiatrist, made back in 2014. "Despite his ongoing difficulties," he wrote, "Deepan shows important signs of the potential for future positive contributions as a citizen."

Due to COVID-19, Budlakoti hasn't had many visitors, but his mother came once a month when she was allowed. He is mending his relationship with his father and speaks with both parents once a week. His parents have suffered through a litany of recent health conditions, and he no longer gives them updates on his situation. "It's just going to provide them pain and grief," he says. His younger brother visited once, the week after Budlakoti's arrest. The brothers were living together at the time, and the charges seem to have ruptured their relationship. "I thought we were close," Budlakoti says. "Clearly, I was mistaken."

Budlakoti doesn't think too far ahead. Without health care or legal work opportunities, his future is bleak. According to J4D members, he owes $17,000 in legal fees due to his failed court bids. He now believes he could be stateless forever. Asked about an alternative life where he'd never had his citizenship taken, he describes modest dreams. "I think I would have been living a normal life. Being married, having kids, working nine to five." He agrees that his troubles wouldn't have happened had he not been arrested. And, if he had not committed further crimes after 2010, he would likely be eligible for a pardon by now, opening up a plausible path to citizenship.

Budlakoti is not giving up. In response to a 2017 amendment to the Citizenship Act that allows the minister of citizenship and immigration to provide discretionary grants based on statelessness, Budlakoti confirms that his applications are being prepared. He says he will not ask for intervention on humanitarian or compassionate grounds but on what he sees as simple facts. "I am a Canadian. I was born and raised in Canada. I've been here my entire life." 🍁

ADNAN KHAN has written for *Hazlitt*, the *Globe and Mail*, and *Maisonneuve*. His first novel, *There Has to Be a Knife*, was published in 2019.

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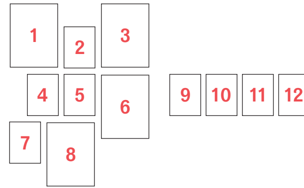
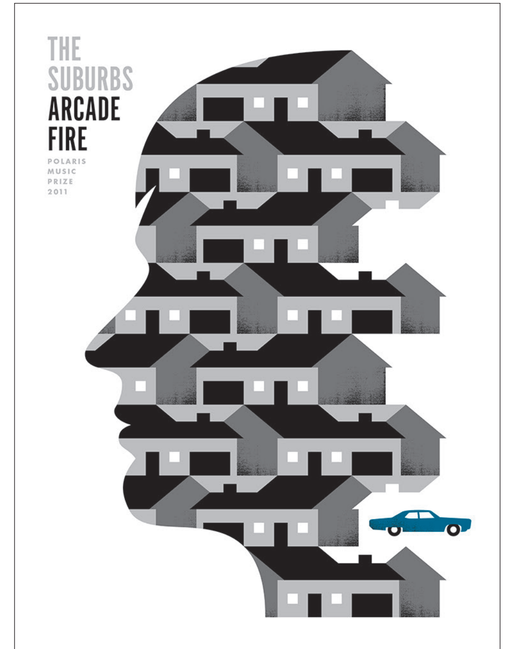
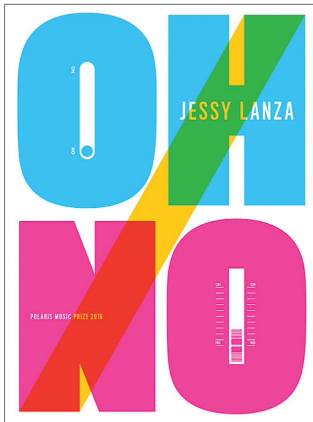
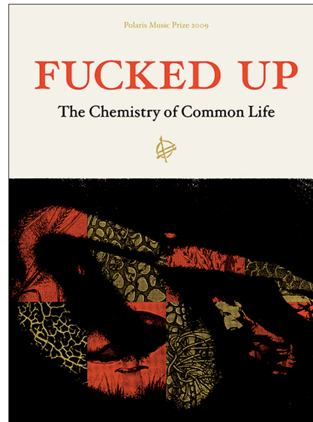








1 Jeremy Dutcher, *Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa* by Alëna Skarina, 2018 **2** Grimes, *Art Angels* by Yarek Waszul, 2016 **3** Arcade Fire, *The Suburbs* by Doublenaut, 2011 **4** Jessy Lanza, *Oh No* by Stéphane Monnet, Monnet Design, 2016 **5** Fucked Up, *The Chemistry of Common Life* by Doublenaut, 2009 **6** Lido Pimienta, *La Papessa* by Ohara Hale, 2017 **7** Drake, *If You're Reading This It's Too Late* by Matthew Daley, 2015 **8** Snotty Nose Rez Kids, *Trapline* by Maya McKibbin, 2019

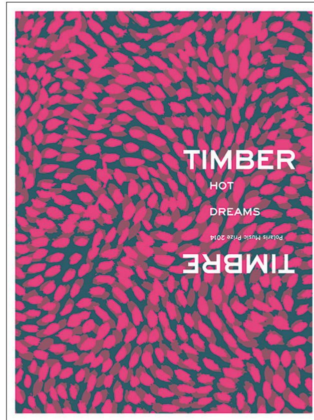
ARTWORK COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS

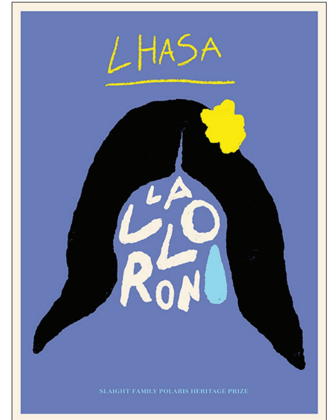
ARTS & CULTURE

The Art of the Poster

For sixteen years, the album illustrations commissioned for the Polaris Prize have equalled the beauty of the music itself

BY MEREDITH HOLIGROSKI





9 Austra, *Feel It Break* by Pat Hamou, 2011 **10** Timber Timbre, *Hot Dreams* by Tristan Marantos, 2014 **11** Shad, *A Short Story about a War* by Anson Chan, 2019 **12** Lhasa, *La Llorona* by Maxime Francout, heritage prize

FOR MANY MUSIC FANS, a great night out starts with a stamp on your hand and ends with a roll of paper under your arm: after the lights come up and the band moves on to a new city, a gig poster is proof that you were in the crowd and a reminder of how you felt being there. Some gig posters feature graphic styles so remarkable that they have gained a kind of cultural immortality, coming to represent the genres and eras for which they were commissioned. The bright, psychedelic images and warped text that evoke 1960s rock are a style popularized by poster artists, including Wes Wilson and Bonnie MacLean, promoting concerts at venues like the Fillmore Auditorium, in San Francisco. Punk music from the '70s and '80s is rendered in grainy black and white in public memory, as if freshly spat out by a Xerox—a cheap publicity machine used in those days by musicians and their fans. Iconic posters are still reprinted and sold to collectors decades later, long after the shows they were made to commemorate.

When the Polaris Music Prize was launched, in 2006, it decided to tap into this tradition, drawing on the long history of gig posters as part of its celebration of musical excellence. (The award is given annually to the album a jury of music critics deems the most artistically successful; since 2015, heritage prizes have also been awarded to albums that were released before the Polaris Prize was created.) Intended to become "beautiful and rare mementos," the posters signal that the Polaris is closer to the concert scene than to the red carpet. Nominated musicians are given a framed print of their poster to commemorate their achievement; other copies are distributed to the poster designer and to Polaris partners and sponsors, and the remainder are sold to fans.

It was Polaris founder Steve Jordan who landed on the idea of commissioning posters for shortlist nominees. (Jordan left the organization last year.) Giving out

traditional award statuettes didn’t fit with the spirit he wanted for Polaris, and he was inspired to take an alternative approach after walking through the Flatstock poster exhibition at the South by Southwest (SXSW) music festival. Early on, poster designers came from the gig-poster scene. More recently, Polaris has been collaborating with The Office of Gilbert Li, a Toronto design studio, to expand the pool of visual artists it works with. To find designers, Polaris puts out an open call for portfolios on social media after the longlist of albums is released; the studio’s creative directors also research potential candidates. Together, Polaris and the design studio decide the pairing of artist and album, which the curators consider the most important element in each poster’s success.

Many factors go into selecting poster artists, including demographic and geographic diversity as well as professional background. Over the years, Polaris artists have included commercial and editorial illustrators, fine artists, and other graphic designers—people who may not have made a gig poster before, selected in the hope of getting surprising results. Li says that an artist’s distinctive aesthetic is a big part of why they are chosen—sometimes even because it differs from the existing look and feel of the album in an interesting way. “We don’t want you to copy what’s on the album cover,” he explains. “We want this to be a pure expression of your response to the album and the music.”

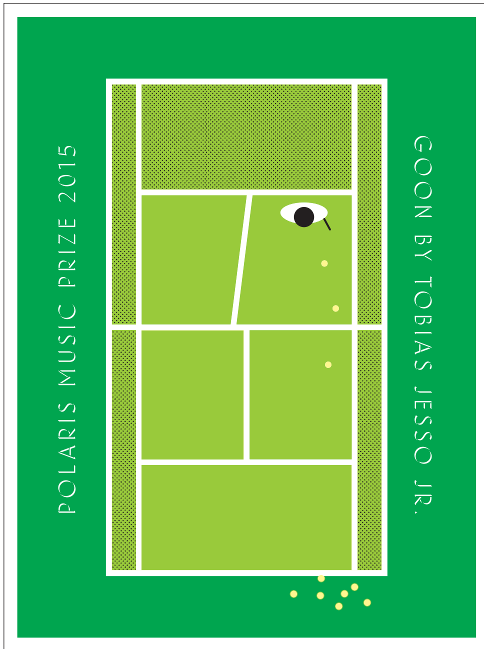
Creating a Polaris poster comes with an unusual degree of creative freedom: beyond the inclusion of a few mandatory text elements—the musician’s name, the album title, the year, and the words “Polaris Music Prize”—the design is generally up to the artist. Designers frequently incorporate their own interests and include personal touches like hand lettering. “I always love the design challenge of being able to put the text in and the art at the same time and have them work harmoniously,” says Ohara Hale, who illustrated the poster for Lido Pimienta’s 2017 winning album, *La Papessa*. To Hale, the acts of creating art and music are, at their core, the same. “What we’re expressing, what colours we’re using, what notes we want to play, what instrument we choose, how we want to sing—it’s all the same.”

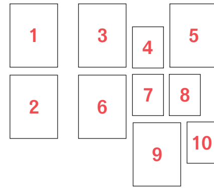
Some gig posters feature graphic styles so remarkable that they have gained a kind of cultural immortality.

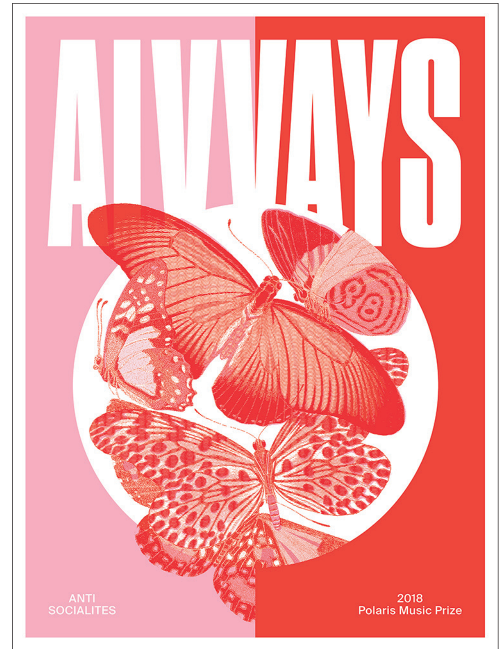
Kid Icarus, a screen-printing studio and shop in Toronto’s Kensington Market, has been the sole printer of the Polaris poster series since 2011. An edition of forty-four prints is produced of each Polaris poster. Although all printmakers aim for consistency, some irregularity is expected with the screen-printing process—alignment can be off in some copies, ink unevenly distributed in others. “That’s my favourite part, you know, the happy accidents,” says Stephanie Cheng, a Polaris poster designer and former screen printer at Kid Icarus. “You really see the artist’s touch when there’s a little bit of an imperfection.” Some musicians agree. Josh Zucker, a guitarist for the 2009 winning group Fucked Up, says that screen-printed posters and the work that goes into producing them feel “like a labour of love.”

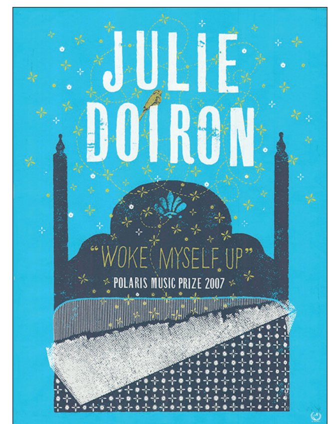
Most often, musicians first get to see their posters at the same time the rest of the world does. Zucker says that a good poster almost feels like a remix of the album. “You get a picture into the way somebody sees your music, the way that they translate it into their art.” Four-time nominee Shad has kept all of the posters Polaris has commissioned for his albums. To him, they don’t seem like commercial assignments, and receiving them is an honour. “I always feel that way whenever anyone spends time with my music. But, when then somebody creates something and it’s proper and it’s really good and it’s framed, you know—for me, that’s a significant gift. And so, I’ve hung on to those.” ◻

MEREDITH HOLIGROSKI is the senior designer at The Walrus.









1 Joni Mitchell, *Blue* by Jacqui Oakley, heritage prize **2** Glenn Gould, *Bach: The Goldberg Variations* by Tom Froese, heritage prize **3** Tobias Jesso Jr., *Goon* by Stephanie Cheng, 2015 **4** Lisa LeBlanc, *Why You Wanna Leave, Runaway Queen?* by Alex MacAskill, 2015 **5** Alvvays, *Antisocialites* by Aaron Rinas, 2018 **6** Leonard Cohen, *You Want It Darker* by Yarek Waszul, 2017 **7** Carly Rae Jepsen, *E*MO*TION* by Ally Jaye Reeves, 2016 **8** Karkwa, *Les Chemins de Verre* by Julie McLaughlin, 2010 **9** Junia-T, *Studio Monk* by Ashley Floréal, 2020 **10** Julie Doiron, *Woke Myself Up* by Yorodeo, 2007

ADVENTURE CANADA

Explore Newfoundland with The Walrus

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The Walrus has a long partnership with Adventure Canada, an award-winning, family-run adventure travel company. As the new executive director, I'll be joining their **small-ship expedition** *Newfoundland Circumnavigation*, July 4–15, 2022.

My family has roots in Newfoundland, and I'm excited to return. This trip will start in St. John's and cover the island's northeast coast, L'Anse aux Meadows, Red Bay, Gros Morne National Park, Miawpukek First Nation (Conne River), as well as other beautiful spots. I'm looking forward to the colourful homes, whale watching, and breathing in the fresh, coastal air!

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Jennifer Hollett, Executive Director, The Walrus

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LITERATURE

Freedom Verse

Once relegated to the literary fringes, dub poet Lillian Allen has inspired countless Canadian writers. A new book shows why

BY KAIE KELLOUGH

THERE IS a certain sound a raised voice can make, a raw and elemental tone that, at its most refined, exceeds the artist. I call it the sufferation tone. Well delivered, it is intense without being histrionic. Approached with insincerity, it rings hollow, and listeners immediately detect the artifice. But, if expressed from a place of genuine anguish, it can give voice to both joy and tragedy.

Great singers can produce the sufferation tone, but it is dub poets who locate it at the heart of their work. Dub evolved out of Jamaica's reggae culture roughly fifty years ago. *To dub* is a recording term that roughly means to transfer audio from one medium to another, and in the case of dub poetry, the term describes a popular art form where poems are performed using words that feel like they have been imprinted on, or stamped into, an instrumental background. Incorporating reggae's rhythms (or "riddims") and drawn from the Jamaican language, dub poetry grapples with the legacies of enslavement while exploring the injustice and inequality of everyday life. Oku Onuora, who grew up in Kingston, is credited with being among the first to experiment with combining music and protest lyrics, which he did while in prison for armed robbery between 1970 and 1977. (According to legend, he had attempted to redistribute funds from a post office to an impoverished youth centre.) Onuora could deliver poems as a growl of fury or a howl that doubled as a battle cry. Among the poets he inspired was someone also able to shift effortlessly from lamentation to threat to celebration: Lillian Allen.

Allen became a fixture in Toronto during the 1980s, when she headlined events for antiracist and women's movements. Now seventy, her voice is still versatile in terms of the sounds it produces. But, beyond sounds, Allen is capable of great emotional range by drawing on Black historical experience to shape her inflections. We hear this in "I Fight Back," one of her first and most celebrated poems: "They label me / Immigrant, law-breaker, illegal, minimum wage worker / refugee / Ah no, not mother, not worker, not fighter." When performing her poetry, Allen can produce a soaring wail that traces the contours of her Jamaican accent, a rhythmic speech that pushes along with the reggae bass line. As it pushes, it insists, decries, and confronts. "Instead of being the doormat," she writes in another early poem, "get up and be the door."

The arrow-like precision of Allen's voice helped fashion a new narrative of who a Canadian artist could be and what they might address. In 1984, Allen was part of a small group of dub poets who tried to join the League of Canadian Poets, a national organization that, for many years, was the face of English-language poetry in the country. Their application was rejected on the grounds that Allen and the others were performers and therefore failed to meet the league's membership criteria at the time. The group countered that they write poems, but they also perform them, and performance is a form of publishing. They were eventually admitted. The instance of discrimination masquerading as formal artistic distinction marked Allen. The initial rejection suggested that a Black poet who maintains an oral practice cannot really be a poet. Instead of accepting that and practising their art form on the margins of the literary scene, Allen and her contemporaries demanded that the definition change.

Make the World New, published this summer, is a selection of Allen's most well-known poems going back to her poetry debut, *Rhythm an' Hardtimes* (1982). While editor Ronald Cummings

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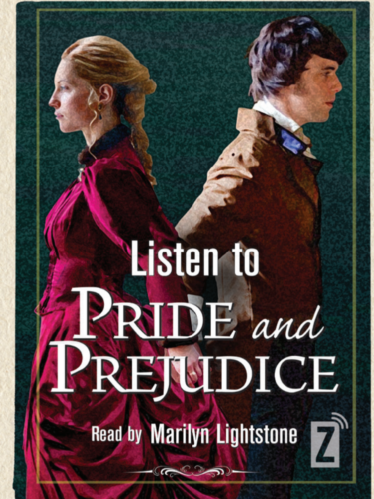

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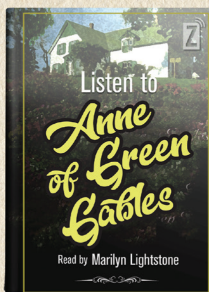

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BEAUTIFUL STORIES, BEAUTIFULLY READ, FOR A CRAZY WORLD

insists, in his introduction, that his choices should not be read as "definitive," the book also works as a primer for an expanded field of artistic practice. For Allen, the writer does not reside outside of a community. They become performer, voice at political rallies, historian, media commentator, recording artist, grassroots arts organizer. If we consider other Black writers of the same generation, such as M. NourbeSe Philip, Dionne Brand, or the late poet Claire Harris—writers who represent an astonishing collective output that includes novels, experimental poetry, essays, documentaries, and short fiction—a broader picture emerges. We encounter a group of women who have fought for the right to be publicly creative.

Today, scores of Black writers are being published in Canada. In British Columbia, Alberta, the Maritimes, Quebec, new voices are emerging to address the realities of global migration, the effects of climate change, and the biases in constructions of national belonging. They are working in poetry, fiction, memoir, and other, hybrid genres. This watershed moment for Black writing in Canada has been decades in the making. It owes a debt to Black women writers from the Caribbean. *Make the World New* can help show why.

Allen was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1951. She moved to Kitchener in 1969, then spent several years between Toronto, New York, and her birthplace, three hubs of Black diasporic life, studying and moving in arts and activist circles. Of her early interest in poetry, she told me, "I started writing poetry in high school, and it lifted off the page."

The poetry continued to lift, both nationally and in the United States, to large folk festivals and women's festivals. Allen's first record, *Revolutionary Tea Party*, which was released in 1986 and won a Juno award, charts an unusual course for a Canadian poet. Allen's earliest successes did not come as a result of publishing books. They came through recordings. Her second album, *Conditions Critical*, released in 1988, also won a Juno. Both records have a clean 1980s pop reggae production and are driven by lyrics that tackle social injustices while celebrating community, life, and love—lyrics calling us to embrace, as she puts it in a 2012 recording, "liberation as ritual and art / meaning and message."

Those early albums were also part of the changing sound of Canada. By the 1980s, reggae and ska had inflected popular music. Bubbling keyboard lines or bass lines that worked in unison with the kick drum were heard in genres as diverse as punk, new wave, and rock. Dub poets, by incorporating the reggae riddim into their lyrics, participated in that moment. Linton Kwesi Johnson emerged in the UK. In Canada, Clifton Joseph, Afua Cooper, and Ahdri Zhina Mandiela shared their work with audiences through recordings, hundreds of performances, publications, and teaching. Their presence was often rooted in Toronto, but their voices reached those of us who lived in the west or the Atlantic provinces via college radio waves, festival circuits, or literary journals. In schools, in public institutions, in private homes, our cultures had often been ignored, even ridiculed. These poets validated us. They gave us a tradition in whose path we could walk. Not only did we understand the language, the expressions, the Caribbeanness of it all, but dub spoke back. It defined itself outside the canons of English literature, and it projected its rebellious aesthetic on the international stage.

Allen articulated that rebelliousness. Her work moved between the page, the stage, and the recording studio. (In one lecture, she defined dub as "multimedia, multi-sensorial, and slightly mashed-up activist poetry.") Allen also demonstrated how a political consciousness could ground experimentation. I was a preteen when she released her early records. The 1980s anti-apartheid struggle was then reaching a height, as was the struggle to free Palestine from Israeli occupation. Peter Tosh, an outspoken reggae musician, made the keffiyeh a part of his wardrobe in a display of

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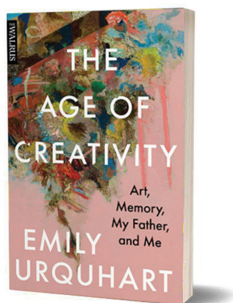

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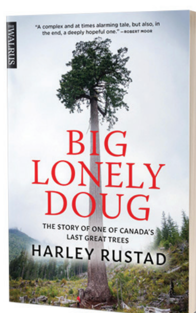


solidarity with Palestine, as did the late dub poet Jean "Binta" Breeze. In those years, dub was invested in political developments abroad, including decrying nuclear war. That context helps us understand Allen's impact on a generation of poets of colour who grew up attuned to world events while trying to make sense of their place in Canada. As she writes in her afterword to *Make the World New*, "I delight in the way a cluster of words, a phrase turned 'jus soh,' can open the imagination and spark all sorts of connections and things."

A crucial point made in this selection is that Allen's work frames local political movements next to global working-class struggles for independence. Her poetry celebrates the 1956 dissolution of the dictatorship in Haiti. It references the 1979 revolution that overthrew Nicaragua's authoritarian rule. It wonders whether capitalist hegemony could be ended in America. *Make the World New* carefully places these poems alongside others that dissect the inequalities of Toronto, where "dashed hopes run wild / in the middle of the night." It's no surprise to learn, from Cummings's introduction, that Allen's poetry was exchanged between community organizers and activists. What they likely heard in her work becomes clear in poems like "Birth," with its blocks of repetition:

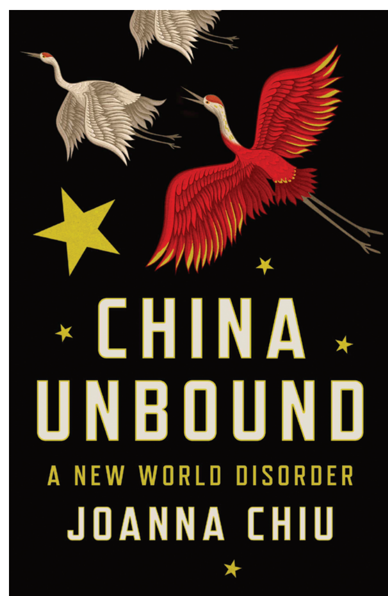
> An' mi labour an' mi labour
> An' mi labour an' mi labour

Those two lines equate the struggle to bring a life into the world with the struggle for rights and dignity. Those struggles are, in turn, bound by language. The poem does what it says: it performs the difficulty of articulation. It labours, and in that moment where content and delivery meet, we hear the sufferation tone.

To reflect on Allen's impact is to reflect on how deep dub's influence runs. It seasons the vernacular assertiveness of slam poets. It crackles in the lines of spoken word artists who insist that the personal is the political. It peppers the boil of cultural influences that simmered down into Canadian hip hop. As Jamaican poet Kei Miller observed in the online magazine *Sx Salon* in 2013, the classic dub that rose to global prominence in the 1970s and 1980s may no longer be practised in its purest form by younger poets ("Dub poetry was the voice of a revolution and revolutions do not last forever"), but its aesthetics have shaped the work of artists as distinct as d'bi.young anitafrika, Wayde Compton, and Montreal poet Tawhida Tanya Evanson.

Allen gave my generation a sense of mission. She didn't instruct us to do what the biblical hymn suggests, to meekly "wait and murmur not." Instead, to borrow Miller's description of dub itself, she "taught us that there are times to be angry, indeed, to be furious, and that fury can be composed into a thing of eloquence." At a time when so many are mounting a rigorous challenge to the legitimacy of societies whose founding gestures include the dispossession of others, the poems in *Make the World New* still burn with a sense of urgency.

KAIE KELLOUGH's story collection, *Dominoes at the Crossroads*, was longlisted for the 2020 Scotiabank Giller Prize. He lives in Montreal.



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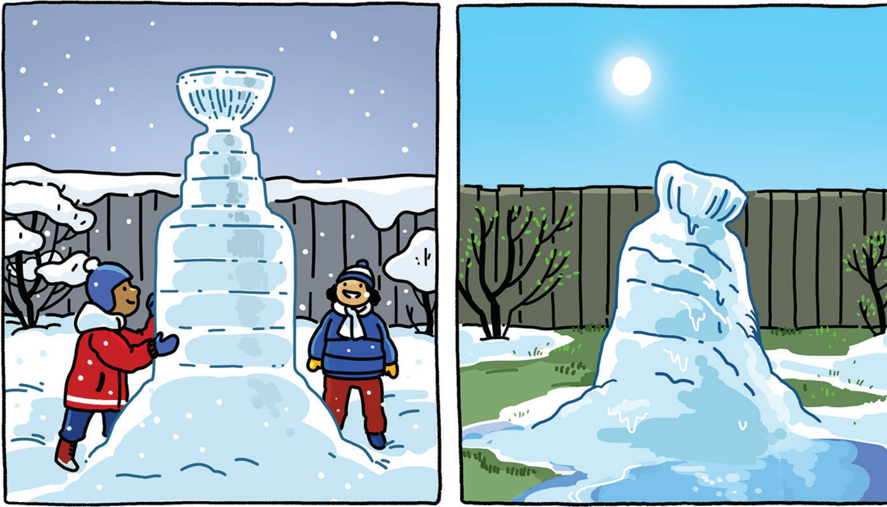


SPORTS

Ask a Hockey Expert

Will a Canadian team ever win the Stanley Cup again?

BY WILLIAM FOSTER, AS TOLD TO SAM RICHES

HOCKEY IS HAILED as Canada's sport, yet no Canadian team has won the Stanley Cup since the Montreal Canadiens' victory over the Los Angeles Kings in 1993. We asked William Foster, a professor at the University of Alberta whose research interests include the management and performance of professional hockey teams, what it would take to end the nearly three-decade dry spell.

Canada is having its longest losing streak in the 104-year history of the NHL.[1] Are Canadian hockey teams getting worse? A Canadian team did make it to the finals for three consecutive years between 2004 and 2007, and again last season. The league-wide salary cap, which was introduced in 2005, helped with that. In the years prior, teams with higher revenues—many of which were American—could spend more on salaries, meaning they could sign all of the top players. During that time, Canadian teams wouldn't even make it into the playoffs. Now, they regularly do. But the salary cap still isn't particularly useful if you've got bad team management—as the Ottawa Senators have been criticized for—or can't procure the right players.

Canadian teams that have managed to acquire some of the best players in the league still haven't been able to win. Why? There are certain sports, like basketball, where a single player can have a significant impact on team performance. In the NBA, players can stay on the court for the whole game, so someone like LeBron James could play forty-eight minutes and decide an outcome by himself. Hockey is more of a team sport. The last two seasons' league MVPs have been from the Edmonton Oilers, but that hasn't helped them win because a superstar forward like Connor McDavid will likely play only between eighteen and twenty-five minutes in a regular-season game. This means that there are thirty-five to forty minutes in a game when star players are off the ice. Thus, they need to rely more on the other players.

In terms of procuring those players, it becomes more difficult in places like Alberta and Ontario, where taxes are higher and take-home pay is much lower than in, say, Florida or Texas, where there's no state income tax.

Right now, only seven of the thirty-two teams in the NHL are Canadian. The league has added new teams every few years, the most recent being the Seattle Kraken this season. Do you think there's room for expansion in Canada? The NHL is a gate-driven league, meaning that—unlike in the NFL, MLB, and NBA, which make most of their money from television contracts—the majority of revenue comes from game attendance.[2] Having a strong local fan base to fill an arena is key. There has been talk about getting a second team in Toronto. There has also been talk about returning to Quebec City, but there are US markets that would be far more viable—they have more fans there. However, because of the losses that happened last year as a result of COVID-19, I don't think there's going to be an appetite for another expansion anywhere for at least a few years.[3]

Do you predict that a Canadian team will win the cup again any time soon? I think, eventually, you will see a Canadian team win. Statistically, it should happen. Oakland Athletics executive Billy Beane, of *Moneyball* fame, has talked about how you can use all the stats in the world to develop your team over a season, but when you get to a playoff series, all bets are off. A bad play, a bad bounce, a hot goalie—all of that can create a situation where it's not the best team that's winning, it's the team that has the most luck.

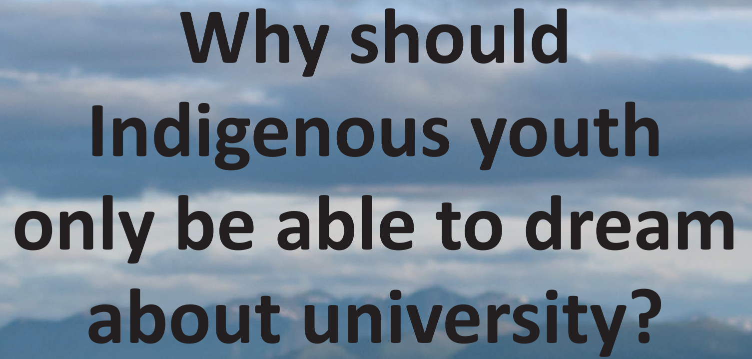
1 Prior to the last Canadian Stanley Cup victory, the longest period between a Canadian team winning was six years. Canadian teams have won a total of forty-nine Stanley Cups since the NHL was founded, in 1917.

2 According to *Forbes*, the New York Rangers had the highest revenue in the league, at $225 million (US), for the 2019/20 season, followed by the Toronto Maple Leafs.

3 *The Athletic* estimated that the NHL "missed out" on $3.6 billion (US) in revenue in the 2020/21 season.

WILLIAM FOSTER is a professor of management at the University of Alberta and a long-suffering fan of the Edmonton Oilers.

THIS INTERVIEW HAS BEEN EDITED FROM TWO CONVERSATIONS FOR LENGTH AND CLARITY.
ILLUSTRATION BY IRMA KNIIVILA



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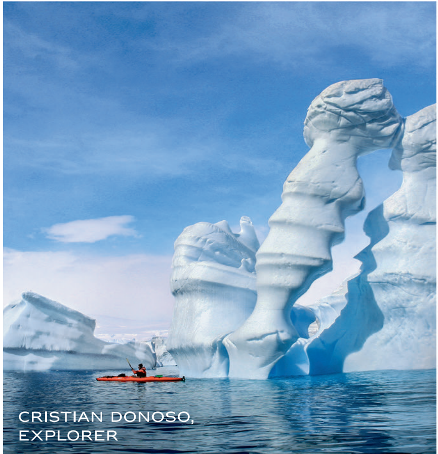
CRISTIAN DONOSO, EXPLORER

TOPHER WHITE, CONSERVATION TECHNOLOGIST

FRANCESCO SAURO, EXPLORER

GHISLAIN BARDOUT, EXPLORER

WHAT DO THEY SEEK?

Explorers, adventurers, scientists. Men and women who always broadened the horizons, for all humankind to share. Rolex was at their side when they reached the deepest point in the oceans, the highest summits of the Earth, the deepest jungles and both poles. But now that we know, more than ever, that our world has its limits, why do they continue to venture out there, again and again? Certainly not for kudos, accolades, or an ephemeral record. What they truly seek is to understand more intimately how complex and delicate our planet is, to document its change and how together, we can affect it for the better. So as long as they need it, we will be at their side. Because today, the real discovery is not so much about finding new lands. It's about looking with new eyes at the marvels of our planet, rekindling our sense of wonder, and acting to preserve our pale blue dot in the universe… **Doing our very best for a Perpetual Planet.**

#Perpetual

OYSTER PERPETUAL EXPLORER II