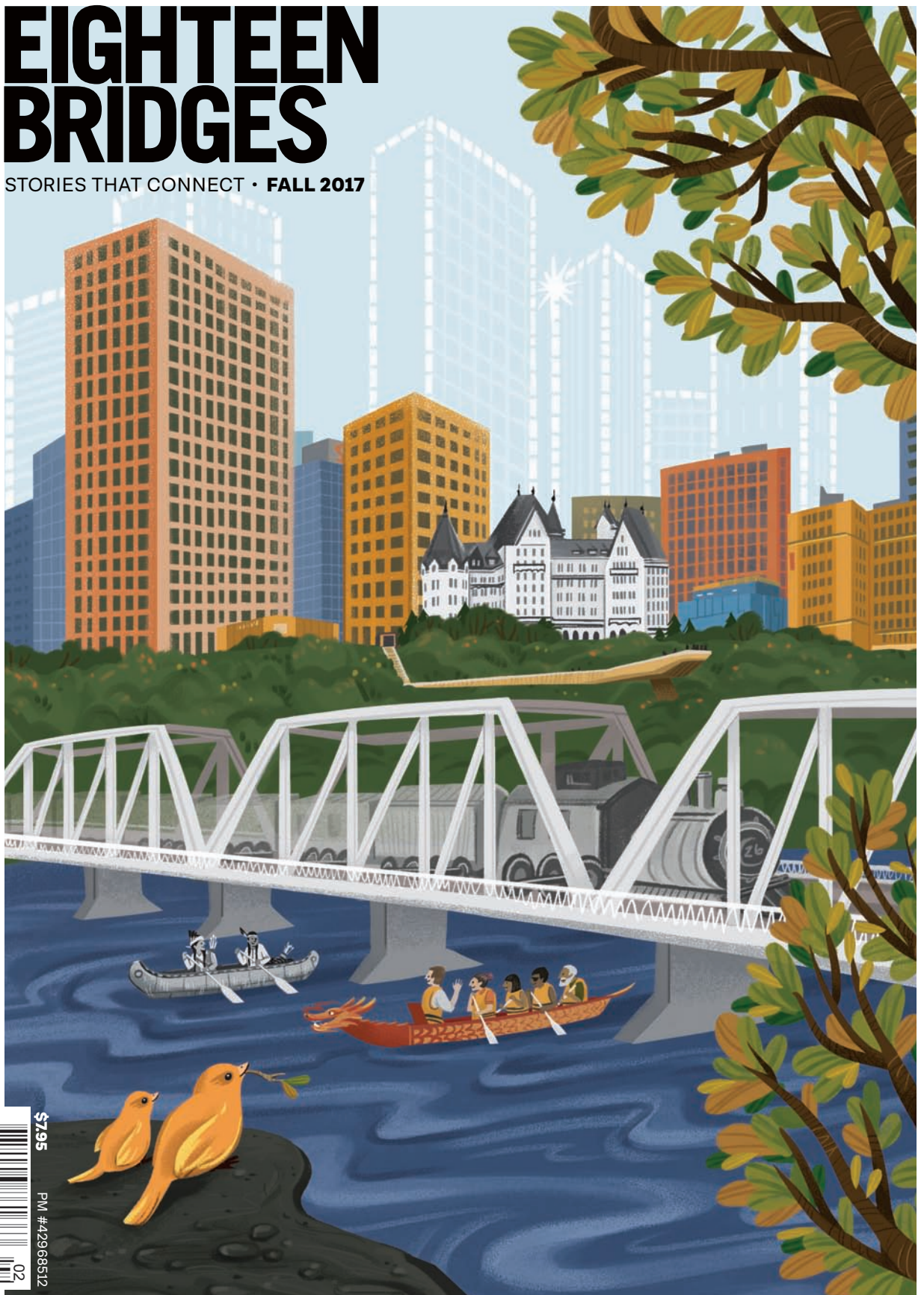


EDMONTON'S HIGH LEVEL LIT LOOKS AT CANADA 150

EIGHTEEN BRIDGES

STORIES THAT CONNECT • FALL 2017



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CONTENTS



44



14

28



68



IN THIS ISSUE

ISSUE 11 / FALL 2017

High Level Lit

A Collaborative Project From Edmonton Community Foundation, *Eighteen Bridges* Magazine and LitFest

5 CONTRIBUTORS

6 MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

8 ANNA MARIE SEWELL

The Truth is in the Dirt

A gardener's meditation about companionship and the living land

14 PAULA SIMONS

To Revive and not Revise

Look at our history with respect and inclusion, not pity or guilt

19 OMAR MOUALLEM

Homeland for the Holidays

Loving the place you're from, warts and all, is complicated

24 ROLLIE PEMBERTON

Edmontonian Time

The clock in my hometown ticks toward a once-distant optimism

28 NASRA ADEM

This Country Thinks it Gave me my Magic

I found a community that doesn't need to ask me if I'm OK

32 JENNIFER COCKRALL-KING

Declaration of Dinner

Edmonton takes a culinary stand

36 CATRIN OWEN & BEN WHEELWRIGHT

You are at Home Here

A mother and son consider the theatre that brings them together

COVER ILLUSTRATION
EMILY CHU



58

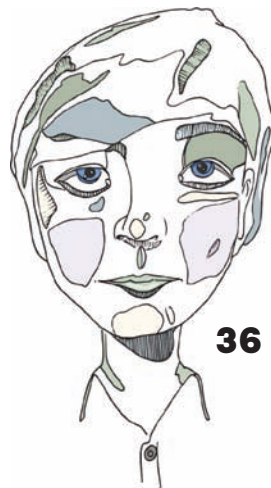
**Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon.
Only connect the prose and the passion,
and both will be exalted, and human love will be
seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer.**

– E. M. FORSTER, *HOWARDS END*

19



32



36

44 MYRNA KOSTASH

Baba was an Edmontonian

I learned Ukrainian after Baba died.
What would I ask her today?

50 MINISTER FAUST FICTION

**Sweet Dreams on the Prairies
at the Dawn of War**

Mother was strong, but she couldn't
stop my father from dying, nor rid the
barn of that giant rat

58 DARRIN HAGEN

A History of Us

In search of the story of Queer
Edmonton

64 RICHARD VAN CAMP

**Canada, you're my favourite
One-Day-Uncle**

Every family has one

68 JALAL BARZANJI

Home After Home

It's not where you begin, but where you
become the best version of yourself

A COLLABORATION WITH



CANADA'S ORIGINAL
NONFICTION FESTIVAL

EIGHTEEN BRIDGES

ISSUE 11 / FALL 2017

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Eighteen Bridges wishes to acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 territory, the traditional lands of many Indigenous Peoples.



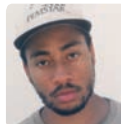
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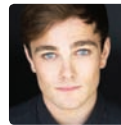
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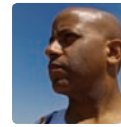
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Darrin Hagen is a playwright, composer, author and drag artiste. He has spent 20 years compiling stories of Edmonton's LGBTQ history, beginning with his account of the underground drag community, *The Edmonton Queen*. He's an official Cultural Ambassador of Canada's 150 Celebrations.



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Jalal Barzanji's writing cost him two years in prison under Saddam Hussein. He escaped war in Kurdistan in 1997. In 2007 he became PEN Canada's first Writer in Exile. He has published books in Kurdish and in English and is a 2015 inductee in the City of Edmonton's Arts & Culture Hall of Fame.

12 WAYS TO LOOK AT 150

WHAT DOES CANADA'S SESQUICENTENNIAL REALLY MEAN?

IT'S NEARLY OVER. BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS, IT'LL be close to the end of October, which means that Canada's year-long celebration of its 150th birthday, its sesquicentennial, don't you know, will nearly be over. It's been quite the party. Never have so many uttered the phrase One-Fifty with so little insight into what that might actually stand for.

Which is why we—meaning Edmonton Community Foundation, LitFest and *Eighteen Bridges* magazine—embarked on a project to have some people help us understand what it might mean. Being Edmontonians, we thought it would also be insightful and interesting to have a bunch of people connected to Edmonton look at this Canada 150 thing through an Edmonton lens, to see what it revealed.

Our goals were both numerous and basic. First, we told our contributors we wanted them to think about what the concept of Canada meant to them in this year of our 150th birthday. Then we gave them a word count. And a deadline. After that, we told them to write whatever they wanted. It was the kind of commission process that had every possibility of going sideways, but somehow this wonderful group of 13 writers managed to entertain us, educate us, move us and inspire us (including through a series of four literary salons—High Level Lit—held at different venues around Edmonton throughout 2017). The only thing they didn't do was surprise us, because we figured they'd do something great. Which they did.

There are certain realities we wanted to face on our national birthday. Canada, by global standards, is an astonishingly successful country. But try telling that to a Cree teenager living on a reserve where suicide rates are skyrocketing. Or telling that to a heroin addict on Vancouver's downtown eastside. Part of what makes a country great, we reasoned, is that it can be honest about its flaws and acknowledge the work that remains. Part of what makes Canada a strong country is a quiet kind of persistence married to a lack of complacency. Are we better off, on average, than most people from Ethiopia or Kazakhstan? Sure, probably. But that's not how we should be measuring ourselves. How about we do it human by human?

And that's what our wonderful writers have helped us understand. That in this city and province and country we have an awe-inspiring roster of talents and gifts and histories and complexities. But that we also have a few reasons to refrain from patting ourselves on the back for too long.

Most everyone in the cultural sector who embarked upon a Canada 150 project realized pretty early on that it would be an empty exercise to simply wish ourselves a happy birthday without asking how we got this far and what we need to do to make it through the next 150 years successfully. One result is this collection of essays and stories. As you'll see when you read through them, there are historical essays, personal essays, fictionalized accounts of what our ancestors did, a graphic memoir, a look at what our food culture means, insights into gardening, a glimpse into alternative histories. There is some celebrating, some anger, some sarcasm, lots of kind words and a few harsh ones.

But more than anything else, what you're going to find between these covers is a kind of clarity. These talented people have come together to tell us something about Edmonton, about Alberta and about Canada—something provocative, something true. Their stories are windows that open onto the ways in which we'll need to think about one another if we're going to keep this thing going. And we don't mean this magazine. We mean the country.

We're pleased to be able to share this work with you as a celebration of Canada's 150th birthday, but it's a celebration that is also a reminder. We have much to be proud of as a nation, but all that means is that we have a strong base from which to do even better. Judging by the grace, insight, intelligence and humanity of our contributors, we think we stand a decent chance.

Edmonton Community Foundation
LitFest
Eighteen Bridges Magazine

EDMONTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
PROUDLY PRESENTS



HIGH LEVEL LIT

MUSINGS ON YEG FOR CANADA'S 150TH



in collaboration with Eighteen Bridges and LitFest



Check out thewellendowedpodcast.com for interviews with the authors
ECFOUNDATION.ORG

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a bright red jacket, blue jeans, and black boots, stands in a field of green plants, possibly a tomato field, at sunset. She is looking towards the horizon. The sky is a mix of orange, red, and purple. A wooden post with orange string is visible in the foreground on the left. The word "THE" is printed in large, black, sans-serif capital letters on the right side of the image.

THE

1

ANNA MARIE SEWELL

TRUTH IS IN THE DIRT

**A GARDENER'S MEDITATION: WE OPEN
A DOOR TO COMPANIONSHIP WHEN
WE DWELL IN THE LIVING LAND**

PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL SWANSON



A GARDEN IS A LONG WORK

Yes, you can turn soil, plant seeds, harvest in that same fall. In that sense, to grow a garden is a simple task, unskilled labour: weed a little, watch the water, wait on the season, and done. Gardening, though, is more than this. It is the communion of human and plant, a conversation. Scientifically, we could talk of microbe, mycelium, symbiosis, processes; poetically, we could speak with the living soul of a place. Gardening, our words are literally fruit and flower, placement of stone, allowances for those we identify either as weed or volunteer.

Gardening, we open a door to companionship with the living land.

I come from long lines of gardeners, who brought themselves to open that door, not as some high-minded esoteric communion, but to feed their own children.

FIVE YEARS

My grandmother came to Canada in 1928, leaving behind the turmoil of martial-law-era Poland, and bringing four young children, the youngest a baby. Her brother had emigrated to St. Louis, and so she'd heard that life across the ocean was possible and positive. Great Uncle Tony was a barber. As for Grandma, she was a farmwife. So her family became part of the wave of Slavic farmers invited by the Canadian government to turn "free, unused" land into a northern breadbasket. And, as I'd glean from my mom's telling, it was bread that finalized their decision to leave Poland.

Here's the story, as I understand it.

Under the regime of Marshal Piłsudski, Poland was lurching toward totalitarianism. Soldiers were everywhere. Farms were being forcibly collectivized. My grandparents were landowners, but now, Grandpa was pressed into service in a fieldwork group charged with meeting government quotas and schedules.

While he was in the fields, Grandma ran the household, as ever. I picture her, strong, lively, hazel eyes bright in youth, curly dark hair held in an embroidered floral scarf. She would have had already the air of quiet steadiness that was her quintessence. She'd already buried her first-born daughter, taken by pneumonia at the age of two. She'd nursed her mother- and father-in-law, lost in the 1918 influenza epidemic, and helped her husband raise his orphaned younger sisters.

She had three other young ones at home. I imagine she was pregnant, or else my second eldest aunt was a tiny baby. Either way, Grandma was a busy woman.

That day, she was making bread. Can you see the

wooden bread bowl, large and plain, smooth inside with use and the working of lard or butter into the grain? Can you see her capable, efficient hands, moving sure in the dance of kneading dough?

Suddenly, soldiers arrived. Her husband had fallen ill in the field, and now she must replace him. Imagine the young mother protesting, that she had work enough making this precious bread to feed her family.

The soldiers simply overturned the bowl, the round of hopeful dough spilled in a dumb mound in the dust of the yard. The story didn't come with any details beyond that one act. They turned her bread out on the ground, and forced her to go to the fields. The rest of what might have been said or done that day fell into the silence that has absorbed so many family histories of endurance and survival.

But that day, when their bread was thrown into the dust, they decided to leave. Those unfinished loaves raised up in them the determination to gamble on a journey across half a world.

MANY YEARS LATER, WHEN I WAS IN MY LATE TEENS

and Grandma in her 90s, I took my turn staying with her in her magical little house in Beaverlodge, up in northwestern Alberta. She and Grandpa had raised nine children, built a prosperous farm, lived long and healthy lives. She'd never learned to read or write, and her English was extremely limited. But Grandma was used to silence, carried whole worlds of stories unspoken. It was restful, staying with her. She accepted with quiet dignity the help she needed, and took a quiet interest in me as a person, conveyed largely without conversation. It was there in the food, which was always prodigious, as if I were fuelling up for a long day in the fields.

Should I protest that I was, in fact, stuffed like a sausage, she would offer a glimpse of her life, in her simple statement. "Eat. Too skinny. Me, young, I was 200 pounds, not fat. It's good."

I believed her. Up until her death at 101, she had a gorgeous incurved waist, and a liveliness that animated her sturdy limbs and broad hips with what I could easily see had been robust beauty in girlhood. Mostly, we talked like that, in brief exchanges covering the basics of our daily activities—meals, baths, medicines, bedtimes. But one day, as we sat at the little formica table finishing our mid-afternoon tea and cookie break, she turned her gaze out through the window for a moment, to where the late winter sun lay low across the snow-covered yard and the small-town bungalows.

Then she looked back at me and, in halting English,

told me a story. She spoke, with heartfelt eloquence, out of decades of silence and endurance, of how cold is Canada (Kanady, she said, declining the noun according to Polish grammar). How long are the winters.

When she was a girl, she told me, by April it was spring at home. She missed the springtime, missed the gentle openness of the land of her birth. She recalled the bounty of cucumbers and strawberries, so easily flourishing there—there where she could swim in the creek at a time of year when there might still be ice in the water here. She missed the green and the flowers.

Here, she said, she was so shocked to arrive and find their farm was nothing but skinny poplars and hard, cold clay, full of rocks. It was five years, she said, before the land provided enough that she could feed her family properly.

“For five years,” she concluded, “I cried. Every day I cried. For five years.”

I TOOK A POLISH CLASS AT UNIVERSITY, BUT TOO late to learn enough to reach back to her for more stories. So, I gleaned from my mother glimpses of family history that my Grandma passed down out of her enduring quiet, to her habitually quiet youngest daughter. And I bake bread.

My mother showed me how, the calm and powerful dance of hands that asks the grain to transform into bread. The prayer that goes into the bread, the way the rising bread reveals the will of God, and can give direction to the prayerful maker. As the bread goes, so goes the matter about which the maker prays.

I knead by hand in my turn, and teach my daughter and nieces the way of it. Whatever their world looks like when they are women, they will know this connection. Now, when I set bread, it is a way to tell back, without words, some of the story, and to honour my grandmother. For five years, my grandmother, learning to convince this hard, cold, dark land to open for her, to offer up grain that would answer her call and transform into the staff of life, bringing health and well-being to her family.

WALK LIGHTLY

As for my Indigenous paternal family, the roots of connection to land had been seared and cauterized in so many joints. You can see it in the thickened waist, that telltale stress-marker of starvation and trauma, passed down into phenotype.

Grandma wore it gloriously, the bear’s body and round face. I have her crescent-moon eyes, hear her low laugh in my sister’s. And I keep a picture of her and her sister in the garden, popping up among hollyhocks, grown

women laughing among the mill-town houses of Sault Ste. Marie, pre-Bill C-31, when Grandpa’s death and her subsequent remarriage meant she had to live off-reserve. She, too, had to come to Canada, an exile in her own land.

Morbidly heavy, Grandma’s ankles remained trim and elegant, her feet high-arched, like her son’s, who could carry his 300-plus pounds across a wooden floor soundlessly in a glide. In the garden, he glided after Mom, a bear with a hoe making holes for potatoes. I wonder if he ever thought about these Turtle Island roots, potatoes potato, evidence of trade routes intercontinental. Potato histories, and the naming of the three sisters (corn, beans, squash) were women’s knowledge, though. In our garden, my mother’s lineages ran, yes, to potatoes—kartofle—but also to onion, carrot, bean, pea, and beet. Dad didn’t have Anishinabek garden lore, but he passed on how to walk with respect, treading light upon Earth. Like many Indigenous men, he came to Canada in service, in the army, and through that, travelled far.

SHE MISSED THE SPRINGTIME, MISSED THE GENTLE OPENNESS OF THE LAND OF HER BIRTH.

My own first, biggest journey, from farm to city, came in the spring of 1985. I took the bus. My dad took the air ambulance, and died in hospital on my first day of work. “Go to university,” he’d said. So, the land of the Mighty Peace behind me, I needed to ground myself in Edmonton. Here, I’d go to university, seeking to prove it would be the gate connecting me to the world tugging at my dreams.

In my first autumn, walking to class, I’d pass through the legislature grounds, where the German groundskeeper would always greet me, and happily spend a few minutes talking about all the amazing things in this biggest ornamental garden I’d ever seen. One day, he was putting the flowerbeds down for winter. *Do you want these geraniums? They are still good, they can overwinter inside, you know.* Though I could not find enough light in my basement apartment for that flower to survive, neither could I refuse his gift of recognition, claiming me.

It was gardeners who sustained me in those first seasons, whether that German master giving me roots, and complaining about the folly of trying to force indigenous

trees into European shapes, or the Italians in their downtown yards, greeting me as I walked by.

My first job was hot-walking racehorses at Northlands, and I didn't know I should be frightened of walking through the inner city to get to the track. Those men who slowed down, or offered me rides, were no more than bewildering creeps, irrelevant. To me, the walk was full of gardens, and of steady, kind people at their work.

After that summer, it would be 15 years before I returned to central Edmonton, this time to make a family home of my own in an old house with a rubble-filled backyard. I looked at that yard, and thought of my grandmothers.

We are still coming to Canada.

GIFTS

I bring long roots, much transplanted, many times starved by drought and shrivelled by frost, beaten, cut and hammered, squeezed by the power plays of forces far beyond them, these roots remain, and they are in my garden now. Gete Okosomin is in my garden, gift of deep friends who were given the seeds at a feast. This squash, only lately named, and for a while given a fairy tale origin, has been grown on Turtle Island for a millennium, quietly, without fanfare. Another old staple, Askipaw, grows in my garden too. I planted Jerusalem artichokes before I knew they were indigenous. I know what to call them now because I asked another neighbour, a Cree Elder and scholar of the oldest stories.

THIS GARDEN HAS MADE ME WEALTHY. SHARING IT BRINGS MORE RICHES. MY NEIGHBOUR FATIMA MAKES ME THE BEST STUFFED GRAPE LEAVES.

In my garden, these ones remind me that Indigenous people, cultures, ways of being, like all good things, have proven incredibly resilient. These ones grow easily, grow strong.

So do saskatoon, raspberry, o'dimini, valiant grapes, queen peonies, Nanking cherries, and the scion of a plum another Cree neighbour quietly coaxed into magnificence across the street. In my garden, indigenous and immigrant plants all burl along together. I have walking onions, and overachieving chives. Yet another Cree neighbour gave

me horseradish root and, every fall, I harvest it thinking of Japan.

In Japan, I haunted temple grounds, my home too small and lightless for plants; and I leapt at a volunteer weekend harvesting imo-mountain potatoes. A stranger on the dragon's back edge of the farthest east, I felt myself connected to my new friends through work my grandmother and her grandmothers would recognize, laughing together in the fields, bringing in the harvest, food and song around an evening fire.

Horseradish is not wasabi, but it is perfectly content to shoulder up through the worst remaining patch of yard and it, too, challenges the palate. Across the yard, lilac, the sweetness I always wanted, now grows, a Mother's Day present from my husband and child, and she is every bit as beautiful as I always knew her to be. I had to travel around the world before I found my husband and home; and it was here in Edmonton, as I read a poem about dandelions, that I first met him. So we embrace dandelions, both for that memory and for their powerful gifts. They're overbold and profligate, yes; but eat their flowers, crowns and roots and you come to see their worth. As they are willing to be here, let us find ways to work with them. That's a gardener's truth.

It was my mother most of all who taught me to look in the garden for truths. Also for slugs. She came to live with us when she broke her hip, revealing the deadly cancer in her bones. She was no city person, but Edmonton was her necessary home for a while. I am forever grateful to have had the means to help care for her. Most of all, I am grateful that my garden could be there for her, and that it has known her care.

Most people saw her as gentle, but I know my mother was fierce. Even broken, she took it upon herself to fight for me and mine. In the early summer mornings, she would make her way down through the garden, setting, checking and emptying the tin cans of beer, with which she (a lifetime teetotaler) waged war on the slugs.

Now she has gone to her rest, and after 30 years, I am becoming one of the old Edmonton gardeners who smile and wave at youth.

This summer, our new Syrian neighbours knocked at my back gate, asking in their limited English if I could spare some grape leaves. This garden has made me wealthy. Sharing it brings more riches; Fatima makes the best stuffed grape leaves, and we recognize each other. She has travelled a long distance, coming to Canada, carrying stories she may never tell me.

Where language lacks, the garden speaks; what we tend will grow. 🌱

Building Edmonton one community at a time.



ILLUSTRATION SÉBASTIEN THIBAUT

TO REVIVE AND NOT REVISE

WHAT PRE-CONFEDERATION EDMONTON TELLS US ABOUT CANADA TODAY

IN AUGUST OF 1859, JAMES CARNEGIE, THE 9TH EARL of Southesk, arrived at Fort Edmonton. Carnegie didn't believe in travelling light. He arrived in Edmonton with an entourage of 75 guides and servants, who hauled with them, among other things, the Earl's India-rubber bathtub and his edition of the complete works of William Shakespeare. The 32-year-old Scottish Earl was our first celebrity tourist. He was the first European to come here, not to explore or trap or trade, but just to see what he could see.

He hauled plenty of metaphysical baggage with him, too. He'd recently suffered a complete nervous collapse, a major depression, after the death of his beloved wife. And so he left his children and his castle and ran away into the far west. He planned to hunt big game—and to hunt up fresh inspiration for this poetry. Oh yes. He wrote poetry. Astonishingly awful poetry, which he had published in London—at his own expense.



*Lordly moose were slain and carried
O'er the snow to those that tarried
Halting on their hunter's track;
Sighted on the far horizon,
Moved a mighty band of bison,
Surged a bellowing sea of black.*

In 1859, the territory we now call Alberta was not a part of Canada. The nation of Canada wouldn't actually exist for another eight years. That which we call Alberta today was then part of what was known as Rupert's Land—a huge swath of land, under the economic control and administration of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). But while the land was under the nominal control of a London-based corporation, it wasn't exactly an official part of the British Empire, either. When Southesk arrived here, 19 years before the signing of Treaty 6, this was still very much the sovereign territory of the Cree, the Nakoda, the Blackfoot and the other First Nations who hunted, trapped and traded here in a symbiotic relationship with the HBC.

*Day by day, with packs of peltry
Goes he to the store-house sweltry,
Fain to barter fur-goods fair –
Mellow marten, mink and beaver,
Wolverine and wolf the reaver,
Fox and fisher, lynx and bear.*

*There he waits in calm endurance,
All the traders' trained assurance
Weak to bend his patient will,
Juggling him with artful measures,
Tempting him with tawdry treasures –
Firm of purpose rests he still.*

There were about 150 people living in Fort Edmonton in 1859—HBC traders and staff, and their wives and children. Since there were no European women here, those wives and children were either First Nations or Métis. English was the official language of the HBC but, in 1859, you'd probably have been at least as likely to hear people speaking in French or Cree or Michif, the Métis language that blended French and Cree with some borrowings from other tongues. You might have heard smatterings of everything from Gaelic to German, too—this was a polyglot, multicultural place, even 158 years ago. Of course, figuring out who was Métis and who was “European” was a rather difficult question, after four generations of marriages between fur traders and locals.

Southesk, for example, was hosted during much of his time at Fort Edmonton by Chief Trader William J. Christie, and his wife, Mary Christie. Christie's father came from Glasgow, and had ensured that his son was sent to back school in Scotland. But Christie's mother was Métis, the daughter of a Welsh father and a Cree mother. Christie's wife Mary was part of the fur trade's aristocracy. Her maternal grandfather had been a founding partner of the Northwest Company—and her maternal grandmother had been Anishinaabe. To judge by archival photos, Mr. Christie looked “European.” Mrs. Christie looked “Indigenous.”

But in the Edmonton of 1859, those distinctions don't seem to have mattered much. As the lord and lady of the fort, William and Mary Christie laid on their best hospitality for their noble guest. When Southesk returned to Fort Edmonton in October of 1859, after his exploration of the Rocky Mountains, he was delighted with his welcome.

“Mr. Christie,” he wrote in his diary, “received me with the utmost kindness and hospitality. It is delightful to be again enjoying some of the comforts of civilization—such as wine, well-made coffee, vegetables, cream-tarts, and other good things too many to mention.”

Southesk couldn't have realized then that he'd arrived here at a fateful turning point in Edmonton's history. He'd arrived here the same year the very first Grey Nuns arrived in Alberta, to serve as missionaries with Father Albert Lacombe in Lac Ste. Anne. He arrived here four years before the Catholic Church founded the Métis settlement of St. Albert. Until the late 1850s, there had been a bare handful of Methodist and Catholic missionaries scattered across Rupert's Land. Now, for the first time, missionary work—for good and for ill—was beginning in earnest.

At the same time, the Palliser Expedition had just launched its fact-finding tour—sent to scope out the region's agricultural potential, to determine whether the land was actually fit for settlement. Up until the late 1850s, no one in Britain had given much thought to wholesale colonization of the western wilderness. Westminster had been quite content to let the HBC take its profits, and to leave Rupert's Land largely alone. Now, that thinking was starting to change. Meanwhile, by 1859, bison populations had declined enough to cause tensions between the Cree and Blackfoot, as they competed for food and hunting territory. Still, no one could imagine the plains without the buffalo. No one could imagine the cataclysm to come.

And so Southesk arrived at precisely the right moment to bear witness to a cultural golden age, a high-water mark in post-contact prairie relations. And he arrived at a time of remarkable artistic achievement. When he returned

to Scotland, he schlepped back to his castle some truly remarkable works of art and craft, stunning artifacts created by Indigenous and Métis artisans between Red River and the Rockies, most of them women, most of their names lost to history. These prairie virtuosos enjoyed access to Venetian glass beads, embroidery silks from China and Japan, printed calico cloth from India, metal blades from Sheffield, as well as traditional materials such as hide, sinew and porcupine quills. Indeed, the women Southesk met during his travels west laughed at the big ugly glass beads he'd brought with him to trade. They were accustomed to far finer materials. Fort Edmonton was just one link in an interconnected global trading empire. And the exquisite handiwork the Earl purchased during his tour across the prairie west includes a remarkable fusion of First Nations, European, Asian and Middle Eastern motifs and materials.

I don't want to be overly romantic, to describe the Edmonton of 1859 as a non-racialized utopia. It certainly wasn't that. But it was a place of cultures in some kind of fragile equilibrium, a place where the lines between us and them were as blurry as a prairie twilight. Like Alice in Wonderland, Southesk had stumbled into a strange realm, wildly different from the world of Victorian British society, where the rules of Victorian British society did not apply.

"What joy to be distant long thousands of miles/
From fashions and fancies and hypocrite smiles!" he later rhymed.

In 2006, the Royal Alberta Museum repatriated many of the pieces that Southesk had collected here, buying them at auction at Sotheby's, after the current Earl placed them at auction. It was a great moment for the museum; but for me, as a journalist who covered the story, it was also a very personal—and disorienting—epiphany.

Growing up in Western Canada, coming of age post-1967, in a time of chest-thumping, unabashed Canadian nationalism, I'd never truly questioned our received cultural narrative of Canadian history. At school we learned about Upper and Lower Canada, about the Family Compact and the Château Clique, about the Fathers of Confederation and the building of the railroad. It was a narrative that made Confederation itself seem both inevitable and triumphant, the logical consequence of Canada's historic evolution. Alberta's annexation by Canada wasn't something I'd ever questioned. In a very real way, my own imagination had been colonized by the official stories and official storytellers of Central Canada.

But the Southesk collection offered me an unsettling and wondrous revelation. I'd suddenly caught a glimpse of Edmonton's alternate timeline—of the palimpsest past we've erased and written over. For the time, I could

imagine a counter-factual Edmonton. A fantasy Alberta that evolved without conquest or colonization, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures cross-pollinated and blossomed into something vibrant and resilient and creative and unique. What might have happened here if the bison hadn't disappeared? If the European market for beaver-felt hats hadn't collapsed? If John Palliser's skeptical survey reports had dissuaded more people from farming here—and limited the flood of Central Canadian and European settlers? What (oh, radical thought) if we hadn't joined Confederation at all?

**IT WAS A PLACE OF CULTURES
IN SOME KIND OF FRAGILE
EQUILIBRIUM, A PLACE WHERE
THE LINES BETWEEN US AND
THEM WERE AS BLURRY AS A
PRAIRIE TWILIGHT.**

Of course, we don't live in that alternate universe.

In our merciless timeline, the buffalo died, and the treaties were signed and the reserves were created and the residential schools were opened and Riel was hanged and the settlers poured in and in and in. And with those waves of settlement, the narratives of the complex First Nations and Métis cultures that once existed here were all but erased from the popular imagination. In 1869, 10 years after Southesk's visit, a terrible smallpox epidemic swept through Treaty 6 territory, decimating local First Nations communities, killing thousands, drastically reducing the Indigenous population. The next year, the HBC ceded its control of this land to the two-year-old Dominion of Canada, selling all of Rupert's Land for £300,000, then the equivalent of \$1.5 million. That was a steal of a deal, given that the Americans had just paid \$7.2 million U.S. to purchase Alaska from the Russians in 1867. But then again, given that the Hudson's Bay Company didn't actually own the land it had just sold to Canada, I guess you could say they made a tidy profit, too.

It was another six years, though, before the treaties were signed, legally establishing Crown control—Canadian control—over what had been sovereign native land just a few decades before. By cosmic coincidence, James Carnegie, the 9th Earl of Southesk, died in 1905, the same year Alberta became a province and officially joined Confederation. By then, the world he'd known when he visited Fort Edmonton in 1859 had all but vanished. Yet thanks to James Carnegie, our first titled tourist, we can catch faint echoes of it today in his published diaries

and in his deliriously bad poetry, the first-known published poems in English that were inspired by Alberta's landscape and peoples.

Most of all, we see it in the stunning artifacts he purchased on his travels from the Red River Settlement in modern-day Manitoba, through to the Rockies. Those pieces give silent voice to the talented craftswomen who created them, the often-nameless First Nations and Métis women who have been so rarely allowed to star as the leading characters in their own stories. Now, after years in storage, their handiwork will finally go on permanent display when the new Royal Alberta Museum opens at the end of this sesquicentennial year. A sesquicentennial that gives us a chance to shift our consideration from "What might have been?" to the greater question of "What will we choose to be?"

CA-NA-DA

(One little two little three Canadians)

We love thee

(Now we are twenty million)

CA-NA-DA

(Four little five little six little Provinces)

Proud and free

I was two years old the summer of Canada's centennial. But I still remember putting on a red-and-white terrycloth playsuit, one of my favourite outfits, and dancing on our front porch, singing along to Bobby Gimby's Canada song on a 45 record, played on my plastic record player. I sang it over and over and over, doubtless driving my poor parents and the neighbours to distraction. One little, two little three Canadians. A variation, of course, on the children's nursery rhyme: "One little, two little, three little Indians."

Which nobody seemed to find at all problematic, back in 1967.

It seemed natural to me, as a toddler, to think of "Indians" as characters in nursery rhymes, people who, like Simple Simon's pie man or Wee Willie Winkie, lived in the fantastical world of the olden days. Maybe that's why, even after I grew up, even after I became a journalist who wrote often about First Nations issues and Edmonton's contemporary urban Indigenous community, I never really considered an alternative outcome for the history of this place. Maybe that's why the revelation I felt as I read Southesk's diaries was such a shock to my complacency. I'd never before realized just how thoroughly I'd bought into the triumphalist narrative of pioneer prairie settlement, and into its parallel joyous narrative of easy multicultural harmony.

Small wonder I loved that mythos. After all, this was the place that welcomed my paternal Jewish grandparents more than 100 years ago, the place that gave them refuge from the pogroms of their present, and shielded them from the Holocaust that was to come. This was the place that welcomed my mother here as a child refugee after the Second World War, the country that provided sanctuary to my Oma, a penniless war widow with three small children, and which gave her the chance to succeed.

MAYBE WE CAN MAKE THIS SESQUICENTENNIAL A GOAD, A CHANCE TO REDEFINE THE SOCIAL CONTRACT OF OUR CITY.

As we mark Canada's sesquicentennial year, I want to celebrate the glorious tale of Canada as a multicultural land of freedom and peace and opportunity. But I can't dance and sing, in unselfconscious innocence, the way I did 50 years ago. None of us should. We're not as naively patriotic as we were in 1967, I hope, as tone-deaf to the complicated nuances of our relationship to the First Nations and Métis Albertans who called this territory theirs long before 1867 and who still call it home.

But maybe we can make this sesquicentennial a goad, a chance to redefine the social contract of our city—to rediscover the values of community, of interdependence, of cross-cultural accommodation, that gave Edmonton its earliest start. In this 150th year of Canada, we Albertans should celebrate the reality that Indigenous culture did not die, despite all the best efforts of governments, churches and schools to destroy it. It endured, and it endures today in new, evolving and powerful ways that enrich our whole city—the culture of resilient, courageous, creative Indigenous peoples who demand respect and inclusion, not pity or guilt.

It's not enough to pay lip service to the fact we're on Treaty 6 land before every meeting and local event. It's not enough to put up a few Cree street signs, or to fly Treaty 6 and Métis flags outside Edmonton City Hall, and then deem ourselves reconciled.

It's not enough, these tentative, stumbling first steps towards rebuilding the fundamental foundation on which this city was built. We can't shape a fairer, more honourable, more equitable future, where everyone has a voice, where everyone has the chance to tell his or her or their story, until we recognize the limitations and omissions in the story of Canada that we think we already know. That won't be enough, either, but it'll be a start. **EB**



HOMELAND FOR THE HOLIDAYS

LOVING THE PLACE YOU'RE FROM,
WARTS AND ALL, CAN BE A
COMPLICATED UNDERAKING

ILLUSTRATION DUSHAN MILIC

JULY 30, 2017 - EDMONTON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

As a child I thought the Arabic term for Lebanon was “the Balaad.” That’s what my parents called it whenever they fondly remembered their life before Canada, before I was born. This other world, as they described it, was somehow a more difficult place, yet always culturally superior. I was seven when I finally visited the Balaad and learned the word actually means “homeland.” And it was apparent that Lebanon was definitely not my Balaad. Canada was.

Yet during this year’s sesquicentennial celebrations I felt only a twinge of pride for my home and nothing resembling the romance my parents feel for theirs, however flawed it was. Do third, fourth, and fifth generation Canadians feel that way too? Like a piece of your heart lives far away, in a place foreign yet familiarized by the photos and stories your has family shared? It’s a question I’m asking before my three-week journey across western Europe and the Middle East.

AUGUST 1, 2017 - LONDON, U.K.

Getting lost on London's tortuous roads at night makes you realize what a toddler the nation and notion of Canada is. One random right turn through a stony courtyard and—what's this, a pub that turned 350 this year *as a rebuild*? The original burned in the Great Fire of 1666.

Just this pub on its own is nearly three times the age of Edmonton's oldest structure, a wooden riverside house. "Under Fifteen Sovereigns" declares Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese's scroll-like sign. Even under the monarchy, we've only seen six reigns. Perhaps their affections for the largest and most loyal commonwealth nation are more than feigned, but Queen Elizabeth missed the Canada 150 celebrations this year. The ambivalence feels mutual. Even though the Queen's approval rating in Canada—yes, such a thing exists—is very high, I'd bet our sovereignty that Canadians feel more loyalty to Drake.

Today, at Buckingham Palace, the scene was overpriced gelato, security horses sipping out of fountains, and tourists taking clumsy selfies with barely visible guards 100 metres behind the iron gates. There's a small summer stretch when the Palace opens a side gate for tourists to see the State Rooms and Royal Collection Trust for £23. Categorized by continent, these are cultural exchanges, gifts Her Majesty has accumulated from other state and city leaders over the course of 70 years on the throne. The velvety decor of the baroque and Renaissance rooms demonstrate the reach of her power, and the power of cultures far older than ours: Ukraine's nephrite egg with a gold filigree, Portugal's silver-threaded horse saddle, the Vatican's canonizing decree (this one having belonged to King Edward the Confessor).

I fully expected to find a hockey stick in the Americas display, but found an even more humble offering: a pair of red mittens, official swag from the Vancouver 2010 Olympics (which the Queen also did not attend) that were given by Prime Minister Stephen Harper; did he pick them up last minute from the airport Roots shop?

Around the mittens, however, other leaders have made earnest attempts to show Canada's historical significance. The City of Drumheller presented her with an extinct dinosaur's fossilized humerus, while a stone carving, small totem pole and painting represented the cultures that Canada and the British Empire at one time tried systematically to erase.

Later that night, I drank beer with two Brits, a Swiss and a Mexican, the last an old college roommate who happened to be passing through London at the same time, and who affectionately recalled the delicious

donairs I introduced him to in Vancouver. We discussed foreign policy, statehood and, of course, Donald Trump. My companions described their notion of the new Canada under the governance of a feminist, refugee-hugging hunk: a serial viral sensation.

"You must be relieved," said one Brit. "America elected a madman. We sabotaged ourselves with Brexit. But Canada is so cool now."

The standard of excellence for a nation in the confused West has dropped significantly, but from the outside looking in, the sudden faith foreigners have in Canada—all of it relative to America's decline in credibility and civility—makes Canada 150 seem like a turning point in our global standing. Even if I don't feel it myself.

AUGUST 4, 2017 - SALZBURG, AUSTRIA

This 21-day trip started with a wedding invitation. My dear friend from Calgary was marrying an Austrian, and they organized four days of group events for their guests, weaving in the local Mozart Festival and a bike tour of *Sound Of Music* landmarks. The reception was inside a venue that was home to the Von Trapps, the family around whom the 1960s movie is based.

In Edmonton, up until quite recently, we tended to knock down old buildings to make room for parking lots, whereas Austrians protect landmarks so carefully that they'd rather cast unattractive netting over architectural statues than let pigeons defile them.

Everything in the old town feels as if it were etched in ink by a fairy-tale book illustrator. And yet Austrians suffer from the same inferiority complex as Canadians. On the world's stage, we are the lesser nations, the knock-offs to something more noble in good times and more frightening in bad times. At a family picnic in Hellbrunn Park, near the 17th-century Prince-Archbishop's yellow palace and pleasure garden, I asked Philipp, the groom, whether Austrians endured misconceptions from their overbearing neighbours. Many Americans, I explained, generalize Canadians as pathologically contrite and polite; what were German stereotypes of the Austrian?

"They think we are too relaxed, like lazy," he explained. "This is not true. We are very punctual. But, to be honest, they do not think about us as much as we think about them."

That's also true of the Canadian-American dynamic. Long before Donald Trump was elected, the United States occupied an oversized region of the collective Canadian psyche, a space we must wade through on our way to identifying ourselves, but it's a one-way obsession. In fact, earlier this week, leaked transcripts of Trump's call with Mexico's president suggested as much: "Do not worry about Canada,

we do not even think about them,” he told Enrique Peña Nieto. I suppose we ought to be relieved.

AUGUST 8, 2017 - KRAKOW, POLAND

More than staring up through the holes atop the gas chamber, more than scratching the dusty, stacked wood palettes that functioned as bunks for emaciated women, it was the eyeglasses at Auschwitz-Birkenau that punched my guts the hardest. They were blackened and bent, mostly devoid of lenses, piled about two feet high, 10 feet long, with wiry frames knotted together much like the mound of human hair displayed in the next room. The heap of metal was sickeningly large, thousands, maybe tens of thousands of pairs, but it was only a fraction of what was yanked off the confused faces of mostly Jewish prisoners and sent to warehouses called “Kanada 1 and 2.”

CANADA THE NATION REMAINED A HOPEFUL PLACE IN THE ABSTRACT FOR THE PRISONERS OF KANADA 1 AND 2.

That’s what the Polish prisoners themselves called the warehouses, because Canada, to them, was a land of abundance. These two buildings were full of money, pearls, pottery, precious items confiscated, sorted, and shipped back to Germany on the same train that had just unloaded thousands of new victims. Sorting the booty in Kanada was considered the best job for prisoners, neither as gruelling as the coal mines nor as horrible as picking gold out of the mouths of corpses before they were incinerated. But jobs at Kanada didn’t last long either, explained my soft-spoken tour guide; when workers became wise to the overall operations of the camp, they knew it was just a matter of time before someone would be plucking their gold teeth.

Yet Canada the nation remained a hopeful place in the abstract for these prisoners.

Tonight I listened to live klezmer, Jewish folk music from eastern Europe, in the Jewish quarter of Krakow’s Kazimierz district. I was staying in an apartment there that played a small role in *Schindler’s List* but a bigger role in the hourly Schindler’s List walking tours that woke me every morning. Drinking wine in the glow of a large menorah, I wondered if the Auschwitz prisoners understood the real Canada of those years. The one that, like Cuba and the United States, denied entrance to 907 Jewish refugees on the *MS St. Louis* because a high-ranking immigration officer said of them that “none was too many.”

A quarter of the passengers would be murdered in Nazi death camps and, by the end of the war, only about 5,000 Jewish refugees made it to our land of plenty; three times as many Jewish-Canadian soldiers travelled the other way to serve our country.

Maybe the high human cost of this failure was necessary for the real Canada to leap closer to its current, welcoming reputation. Blatantly racist immigration rules of the 1920s finally crumbled, allowing Kanada to step out of the abstract, and a truly colourful wave of immigration to pursue Canada’s sought-after passport.

AUGUST 11, 2017 - TELAVIV, ISRAEL

My passport photo makes friends laugh. It’s not particularly unruly but it was taken during the single brief phase of my life when I grew a lumberjack beard. Fixed next to my name, that beard is enough to warrant a second look from most airport personnel.

“Do you ever get hassled?” my friends often ask.

“No, because this,” I usually respond, flipping to the glimmering Canadian crest on the cover, “is what actually matters.”

I’m beginning to doubt that after three hours of questioning, waiting and re-questioning at Tel Aviv’s David Ben Gurion airport. From the moment I showed it to passport control, I’ve wondered if it’s really your parents passport that matters.

“Omar Mouallem?” he asked, appraising my grizzly old mug. “What is the origin of your name?” He was confused because my last name is also a common Hebrew name, but my first name is more likely to be Arab or Islamic, two character traits he suspects of me but won’t ask so bluntly. I told him my parents are Lebanese. “*Lebaneez*,” he said in a higher pitch. “We need you to go into that room on the left, with the TV,” he said, tucking my passport under his desk.

How much can you tell about a person from their passport? What do the stamps from your travels say about where your heart is, for whom you have sympathies? What does your birth country say that your nationality doesn’t? How different might the person in the portrait be from the one standing in front of you?

I pondered this while I sat in the room on the left with one TV, eight sandwiches, a dozen men and two women. They were Arab, African and Caucasian; bearded, clean-shaven and made-up with cosmetics; donned in white robes and Hawaiian shirts. The similarities were more in the origins of their names: Ali, Saleh, Salem, Omar.

I code-switched to patriot Canadian, emphasizing my nationality and anglicizing my father and grandfather’s

names before the officials had me write them down on a slip of paper, then write them again with a different interviewer, who sent me back to my seat after he established that my last name was “not Jewish.”

The room with the TV is quiet and miserable. Nobody is asking questions, except for the rowdy French guys, who are not getting answers. A woman slightly older than my mom with dyed blond hair and expensive jewelry sobbed most of the time. I wanted to fill a cup of lukewarm water from the broken cooler for her, but I didn’t, nobody did, because when you’re pushed to suspect yourself how can you trust a stranger? It was better not to make any alliances and just be friendly with personnel, even though a part of me wanted to act like the French boys, obnoxiously splay my legs across the aisle, demand a cigarette even though I don’t smoke.

Instead I kept smiling, answering the same questions over and over again about my reasons for being here, about my parents, about my visits to Lebanon, about theirs. Then a curveball: have I ever written about Israeli-Palestinian conflicts? Do I consider Palestine a state? All of this is to determine the first number of the barcode they’ll stick on my passport when I depart in six days. Will it start with 1, the lowest risk, or the 6 for hostile internationals?

AUGUST 14, 2017 - BETHLEHEM, WEST BANK

I know one place in Israel where the crest on my passport actually matters: the West Bank, where I’m repeatedly reminded of why I have more rights than Palestinians, whose green identity papers keep them contained in Areas A or B—under Palestinian Authority control or Palestinian Authority and Israeli control—and out of Area C, under Israeli control only, usually at the front of Jewish settlements. Without a work permit or special permission, Palestinians couldn’t penetrate the wall between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, but all I needed to do was hop in a yellow-plated cab. The yellow plates are for Israeli cars, the green-plated cabs are for Palestinians and the furthest it can take them is to the sometimes hour-long queue at the border turnstile.

I was staying in a hostel inside Dheisheh, a three-generation refugee camp in Bethlehem that’s now a subdivision, kind of. There’s a palpable anger here. Not rage. Not violence. But anger. The hot cement walls are adorned with symbols of resistance, such as the painted-on brass keys representing the door locks that awaited the missing grandparents of the inhabitants, who believed until the bitter end that they’d one day return. There are also posters and paintings of young people killed by Israeli soldiers in conflicts, in raids, in everyday

confrontations. They call them martyrs; I called them dead young men and boys.

Every conversation I have had in Dheisheh has centred around the same things. The occupation, the new museum about the occupation and the colonialism-themed hotel secretly opened by Banksy, the world’s most famous living artist. The top-hatted doorman and marquee lights of Banksy’s Walled Off Hotel, situated as it is in Bethlehem’s cement jungle, stand out like a scene from a Wes Anderson movie. You can rent spray paint and stencils to paint the nearly-eight-metre high wall directly outside the hotel.

I GOT MY PASSPORT BACK TO SEE THAT I HAD BEEN ASSIGNED A 6. HOSTILE INTERNATIONAL. AND CANADIAN.

Palestinians are monetizing the occupation and squeezing some value from this hell. Taxi drivers offer to show you famous wall murals and guides give occupation-themed tours. In Hebron, I was led through the raucous souk, where the stretches of fruit, sweets and mobile phone accessories seemed never to end until they did. The merchants announcing their goods over the buzzing crowd quieted to just a pattering around mostly shuttered garage bays as we neared the so-called “Ghost Town.”

The souk pathways were suddenly covered in cages littered with buckets, shoes, socks, boulders that have been dropped from Jewish settlers above. Past the turnstile that everyone must pass through to enter Ibrahim Mosque, as it’s known to Muslims, or the Cave of the Patriarchs to Jews, we reached a point where my guide handed me over to another guide with special access to the Ghost Town—his Palestinian family was one of the few that remained after Palestinian shops, offices and bus stations were forced to close. Vibrant for thousands of years, Hebron now felt like a walk through a museum park after hours. Jewish settlers, many of whom are in fact American and considered radical by Israelis themselves, waited at bus stops on deserted streets, never far from armed soldiers, but just in case, some settlers carried handguns too. I passed a tall, multi-family home decked out in Israeli flags and banners, a home that its original Palestinian owner told Al Jazeera was taken over by force. Two Israeli soldiers guarded it in patio chairs by the front door.

Around the bend, two Arab boys rode their bikes in circles behind a chain-link fence that encompassed their home and was locked from the outside. How long has this

fence been here? “Two months,” said my guide. It felt horrible to stare in as if we were at a zoo, but we couldn’t look away from the oppression unfolding before our eyes. Perhaps a century ago Canada did not feel so different to the bleeding-heart foreigner bearing witness to a residential school. Perhaps I am a beneficiary of the same process that happened centuries ago.

An Arab woman beside me, who I believe was from North America and who was quietly breathing into her hand, asked one of the boys why it was locked; he didn’t have an answer. The two soldiers outside did not betray sorrow, but my heart broke, and it felt like my whole heart. Maybe it was the part of my heart that lives in another homeland just 268 kilometres north.

A politically active Palestinian who works at the hostel asked me about that last night. At first he was ambivalent to me, playing Candy Crush outside while I caught some cool air. My Arabic was clumsy and my lighter skin could easily have made me part of the dozen Italian NGO volunteers staying as guests. But once he learned my name, he wanted to know where I was from. Originally.

“My parents are from Lebanon, but I’m Canadian.”

“So you’re Lebanese.”

“Yes, I also have Lebanese citizenship.”

“Well, of course you’re Lebanese then,” he said in impeccable English, still playing on his phone, now smiling on one side of his mouth. This felt like the reverse of my experience in London, where people only wanted to discuss my Canadian-ness, and where my Lebanese citizenship wasn’t even acknowledged, let alone questioned.

“What do you think of Hassan Nasrallah?” he asked, referring to the leader of Hezbollah—a party and militia in Lebanon, a terrorist group just about everywhere else. I gave him a tepid answer: my feelings are neither good nor bad, I don’t agree with the politics but I won’t deny the group’s importance to defending the Shia minority and bringing an end to Southern Lebanon’s own 15-year Israeli occupation.

He put away his phone. “You make it sound like both sides have some good and bad, but it’s actually quite simple. Hezbollah is not about politics, it’s about freedom.” I responded with the most progressive-sounding cop-out I could muster, that my opinions weren’t as important as those of Lebanese or Palestinians who’d lived under occupation. I ventured that it was not my place to speak for them.

“I’m going to be very honest,” he said. “OK? Don’t get mad at me.” He waited for my permission. “I don’t like what you just said, ‘Oh, I’m Canadian, I’m not true Lebanese, I can’t understand what it’s like.’ This is what they want. They want to disconnect you from your roots.”

AUGUST 16, 2017 - BENGURION AIRPORT

Suspicion confirmed. I got my passport back to see that I had been assigned a 6. Hostile international. And Canadian.

AUGUST 21, 2017 - ERBIL, IRAQI KURDISTAN

I was technically in Iraq, a short drive from Mosul, not far enough from Baghdad, but all I could think about was an independent homeland. Palestinians now number 12 million, more than the number of stateless Jews in 1945. Today, the Kurdish are the world’s largest ethnic group without a Balaad. But maybe not for long.

The bustling bazaar in the centre of this ancient city felt ordinary for this part of the world, men crowding one side of the street with barbers and tailors and women on the other side with produce and dresses, but there was a quiet excitement and anxiety. After 140 years of Kurdish nationalism, after innumerable battles, countless dead in three-front battles with Turkey, Iran and Iraq, after thousands gassed by Saddam Hussein, the Kurdistan Regional Government is to hold a referendum on statehood in the fall of 2017. In the summer, most Kurds believed it would be won in a landslide, but were still nervous about what that would mean for Middle Eastern relations, or whether it was a smart purchase at a time when economic instability had slashed public salaries by three-quarters. Unlike the West Bank, Iraqi Kurds live peacefully and safely, going about their perfunctory days and moving between clean, wide roads with little hassle. Still, speaking with locals, Kurds tell me stability is a risk worth taking.

Here was a people with their own language and culture refined over a thousand years. Their sense of themselves is clearer than what most of us experience as “Canadian.” But a single day of independence when all these virtues are celebrated does not exist. It’s the opposite of Canada. We have the party but can’t always agree on what to celebrate. What is ours, what is Britain’s? What is unique, what is *not American*? How much of the story of Canada’s Indigenous people do we even have the right to tell, when Confederation Day accelerated their near-erasure?

Simply living in a place so stable that I rarely consider these questions makes me grow fonder of Canada. But I don’t feel as though viewing it from afar, in countries of discord and pain, has given me a stronger connection to my homeland. For that, perhaps one must leave the Balaad, as my parents did. Or maybe the idea of a homeland must be just out of reach, or withheld, in order to grow truly fond of it. That does not seem like something worth asking for. ☒

ROLLIE PEMBERTON

EDMONTON TIME

THE CLOCK IN MY HOMETOWN TICKS
TOWARD AN OPTIMISM THAT ONCE
SEEMED DISTANT

PHOTOGRAPHY **LUCAS BOUTILIER**

CANADA IS A GREAT LAND MASS WITH A MULTITUDE of faces, climates and attitudes, a realm defined and strengthened by its amorphous, uncategorizable nature. Our country is bound together by shared values and ideologies based on an inherent goodness that belies the history of what, exactly, allowed many of us to settle here in the first place. This dichotomy has never been clearer than this year during Canada 150, with its dizzying onslaught of government-sponsored sesquicentennial parties in the shadow of a First Nations clean water crisis. But what truly sets us apart from province to province is how we perceive time.

In my travels across the country as an artist, I've learned how each Canadian city's relationship to time is different. In Toronto, where I currently live, you're rarely afforded an opportunity to reflect on the passage of time. You find every free moment booked up with professional obligations, navigating a constant stream of opportunities. It is a city where people ask what you do before they ask who or how you are. You're unable to make time for anything outside of the rat race, and the carrot at the end of the stick is a condo. Still, it's a productive place and if you're focused, your time will be well spent.





In beautiful Montreal, time gradually slips away from you, reality itself becomes unmoored by an endless parade of picnics in the park. Being timely begins to feel less important. Staying out until 4 a.m. on a Tuesday is not considered socially irresponsible. After living there for several years, I often worried that I might wake up one Sunday next to the George-Étienne Cartier Monument, across from Parc Jeanne-Mance, with grey dreadlocks, a djembe and no idea how two decades had flown by.

No such concern in Edmonton. The colossal, yawping sky and winters with unmitigated brightness and clarity make it quite apparent precisely how much time has elapsed over any given period. Our country's unfavourable climate forces us to spend half the year in a state of suspended animation, facilitating deep introspection and subsequently, some fantastic art. This is particularly true of Edmonton, where snow falling well into May is not uncommon.

A capital city of 1.3 million people that has historically defied definition in the popular culture, Edmonton can be a peculiar place. Even after the peak of its international relevance as the home of the Edmonton Oilers championship dynasty and the World's Largest Mall in the 1980s, there is a lingering sense of ambiguity about what the city stands for and what it's like to live there.

In his 1985 profile of Wayne Gretzky for the *New York Times*, Mordecai Richler called Edmonton "the boiler room" of Canada, describing it as "a city you come from, not a place to visit, unless you happen to have relatives there or an interest in an oil well nearby." Today, Edmonton's page on the Lonely Planet travel website labels it "frigidly cold for much of the year" and "a government town that you're more likely to read about in the business pages than the travel supplements." Dominated by boxy, brutalist architecture and a numerical grid system that turns its street addresses into a jumble of numbers, Edmonton often exudes a sense of rigidity.

But there is an ephemeral, transient quality to the city as well. Edmonton has traditionally been a through-point for the country. For many, it's a boomtown where you can make a fortune and then scuttle off to a more permanent destination. Like its northern cousins in Yellowknife and Whitehorse, for whom it provides a gateway, it's a place where you can reinvent yourself, away from the unforgiving eyes back in your hometown. I've known several people who changed their names and identities upon moving to Edmonton.

The city itself has often behaved in the same manner, allowing the urban landscape to be remade over and over at the expense of heritage buildings. Historical sites have been laid to waste countless times, most recently

the 117-year-old Etzio building on Whyte Avenue and the 108-year-old Mitchell & Reed Auction House. This attitude was made apparent in 2015 during the dustup around the Welcome to Edmonton signs that beckoned drivers in from outside city limits. The angular, taupe signs also bore an additional proclamation: City of Champions. It memorialized former mayor Laurence Decore's tribute to citizens' courageous response to the F4 tornado that ripped through Edmonton's east side on July 31, 1987.

As dated and hokey as the signs now look and as irrelevant as the slogan might seem in recent years, the removal of Decore's statement from the signs felt like a tacit admission by the city that Edmontonians were, in fact, not championship material. Born and raised here, I never felt that way. To me, Edmonton was a glittering, underappreciated metropolis. I wondered why all of the music I heard and the films I watched were filled with romanticism for places like New York, London and Paris, yet never for my city. Everyone knows that time is money in New York and everyone knows that time is unhurried in California. But what can be said about Edmontonian time? It was that absence of understanding, that lack of a cultural imprint, that pushed me to create art about Edmonton in the first place.

I'VE ALWAYS TRIED TO WRITE ABOUT WHAT I KNOW.

I wrote songs that covered the expanse of Edmontonia: the strip malls, the gentrification pushing my friends out of the city, the Avenue of Nations and the local venues where I learned how to perform. I rapped about the windy nights driving to Edmonton International Airport during the brutal winter, seeing Highway 2 lined with upturned cars. In my work I've shouted out local politicians, shopkeepers, public-access TV stars, scenesters, musicians and athletes. As the city's poet laureate, I wrote a poem about Edmonton's strange relationship with its monuments that stands as a self-referential monument of its own, hanging sentence by sentence on the flags that line Jasper Avenue.

I've strived to reflect the values and lifestyle of where I come from in the same way my heroes did. Artists like Nas, Lou Reed, Mike Skinner, André 3000 and Martin Newell made their cities feel larger than life and fantastically detailed. I've tried to do the same for Edmonton, even if that meant it wouldn't always be portrayed in a positive light. This is bound to happen when you write about a place with any measure of specificity. You know how Reed sings about meeting a drug dealer in "I'm Waiting for the Man"? The memorable part for me is that he made his transaction at Lexington Avenue and 125 Street in

Harlem. If I helped make people think of Oliver Square as somewhere more than just a place you can get both a Booster Juice and a Big Mac, that means I've achieved my goal.

Some people have taken issue with how I've portrayed the city in my music. I titled my third album *Hope In Dirt City*, which refers to a colloquial nickname my small group of artistic friends gave Edmonton. I thought Dirt City embodied the hardscrabble, workmanlike attitude of people in the city. It felt similar to Newark being known as Brick City. But I didn't consider the fact that some people wouldn't exactly appreciate having the place they live in being portrayed as unclean or murky. I apologize for the miscommunication.

I find myself particularly inspired when I come back home. The impossibly wide streets set my mind into motion as I walk. I'm besieged by ideas while driving across the city. There's something about the passage of time here that provides me with a wellspring of imagination. I believe that some of this can be attributed to the city's adherence to Mountain Standard Time, an oft-forgotten time zone that places the city in limbo: two hours behind the newsmakers in New York and Washington and an hour ahead of Los Angeles and Vancouver. Distractions are limited when I'm back in Edmonton. It allows for the rare opportunity to move forward on projects at whatever pace I choose, rather than allowing my environment to dictate the speed of my lifestyle. I often feel pleasantly disconnected from the flow of world news when I'm there, learning about things a few hours or days later than I would if I were on the east coast.

Despite the positive feelings I have when I return, as I look back at my career and my relationship to the city, I'm surprised by how bleak some of my imagery is. Edmonton has changed a lot since I was a teenager watching kids fight each other with machetes outside of house parties in the west end. Yet whether it's literature, film or music, I've never seen or heard Edmonton depicted in full summer bloom in any medium. Why have these sunny, optimistic visions of the city been obscured from the public consciousness? Could it be because the cold months are so long and chilling that they overshadow the greener seasons (or let's be honest, season), creating a seemingly inextricable link between Edmonton and the image of a frostbitten gold prospector? Or was it just not that compelling to rap about a really nice day I had at Folk Fest?

Perhaps I can help to rectify that with this essay. I'll never forget the feeling when I first ventured to Old Strathcona one summer night. My mother drove

me there as a teenager to rap along with my uncle Brett Miles and his jazz trio Rise at the Sugar Bowl. The clusters of people on Whyte Ave. as we drove by, the shimmering marquee of the Garneau Theatre, the independent spirit of the audience for our gig that felt so different than the more conservative attitudes I was accustomed to seeing on the north side of the city: this was when the city came alive for me. When I was older, I would live a couple buildings down from the Sugar Bowl, subsisting primarily on chicken burgers from the long-closed diner Keegan's. The river valley nearby is indivisibly linked to Edmonton, a natural wonder that sets it apart from any other city in the world. There aren't many places where you can walk down some stairs and suddenly be in a massive forest.

For many, the High Level Bridge is an object of fear and desolation. It has recently been outfitted with tall fences to prevent suicides so rampant that they warranted a documentary by filmmaker Trevor Anderson. It makes me recall a romantic first date where the two of us walked across the bridge together, stopping to look at both sides of the city simultaneously. It also reminds me of some scenes Steven Hope and I shot there during the making of the music video for "Coming Home," a song I wrote with Shout Out Out Out Out about returning from tour to a city that has changed without you.

Fellow Edmonton native Mac DeMarco recently released a song called "Moonlight on the River," a ballad from his album *This Old Dog*, about returning home to visit his ailing, estranged father. This elegiac tale of loss and acceptance obliquely casts the North Saskatchewan River as the setting for a potential final farewell: "I'm home, with moonlight on the river, saying my goodbyes." The fact that a place in Edmonton can potentially inspire such a broad spectrum of emotions is proof that our monuments have as much value as those of any other city, a testament to the myriad ways that you can make art about Edmonton.

On one of my trips back to town in 2016, the optimism around Rogers Place and the current Oilers team inspired me to write a song about their young star player Connor McDavid. Just like the previously moribund downtown core that Richler famously denigrated, McDavid has resurrected the hopes of the team and the city in a way that hasn't quite happened since the heyday of Gretzky. New successful businesses are springing up around the stadium's orbit and, according to new census data, Edmonton is one of the fastest growing cities in the country. There were times (usually during the winter) where this kind of upswing felt distant and impossible. I guess time in Edmonton just moves at its own pace. **EE**



5

NASRA ADEM

THIS COUNTRY THINKS IT GAVE ME MY MAGIC

**I HAVE CARVED OUT MY OWN SPACE
AND FOUND A COMMUNITY THAT
DOESN'T NEED TO ASK ME IF I'M OK**

PHOTOGRAPHY COOPER & O'HARA

**if my Black were to be haloed by one truth
it would glow James Baldwin gold**

**"The place in which I'll fit will not exist
until I make it"**

I have been carving out space for myself for as long as I can remember. As an energetic and dreamy little Black girl, I took pride in making my spaces resemble whatever I needed "safe" to be at the time. Whether that meant sticking glow-in-the-dark stars on everything I owned, or draping my closet hideaway in Hoyoo's scarves, I was constantly finessing my way into comfort. Now, as a multidisciplinary artist and activist I share and exchange this survival tactic with anyone who needs it. Curation and creation have been the means through which I define home and myself. It makes interacting with the

idea of nationalism a lot more autonomous and fluid. The journey, however, has not always been so empowering.

In 2007, at the age of 12, I made the move from Ontario to Alberta. It was a reluctant move on my part and I was bitter for at least a handful of years after that. Edmonton was white. Very, very white. My new school was also very, very white. And wealthy. Everything the government subsidized, like the brown and Black community I grew up in, wasn't. It frustrated me how little that whiteness (although I didn't know that's what it was at the time) was felt and, if not felt, acknowledged. I was frustrated with how different I suddenly was and immediately began to turn myself inside out. I changed my hair, my clothes, the music I listened to, the way I spoke. I did what I thought I needed to do in order to fit. But all that started to shift when I got involved in leadership and the arts. I was back in my power and slowly reconnecting with my ability to make home out of nothing.

High school, however, set that back. My mom remarried to a man who required we wear the hijab. I began dancing competitively (in a hijab). I was in a relationship with someone who preyed on my insecurities and I was emotionally invested in all my friends' issues. I was performing a lot and gaining popularity in school but had only a few people who knew who I really was. I was filling journals with things I had no space for during the day. I was worried my God and my family would disown me if I followed my dreams. I was crushingly bored and I was starving myself creatively, mentally and physically. The artistic spaces I thought I could see myself in saw me as an anomaly. I didn't believe anyone could hold all of it, so I let my journal bear the weight. And for the first time, it felt like I couldn't create a space in which I fit. So I left. In my Grade 12 year I was pulled out of all of my classes except fourth-period drama, which I would frequent a few times a week. I had developed a thyroid/throat chakra problem that heavily affected my depression and anxiety. Now, as I study the spiritual reasons for disease I understand what was happening; I had quite literally stifled my voice.

I was able to graduate with my class but attended a continuing school for the remainder of my credits; this is where my relationship to education shifted. The teachers at this school were creative and energetic and deeply committed to engaging their students. They had to be. They were working with students who came from traumatic and complicated backgrounds, students who had their innate intelligence devalued by a structure that worships production over ingenuity. They saw through my self-sabotaging behaviour and acknowledged the girl who needed to trust herself. The girl who needed to speak. Cue the beginning of my wavering tolerance for Edmonton, Alberta.

After graduating, I took a year off and weighed my options for school. My mother realized my mental health was largely contingent on whether or not I was creating, and supported me in auditioning for the musical theatre program at MacEwan University, where I learned about Edmonton's thriving theatre community. I was in a class of artists with varying relationships to theatre and creativity but quickly realized I was still an anomaly. The only Black person in my program and one of three or four Black people in the whole arts campus. Not only that, the majority of the shows I was going to see rarely had a person of colour contributing to any part of the creative process. I began to realize that my education was going to have to serve me differently from the majority of my classmates.

This institution had no room for my Blackness. And the world was making it very clear that it did not either.

THEN THERE WAS MICHAEL BROWN, AN UNARMED Black teenager. In 2014, when I heard that a grand jury announced it wouldn't charge the man who killed him, I spent an entire vocal performance class waiting for my opportunity to collapse in private. I remember only just making it to my locker before letting out a cry that disturbed the rehearsal next door. My chest collapsed into itself after the first "Are you OK?" The weight of having to explain the unexplainable was a loneliness I wished on no one. So I left.

i ask the country that thinks it gave me my magic
a few questions about government housing
and immigration paperwork
and entry-level jobs
that define entry based on how it's pronounced
i ask why it thinks that because i am fed
i am whole

ORALMOSTLEFT.

The only reasons I stayed being the Breath In Poetry collective and two educators who understood what I could do outside an institution. I came back for a second year, but only after establishing a home for my Blackness on BIP's tiny open-mic stage. Every Tuesday at 9 p.m., I practiced speaking my truth, wrapping my innermost frustrations and dreams of love in a voice that I always knew was mine.

my mother is whole
in a way that I am too privileged to understand
my hunger is not her hunger
my poverty; a belly half full
my freedom; an overstep
a challenge to her sacrifice
when i am loud and in the streets
asking for more
(truly, i am just asking for enough)

ON THAT STAGE I WAS BLACK. AND A WOMAN. AND Muslim. And eventually, on that stage, I was queer. It was undeniable, and equally important and crucial not only to my existence but to anyone who was working to turn their quiver into a bellow. I wanted to live on that stage. So I stayed.

I found the people that wanted to hear me scream about injustice and joy. I found the spaces that didn't look like me but wanted to. I found an Edmonton that doesn't need to ask me if I'm OK, but instead ensures that I am. I built a family of weirdos who were passionate about excavating the truth by any means necessary. I found my mirrors. And I knew that it was my job to ensure artists of colour found their mirrors as well.

**i remind her that i protest in honour
of the sea and the people braving its depth
each day i sweep up the language and
forgotten children
from its murky bottom
and i mourn**

SO I BEGAN TO VISIT THE PLACES WHERE PEOPLE HAD been masterfully creating the spaces in which they fit. That's when I began to carve a little Nasra-shaped hole in New York City. Immersing myself in its history of Black and Brown artistic resistance gave me the juice I needed to reshape what we knew as an artistic community in Edmonton. I overwhelmed myself with questions. What does it mean to be inclusive? Who holds the keys to truly healing in our communities? Who's actually committed to that work? How far back do we start? What does it mean to Indigenize versus Decolonize? If the art is what we have claimed as our identity, what is the art saying? And who is saying it?

**i dig and dig inside the well of me for more water
(empathy needs more human homes)
and i swim in its depth and history
let it almost drown me
so i may cherish the breath that comes
if it comes**

WITH THE THE INCREDIBLY MASTURBATORY DISPLAY of Canada 150 nationalism approaching, I knew it was time for everyone in this country to get shaken up and educated. Watching millions of dollars pour into the celebration of a nation founded on the near-genocide of Indigenous peoples, while the effects of these genocidal acts still traumatize their descendants, made me question the true nature of Canada's relationship to reconciliation. One hundred and fifty years of colonization does not deserve my breath. The liberation of Brown and Black and Queer artists and people of this

country does. We deserve to redefine, reimagine and rebuild this notion of home for ourselves. Which is what this country and this world is ultimately trying to do.

**because i speak the shiny language
and because my skin has no visible holes
and because i write poems for work
and because i know i am the Dream of so many
manifested**

THE TROUBLE COMES WHEN OUR ATTEMPTS TO create the spaces in which we fit infringe on others. Borders and binaries have limited our capacity for empathy and compassion. We have become obsessed with protecting ideals that have never served us, simply because we are afraid of change and growth. We are the ones taking from ourselves unjustly every time we reduce each other to a nation, a language, and an arbitrary set of values. This colonial construct that goes against our innate capacity for co-existence has been solidified in our conditioning as producers, winners and conquerors. We have created so much distance between each other that the discomfort of interacting with anything, either intimate or alien, keeps us from building true understanding. And in turn, from building true love and community. That's where our strength lies: in places where people understand you, or are working to understand you. My commitment to spaces where people prioritize this truth is nuanced, and living a beautifully layered human existence is how I unlearn harmful, limiting conditioning. I acknowledge and honour who I truly am by acknowledging and honouring the truth of who others are.

**i remind my body it is its own nation
i remind my art it is its own home**

AND AS I CONTINUE TO CURATE SHOWS, FESTIVALS and communal spaces I keep this crucial fact in mind; the place in which I fit is the space where love exists. Canada, Edmonton, New York, my bedroom, the stage; as long as we are speaking and as long as we are excavating truth, we are home.

**and it all fits
and exists the way a universe does
Black and ever reaching
for more. 📖**

DECLARATION OF INNER

EDMONTON
MAKES
A **CULINARY**
STAND,
AND IT
DOESN'T
CARE
WHO'S
TAKING
NOTICE

PHOTOGRAPHY **BLUEFISH STUDIOS**

“WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ABORIGINAL executive chef in Edmonton, in charge of my own kitchen and staff?” Shane Chartrand only somewhat rhetorically asked me as we sat down to a table set with white linen, gleaming cutlery, and china for what is unfortunately a unique experience in Canada: a fine dining Indigenous restaurant. “What does it mean to have four different nations working for me, looking for guidance on how to express their ambitions, their dreams, and their identities through food?”

These questions have been weighing on chef Chartrand’s mind for quite some time. Chartrand is 42 years old. He wears his hair shaved on the sides, and has a wide strip of thick black hair on top, which he wears slicked back. He’s usually upbeat but rarely smiles. His look, for lack of a better term, is one of intensity.

He has come from a background of foster care, followed by adoption (into a family of mixed Métis, British and Mi’kmaq heritage), full circle to his home nation on Edmonton’s western edge. And now he’s on a mission to piece together his Enoch Cree identity through food. Since 2014, he has been the executive chef at the River Cree Casino and Resort, where his flagship restaurant Sage straddles the steak-and-seafood expectations of the slot-machine-and-cards crowd and the foodie set who seek out his contemporary Indigenous approach to cuisine.

We get together every few weeks to talk about food—there’s always a new restaurant or bar opening, it seems—or because Chartrand is working on a new idea for a big national cooking competition or a fancy celebrity chef event somewhere in Canada. One day, he puts a fuchsia pink beet-cured salmon gravlax in front of me. Another day, it’s strips of paper-thin bison carpaccio draped over leafless willow branches, like a small semi-edible bonsai garden.

With every dish, Chartrand reminds me that food is edible culture. And as a city with an embarrassment of cultural riches, it’s no wonder Edmonton has finally hit its culinary stride. Yes, we’re eating well here these days. There’s an energy I’ve never seen here before, and for the first time in my life—and I’m 46—we’re a city of tastemakers. I might even venture that we’re the envy of other parts of Canada.

It begs the questions: Why us? And also why now?

After all, we’ve had some exceptions to our comfortably mediocre culinary reputation for quite some time. Back in 2004, chef Brad Lazarenko opened a southside spot called Culina that was unlike anything Edmonton had seen. It billed itself as comfort food and a neighbourhood bistro. It was certainly both, but the menu was also confidently bohemian, a nod to Edmonton’s cultural mashup and Lazarenko’s Ukrainian heritage. The room was candlelit and sultry, and the décor oozed cool. Some got it; some didn’t. That was maybe the point. It wasn’t the usual everything-to-everybody space that Edmonton had ill-advisedly made its signature. Soon after, Lazarenko added a sliver of a winebar next door that served more wines by the glass than the number of people it could squeeze in.

In 2008, Cindy Lazarenko (sister of Brad Lazarenko), was reinventing her Highlands restaurant after a business-



partnership split. When she reopened as Culina Highlands, her riff on Ukrainian contemporary cooking earned the restaurant a top-10 spot on *enRoute* magazine's list, "Canada's Best New Restaurants."

After that, something definitely tipped. In 2009, Duchess Bake Shop, a cake and pastry business, opened its doors on 124 Street. It was elegant contemporary Empire Style, including a chandelier, Parisian white-on-white interior and long display counters laden with comestibles we'd never seen here: made-from-scratch pâtes à choux (like éclairs with rich vanilla bean crème pâtissière), prinsesstårta (the signature Duchess dome-shaped cake draped in a pistachio-green marzipan) and the rainbow colours of various macarons. Duchess single-handedly created a culinary locus on 124 Street that continues.

In 2010, chef Daniel Costa opened Corso 32, a skinny 34-seater on Jasper Avenue that served his version of rustic Italian cuisine; it remains the hardest reservation to get in the province. And then Tres Carnales (2011), Three Boars (2012), Canteen (2013), RGE RD (2013), Rostizado (2014), North 53 (2014).

By 2015, we had a dozen restaurants I'd put up against any in the country, yet the critics' praise was invariably a version of "and you'll never believe that it's in Edmonton!"

We even charmed the stretchy pants off of *Vogue* magazine, its writer gushing about many of the aforementioned hotspots as well as Uccelino, Bar Bricco, and Café Linnea.

This year, we have three restaurants on *enRoute* magazine's Best New Restaurant's longlist—the food and travel magazine will announce its top-10 in November. Alder Room. Clementine. Café Linnea. Not to mention Chartier, which is in Beaumont, a Franco-Albertan town a mere 30-minute trip from downtown Edmonton.

Are we finally willing to admit that Edmonton has (and maybe has had for quite a while) the breadth and depth to be one of Canada's great food cities? Sometimes you need to have some distance from it for a while to see what was right in front of you all along.

"WE WERE THOSE PEOPLE," GISELLE COURTEAU said with a laugh as we sat in her new cooking school space, Duchess Atelier, just a few blocks from the bake shop that sells thousands of macarons every Saturday from its 124 Street flagship location.

Courteau admitted that she and her then-husband now business partner, Garner Beggs, left Edmonton as soon as they could, moving first to Victoria then Vancouver then Tokyo. There, they began to plan their return. "We

grew to realize that it was the place we wanted to make our home. Because it always was our home. And we didn't know that until we left."

Courteau and Beggs dreamed of opening a French-style patisserie in Edmonton to which they'd bring the macaron craze that was happening in Paris and Tokyo. Why not? Courteau spent four years maniacally perfecting recipes in a toaster oven in their tiny Tokyo apartment kitchen.

"We don't give Edmontonians enough credit," said Courteau. "They are well-travelled and open-minded." There were enough of us who had tasted and loved macarons and other French pastry treats abroad and were more than happy to pay for them in Edmonton. But side-by-side with the macarons were saskatoon pie, rhubarb galette, and Courteau Family tourtière, crafted from her Franco-Albertan roots. The lesson was our city was ravenous for the finer foods in life, which included our own culinary traditions.

And while I'm thrilled that so much of our talent is getting the recognition it deserves every time another sensational downtown hotspot opens, I feel that Edmonton's restaurant geography owes much to the unsung heroes in our community who have expanded our culinary horizons despite the challenges and lack of recognition.

AMSALE SUMAMO ARRIVED IN EDMONTON IN LATE

October 1983. Prior to that, she had walked for seven days avoiding detection and peril as she made her way from Ethiopia to Sudan. It was 47 C in Sudan when she left. It was -10 C when she landed in Edmonton. As it does for immigrants like Amsale, the Government of Canada chose her destination. Her husband was able to join her a year later.

The Sumamos both found work, and began to raise a family. In 2004, after years of prodding by her husband, Amsale opened Langano Skies, a restaurant serving made-from-scratch Ethiopian food. But would Edmonton embrace injera and Berbere spice mix?

I caught up with Amsale this past summer in Sir Winston Churchill Square at her food cart, an extension of the restaurant during the busy summer festival season. "Open your mind and give it a try!" she said to passersby as I sat with her. Between serving customers, she told me candidly of their early struggles to educate Edmontonians about Ethiopian food. Few people knew where Ethiopia was and even fewer had tried its cuisine. That said, Langano Skies has maintained a steady, loyal clientele throughout its 13 years. When a fire in 2011 in an adjacent nail salon caused a five-month closure of the restaurant, the Sumamos received countless emails of support. Customers who had become friends brought flowers to their house.

“Well, we were poor when we opened the restaurant, and we were poor again,” said Amsale of having to rebuild her business after that fire.

I bought a plate of spiced stewed beef, pinching mouthfuls with the delicious spongy injera, a soft flatbread made with teff, a grass cultivated for its tiny seeds that are ground into flour. What was not to love? Amsale still sources her spices from Ethiopia to ensure flavour. As I downed the last of her delicious cooking, she pointed to the other food carts, which hawked a depressing collection of deep-fried offerings, including spiraled potatoes on skewers or donuts, all for the same price as one of her dishes, each of which took hours of patient slow-cooking and from-scratch preparation. Someone walked by us eating a sloppy, stringy glob of poutine.

Perhaps Edmonton still has a way to go.

For this, we need a solid middle ground, which isn't as sexy as a skinny downtown bar but, to me, it's where Edmonton's blue collar soul gets to flirt with its metropolitan ambitions.

Andrew Fung's restaurants sit in that middle ground. Fung came with his family to Canada at age 15 from Hong Kong. There, his exposure to restaurant dining was limited to Pizza Hut and McDonald's. (Western food was terribly exciting, as was its signature product: ketchup.) But from an early age, he had a goal: to own his own restaurant.

At 39, he already co-owns two: XIX Nineteen Terwillegar and XIX Nineteen St. Albert. Chefs go to his place on their nights off and sink into the leather club chairs for lobster ramen or a steaming pot of mussels in gorgonzola cream. (So goes the rule with any food-focussed city: go where the chefs go on their night off.) Fung is the guy in the strip malls our city needs to answer to the tide of Cactus Clubs and Earls; his restaurants are places where people can stretch their palates, and the kitchen can incubate the next generation of talent. There he can draw diners, and get them excited about homegrown restaurant talent, or get them ready for the next step in their culinary education. “People can't go from Burger King to Corso 32!” he said.

Fung has had to be patient, and sometimes pull back his culinary ambitions. He put steamed buns with sweet slow-cooked pork inside on his menus, the same “char siu bao” that everyone is going nuts for now. But that was a few years ago, and a few years too soon. Now he does a five-spice bao benny for brunch, which people love. He's the middle step the city needs. As his staff bustled around the 150-seat Terwillegar dining room polishing glasses for the busy night ahead, it was apparent that occupying the culinary middle ground in the city is paying off.

SHANE CHARTRAND JUST GOT BACK FROM A THREE-day wine country cooking event in B.C.'s Okanagan Valley, at which he was a special guest. He has an interview scheduled with an Australian food journalist after our meeting, and he's excited about being in the running for the next season of *Top Chef Canada*. (He has already been on *Chopped Canada*.) He's on the verge of signing a cookbook deal with a major Canadian publisher, and yet he's still unknown to many in his hometown. We often are slow to recognize these major shifts when they are happening right in our backyards.

That doesn't rattle him. He's focused on being a role model for a generation of Indigenous kids who might be Canada's next rockstar chef. And he is still trying to sort out how his Enoch Cree heritage with his Métis and Mi'kmaq traditions from his adopted family can help him define his own culinary mission.

“I remember being alone. I remember going from place to place,” Chartrand said of his early childhood. He recalled being hungry all the time in foster care, until he landed at the Chartrand home at the age of six.

There, they ate as a family around the dinner table every night. Chartrand's earliest food memory is not a specific dish. It's simply that he was no longer hungry. His mom, Belinda, still brings up how Chartrand always said thank you at the end of each meal. He knew that he was one of the lucky ones.

Now that Chartrand is in the business of feeding people, I feel like one of the lucky ones. People like me, who grew up on the same land, same Treaty 6 territory—though my side has only just begun to learn about and acknowledge it—are getting an entirely new perspective on what Edmonton food is and can be.

So when people ask me for an explanation of why Edmonton dining is suddenly hot, I'll point to the visionaries and the list makers who brought the spotlight to the city. But then I'll also talk up the community builders who have always been there, contributing to our collective table without fanfare even though they deserve it. And then I suggest we all keep an eye on Chartrand, especially his special events where his creativity is really let loose. He, his staff, and a handful of other Indigenous and Métis colleagues are going to rethink and remake Canadian food.

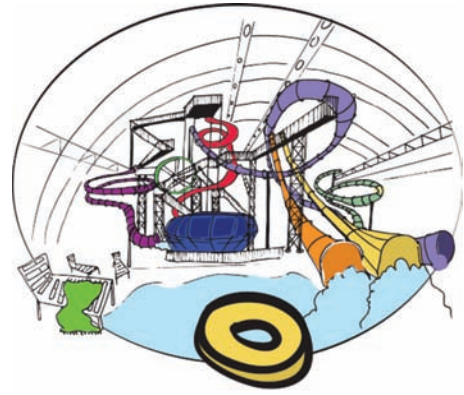
It's satisfying that we're finally comfortable with who we are and ready to let that lead us to the table. Edmonton, it seems, is at its best when our chefs connect with their personal stories. But hasn't that always been our strength? I guess we just needed a little outside reassurance. ■

CATRIN OWEN
& BEN WHEELWRIGHT

YOU ARE AT HOME HERE

A MOTHER AND SON,
ON STAGE AND OFF,
CONSIDER WHAT BRINGS
THEM TOGETHER

ILLUSTRATION BEN WHEELWRIGHT



BEN

There is something in the water at the World Waterpark at West Edmonton Mall and it's not just the occasional unknown floating object—it's a buoyant ambition, a resilience that keeps dreams afloat, a dexterity that says anything is possible.

All over the world, there are remarkable artists doing great work who took the Edmonton waters (not the chlorinated WEM water, but the elixir of possibility that comes from our taps). Like pilgrims at Lourdes or visitors to spa towns, they've experienced at best a small miracle, and at least the rejuvenating cleanse that comes from knowing no one is going to stop you doing what you want. The thing about Edmonton is how good a total immersion feels—a baptismal soak that says, "I'm in, come what may." And when it comes, Edmonton will reward your loyalty and send you off into the world with an explosive splash. Ejected from the winding water slide in a rush of adrenalin, the city lets you go.



CATRIN

I'm 21, arriving from the UK with two suitcases filled with the most improbable things: a treasured vase from my grandmother, a lithograph by Augustus John, a Royal Doulton cheese dish. And when I unpacked this Mary Poppins portmanteau, I realized that I had not brought socks. Hello Edmonton.

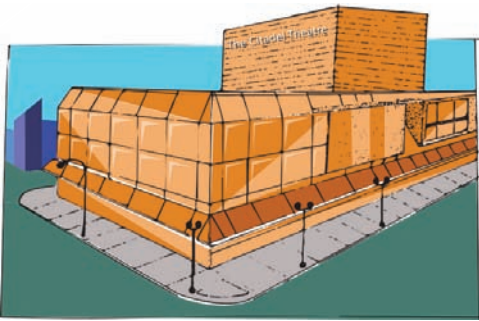
I was intrigued but confused. Where were all the people? After living in London, being jostled daily on the Tube and the Strand, there was something eerily silent about walking the High Level Bridge to the the university to study and teach and not passing a soul. But Edmonton, quiet and vast, was opening her arms, and gently saying, "Welcome. You are at home here. Be what you want."



BEN

Edmonton invites a loyalty and stick-to-itiveness while you're with her. No easy escape to the next party, no flibbertigibbetness. You stay longer at the table, holding your end of the conversation. Holding a gaze. Fighting for an idea. Digging a little deeper for the point. It takes time to bundle up—an effort to leave, finding my coat on the pile in the bedroom, sourcing my boots from the jumble in the hall, bracing for the blast of cold.

So stay. Stick with the conversation. Love the ones you're with. And long past the moment when you might have left, might have given up, here it is: a look, an acknowledgement. A depth of feeling from a hard-won moment. And that's how the art is in Edmonton. It is stubborn. Slow to reveal. Deep when it comes. Real. Grateful for the effort. That's how the artists are, as well. They don't leave the party too soon. I take their motivations and inspirations with me everywhere I go. Stay. Stick with it. Labour.



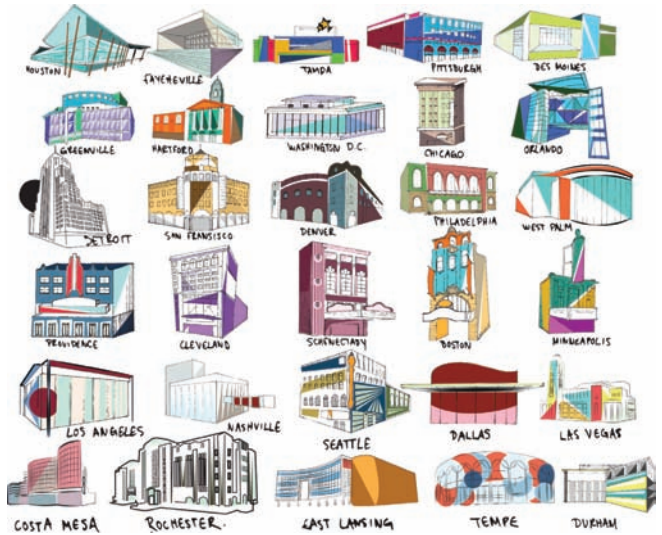
BEN

Stepping into a rehearsal room for the first time as a child. A spare and blank space. A crucible for what will be made here. A work hall. A sanctuary. A womb. They're not all the same, but they all feel the same. Teeming with possibility. Itching to get going. Ready for beauty to be built. My first was the Citadel. There's never been one more exciting. Everything I learned about bringing those spaces to life, I learned under the watchful and inspiring eye of Bob.

"If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere. It's up to you..."

And more than anything, I have a feeling of being home. A place to be safe. A place to take risks. A place to create something from nothing, and to build a family each time. This is a feeling I can replicate anywhere I go, and every rehearsal space has it. Travelling up in the elevator with Cicely Tyson and James Earl Jones at the 42nd Street Studios in New York—we're going to the same place—we're going to a new home with that familiar feeling. It's a feeling I've tested in 30 theatres over 50 weeks on a US tour with my new family. A feeling I trust. A place that is always the Citadel. Always Edmonton. Always wondrous.

"IF I CAN MAKE IT THERE,



I'LL MAKE IT ANYWHERE. IT'S UP TO YOU..."



CATRIN

It took a while to see her beauty and appreciate her generosity. An upbringing in the UK is an education in skepticism and self-doubt. Can I really do anything I want? Will Edmonton flirt a little then ignore me at the next party? Is she constant? Is she true? Is she waiting for something better to come along?

But I learn that it is almost impossible to disappoint her. Arriving over-dressed at student parties, I am made to feel at home. Ordering pizza over the phone and struggling to make my accent understood, I'm told I sound just like Lady Di (I don't, but Edmonton doesn't care about lineage). Edmonton thrives on my contentment, not on my insecurity. She is as constant as the sky. Wide. Blue. Clear. Sure. All she asks is that I become the same. That's not easy. I am Low. Grey. Overcast. Uncertain. But she teaches me.

CATRIN

Week three in Edmonton. Blinding headaches. An inability to open my eyes without searing pain. The nausea that accompanies extreme throbbing. A tumour for sure. An anxious visit to the campus health centre. A kindly doc with a Scottish burr. "Where are you from?" "Wales. Just arrived. Never had this kind of pain." A careful look behind my eyes with the ophthalmoscope. "It's just the light. You're not used to it. Buy some good sunglasses. Welcome to Alberta."



BEN

I remember sitting in my car seat in the back of the car. How old? How light? How short? Who knows? It was Easter time and all kinds of CBC coverage of the holy days. We were outside Mountain Equipment Co-op on 124 Street and I asked, "Do we believe in God, Mum?" Pause. Pause. Pulled the car over. Stopped. Turned. "I don't. You may in time. We don't go to church. But we do go to the theatre." And there it was. A reverence. A belief. A commitment to the holiness of sitting in the dark. Alone. Experiencing something that will never happen again. Watching meaning unfold. Becoming more human. I turned to religion.

**WE WERE OUTSIDE
MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT
CO-OP ON 124 STREET
AND I ASKED, "DO WE
BELIEVE IN GOD, MUM?"**



CATRIN

A girl from the seaside making sense of the prairie. And now, 13 years later, making sense of single. Making a new home for our two-person family. "Hi, you've reached Catrin and Ben, please leave a message." My dear and outspoken girlfriend reminds me that, "until that five-year-old is helping to pay the mortgage you shouldn't make it sound like he's your man..." We are early adopters of Edmonton's warehouse district and the CBC does a radio piece on children living downtown. I assure them that we do what everyone else does and make a pitch for more playgrounds in the city core. Years pass in contented singledom, and then comes a whale of a man from Ontario with Alberta sky-blue eyes and a smile as wide as the North Saskatchewan River. Edmonton becomes home for us all—new sisters, too—as only Edmonton could. Gently, generously, without hesitation or adjudication. I buy a painting of a red canoe on a mountain lake. It's called *The Crossing*. "Welcome home, darling."

BEN

Auditioning. Knowing that everything I want rides on the moment. Starting to understand that fit is everything. That it's not just me. Hard to learn at nine. Important to learn for my life. I didn't get the part. But I shook Bob's hand. Tried to grip with manly strength. Held his gaze, "I really want this." Doing my utmost to telegraph a seriousness, a gravitas, a deep "knowing." Just a round-faced boy. Willing to give up everything else: skiing, baseball, soccer. I had to enter this church.



CATRIN

"We'd like to offer Ben a part in a play. But you should read it first. It's dark. He's young. You may not be comfortable with it. He kills both his parents onstage..." Mother and father smothered with a pillow by a son. For art. For story. For beauty. Reading the script and deciding about exposing a boy to a life hallmarked by complexity, darkness, the struggle between reality and invention. And knowing, even then, that he had already chosen his sacred way. That it would always be a quiet place we could connect. That, even in those awkward years, we would be able to sit shoulder to shoulder in a theatre, sharing an experience, at home in the silence. Facing the horrors and the splendour. Loving the play or hating it. "I think he should do the play."

BEN

It's 2001, and I'm watching *Hamlet*. It's complicated, and I struggle to understand the ghosts and the relationships and the disappointments. Yet David Storch's *Hamlet* is mesmerizing; I can't look away. He's confused, he's raging, he's athletic. The words are muscular and strong. The music of the words is harmonic and dissonant. A new high priest: Shakespeare. A new depth of commitment. Four hundred years. Still so angry. Still so sure. Still so accurate. My stiff shirt is tight on my neck, but Mum tells me we dress to honour the performances. I am a bit uncomfortable, and then I realise I'm supposed to be.



CATRIN

We are in the car again. Always the car for the big moments. You are 17 and applying to theatre schools. Only theatre schools. The careful and doubtful in me fears for this plan. All the eggs in one basket. What if? I suggest an alternative: a safe bachelor of arts degree at the University of Alberta. Just in case. Just like me. Cautious. You fix me with a kind but firm stare: "You might need a Plan B. I don't."

I'm reminded that advice is often fear disguised as wisdom. It is me who can't see the future. You can live with the consequences of the boldness. My timidity has no place in your head. I vow to keep my fear to myself. You can always do a BA later.



“YOU MIGHT NEED A PLAN B. I DON’T”



BEN

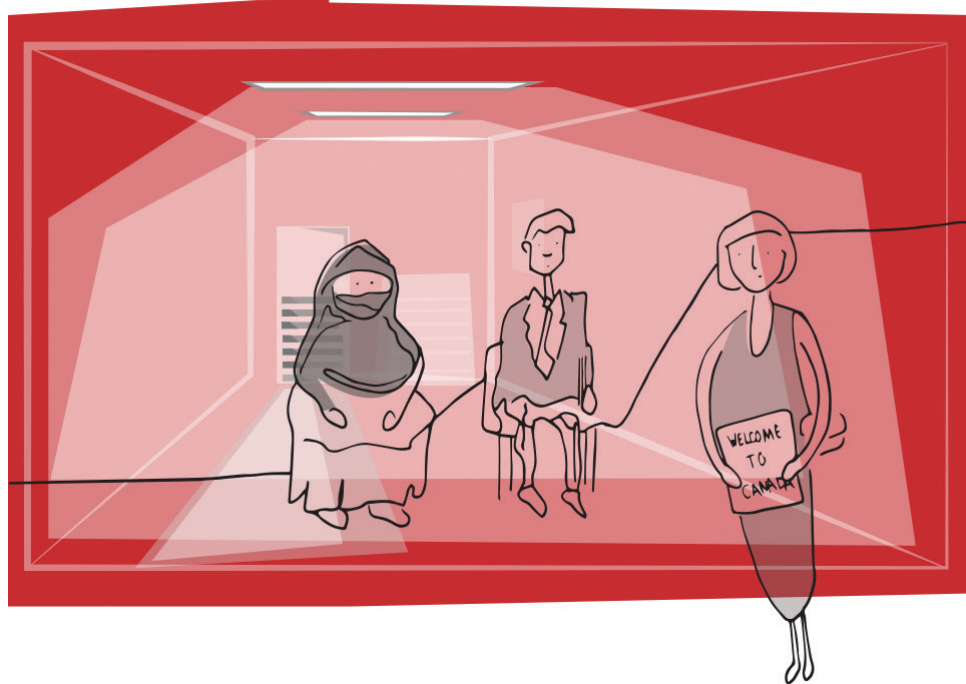
We are in New York on a post-graduation theatre spree. Two plays a day, packing them in. That crush of humanity and souvenirs and pretzels and litter on Broadway. And then, the sanctuary of the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, where Denzel Washington is playing in *A Raisin in the Sun*. This is not a movie-star performance. He's subtle and quiet and a powerful ensemble member. It's beautiful to watch and David Cromer's weaselly Karl Lindner is pitch-perfect. A sliver of a performance, but I chase him down the street afterwards to thank him for that bit of precision. As a treat, you take my grandmother and me to Sardi's. It is time travel. Elderly waiters in burgundy red blazers. Crab cakes. Old fashioned cocktails and actors... everywhere I look, a famous face smiling a cartoon grin down from the walls. As we leave, I say, "Next time we come here, I'll be opening on Broadway, and I'll buy." We laugh. Somehow, miraculously, it was the next time we were at Sardi's. I opened in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* at the Ethel Barrymore: a warren of dressing rooms and stories. My new home. The ghost of beautiful Philip Seymour Hoffman in the halls. *Death of a Salesman* before death of an actor. Nain and Mum in the second row, beside a lady making sandwiches from a bag of groceries. The same lady wept at the stage door after the show. Christopher had spoken to her.

Dinner at Sardi's after the show. Without prompting, they hand me the lower-priced actor's menu, and serve me hot water, honey and lemon. They know I've just come off the stage. I had the crab cakes again, and someone came over to say they'd enjoyed the play. They apologized for interrupting our family time. Apologized—for making my dream come true! My shout this time. I ask for the cheque.



CATRIN

A Canadian citizenship ceremony: post forms, post line-ups, post test—and after 25 years of landed immigrant status, I’m finally taking the plunge. And I want to do it alone, in quiet communion with what is now my country in the basement of the library. But after the oath, I look up and there he is, Mr. Alberta with the sky-blue eyes: big and smiling and full of optimism. Like the country. “Welcome to Canada.”





BEN

The card is actually green. Of course it is. But still it surprises me. There it is, nestled in my hand. My unsmiling face on my permission to stay. A welcome that I bought. An opportunity that I paid for. A complicated time to call America home when so much of what it does and says these days is so unlike what I know and value. I'm quiet about the moment; I want to celebrate it alone. I've been carried away from home by the comforting waters of the North Saskatchewan, and now I can see the Hudson River from the end of my new street. Everything I am has been shaped by that early taking of the waters. I choose a quiet communion at Lillie's, my favourite bar. The bar-keeper is from Liverpool, that port on the River Mersey, not far from where Mum was born. He is big and smiling and full of optimism . . . 



Indigenous Women's Voices at the CLC

Our best events are the ones that include you! Our free noon-hour Brown Bag Lunch Readings bring some of your favourite writers to the University of Alberta campus. As of January 2018 we will be featuring Indigenous women's voices, and you can look forward to readings from Marilyn Dumont, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, Natasha Kanapé-Fontaine, Gwen Benaway, and Katherena Vermette. Check for dates and locations at www.abclc.ca.

The annual CLC Kreisel Lecture, our flagship event, has been delivered by Eden Robinson, Tomson Highway, and Heather O'Neill, among others. On April 12, 2018, we will hear from Newfoundland writer Michael Crummey.

We love being part of your literary community and are proud to work with our partners, including CBC Radio One "Ideas," the University of Alberta Press, LitFest: Edmonton's Nonfiction Festival, and the Edmonton Poetry Festival. See you in 2018!

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BABA

WAS AN EDMONTONIAN

**I LEARNED TO SPEAK UKRAINIAN AFTER MY GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH.
WHAT WOULD I ASK HER NOW?**

ILLUSTRATION ROBERT CARTER

From the eulogy delivered by my father, William Kostash, at the funeral of his mother-in-law, my maternal Baba, Pauline/Palahna Kosovan Maksymiuk, 9 October 1979 at Park Memorial, Edmonton. The memorial lunch was served at the Ukrainian Labour Temple.

Baba Palahna was a good mother and, although she had never heard of Dr. Spock, she raised her children on common sense and love, and they returned her love a hundredfold. She was a great inspiration to her four granddaughters and has been immortalized in a National Film Board documentary, *Great Grandmothers*, and in a book, *A Harvest Yet to Reap*. Her womanliness and humanity were the source of inspiration for the book, *All of Baba's Children*, by her granddaughter, Myrna Kostash.

Palahna Maksymiuk née Kosovan died in 1979 at age 87 in an Edmonton hospital: she had been an Edmontonian for 68 years. Baba was not among those whose arrival

in Canada, specifically in the Star-Edna district east of Edmonton, is now marked by the 125th anniversary of Ukrainian settlement. But she did make it out of Galicia in time, before the guns of August 1914 blew apart the world she had known. Summoned to Edmonton from her village, Dzhuriv, by a man she hardly knew, she planted herself in the wood-frame house he had built for her, address 12518 – 93 Street, and that was that. Baba was home.

My maternal grandparents, Nikolai and Palahna, never homesteaded. They are not the Ukrainian settlers tirelessly evoked by our heritage festivals, villages and monuments as the stout men and women in sheepskin coats who lined up barefoot on the Strathcona railway station platform to have their picture taken. Who then shuffled off stage left to climb aboard a wagon full of farm tools, seed and pots and pans and set off for the now legendary quarter-section that stands for all Galician beginnings in Western Canada. Canada, the country that, at confederation in 1867, had then promptly and fortuitously laid a rail bed and track to bring the sheepskinners out to “free lands” for the taking.



Baba rode that train but she hadn't married a farmer. Nikolai had quit Dzhuriv as a teenager, expelled by the malign forces of deep rural poverty and a mean-minded stepmother protective of her own cubs, and he lit out for the coal fields of Silesia, the central European region that sits mostly in Poland with smaller sections in Germany and the Czech Republic. A couple of years later, pockets stuffed with cash, he returned to his village, paid a visit cap in hand to his prospective father-in-law, Petro Kosovan. He promised to send for Palahna from Canada, then set out for Rotterdam and the steamship Gothland.

Petro Kosovan was poor, land-wise—he made extra cash hauling beer kegs from town to a string of pubs—and was happy enough to get one daughter at least (there were three others) out of the house. There is no record of how Palahna felt about the arrangement except for a fleeting mention by my mother: “When your Baba saw Nikolai come toward the house [in Dzhuriv] she ran and hid in the barn.” In her wedding picture taken on the stoop of 12518 – 93 Street she looks terrified but also, hanky clenched in her tightened fist, resigned to her fate.

Her fate turned out to be that of wife of a packing-plant worker and, within the year, mother of Mary, my mother. Within five years she was a widow, pregnant and with few resources as far as I have heard, except for the bachelor brother-in-law, Andrew Kosovan, in the attic bedroom. They married in 1920 and it was then that her life was truly set.

This was the man I knew as Dido (it was decades before I enquired about my biological grandfather, the packing-plant worker) and it was their household I understood to be just another Ukrainian-Canadian home in Edmonton in which my mother and her half-sister were raised. That other Ukrainian-Canadian household of Kostashes on a farm near Vegreville was, to me, the exotic enterprise.

By the time I was aware of Baba's surroundings, the large oval-framed portraits of Lenin and Stalin were no longer on the living room wall, having been consigned to the cellar while my mother was still a teenager. It was a story she enjoyed retelling. A prospective suitor from her high-school class had come calling—great excitement throughout the house—but one look at the Commies on the wall sent him flying out the door in high dudgeon. (There were no more suitors until she met my father, a man who went to church and voted Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.) But was Baba amused? We all knew the story of how Dido had purloined her Ukrainian prayer book and thrown it down a biffy hole, or perhaps merely ripped out its pages for toilet paper. But we also knew,

in the same breath, that religion had been Baba's best subject in her four years of village schooling.

At marriage, my mother's social life began to revolve around the Ukrainian Orthodox parish church then on 95 Street, and its women's association, whose members raised money for clerical vestments, church banners and Sunday school, and who hosted the Bishop's Tea posed behind silver tea sets in large, frothy hats and white gloves. The only time I saw Baba in a church was at my wedding in 1972. (For both her marriages there was benefit of clergy but no record, photographic or anecdotal, of church ceremonials.) But she had an active social life only two streets and two avenues away from my parents' church, at “the Hall” on 97 Street, the Ukrainian cultural centre and home of the Ukrainian Labour and Farm Temple Association. Here portraits of Marx and Lenin shared the walls with the people's poets, Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko and Ukrainian-Canadians' own Communist tribunes, Matthew Popovich and John Boychuk, and maybe that Anglo-Canadian Party leader, Tim Buck, diminutive and nattily tailored, his oratory much admired by Dido.

**BY THE TIME I WAS AWARE OF
BABA'S SURROUNDINGS, THE
LARGE OVAL-FRAMED PORTRAITS
OF LENIN AND STALIN WERE
NO LONGER ON THE LIVING
ROOM WALL.**

But neither did I ever hear Baba curse and fulminate against the capitalist bosses and exploiters—as Dido did in a game of warring newspapers with my father, his petit bourgeois son-in-law—nor stand and chant the Russian verses to the Soviet national anthem (it was I who learned the words from a Red Army Chorus and Band record album). She never went on a protest march; it was her brother, Nick, in Lethbridge during the Great Depression, who (I'm speculating) marched with the Beet Workers' Industrial Union, was arrested and forthwith deported, further fate unknown. But it was told of Baba by the family that she had to rescue Dido from a jail cell in Fort Saskatchewan when he had inadvertently found himself pressed into a crowd of Hunger Marchers in Market Square (south of today's Churchill Square, where the Stanley A. Milner Library now sits). That was about as “revolutionary” as the two of them became but what does one expect—what did I expect?—of semi-literate, in Ukrainian and English, lumpen

proletarians whose radicalized compatriots were being interned or deported and their presses and offices seized and padlocked?

From my father's eulogy:

Coming from humble beginnings, Palahna's sympathy naturally lay with the working classes and the organizations that fought in their cause. And, within the limits of her income, she supported these organizations. The Ukrainian Centre, of which she was a member for many years, was the centre of her social life. Her concern for humanity extended even to people she did not know. The Maksymiuk home was but a stone's throw from the main CNR line in north Edmonton, and the unfortunates who rode the rods in the Depression years knew that they could always get a sandwich or a piece of bread from the kind lady who lived by the tracks. She made no distinction as to race, colour, or creed when she saw that they were in dire need.

Baba did no harm. At the Hall she played bingo and went with the whole family to see the plays of socialist and Communist Ukrainian playwrights such as Miroslav Irchan. He was hailed by *Saturday Night* magazine in 1928—that periodical of Anglo-Canadian cultural rectitude—as “Canada's most popular playwright” but, back in Soviet Ukraine, he was executed by firing squad in the Terror of 1932. The men and women and children in the Edmonton hall had loved his stories of crafty workers and peasants who gave the bosses and landlords the old heave-ho but I doubt that it ever occurred to Baba and Dido that they need undertake such dangerous plots themselves. But they did demand an explanation of Irchan's scandalous fate, a demand that remained unsatisfied when the Canadian Party men came back from Kiev with their tails between their legs.

Yet there is a photograph—a large studio photo mounted on a cardboard frame—to which my mother affixed a sticky note: “Baba's women's Communist group.” Really, Baba? But there she is in the back row, already halfway to the stout, sway-bosomed woman I would stretch my arms around to embrace in fondest greeting, but here still dark-haired in a blunt cut and no-nonsense expression to match. There is no banner to identify the group. But, gripped by two women in the front row, there is a very large photo-portrait of the Ukrainian poet, Lesia Kobylianska, modernist writer and feminist and, unbeknownst to Baba and her comrades, something of a proponent of same-sex love. She

was also lionized by the equally innocent bourgeois nationalists such as my Sunday school teachers.

But remember: Baba had all her family, except a sister in Lethbridge, still in Ukraine. They were Soviet citizens after 1945 and it was their photos and letters that Baba kept in a pile in her linen closet, to be taken out for repeated, loving, teary examination, opened and spread out by her reddened, swollen gardener's, cow-milking, pyrohy-pinching fingers. Sometimes she would weep inconsolably, her face buried in her apron, growling her anguish about the fate of her brother Yuri, murdered by “bandits” at the stoop of his parents' home in Dzhuriv. It was decades later, long after her death, that I learned that the “bandits” were the anti-Soviet guerrillas who struggled against the Red Army until 1955 from their bases in the Carpathian Mountains. Yuri, a known sympathizer of the Bolsheviks now in control of Dzhuriv, had been targeted as a collaborator, was “disappeared” from his home and never seen again. Did Baba have any inkling of this identity?

Yet even during years of the Cold War (1946-1979) she subscribed to Soviet Ukrainian magazines. On visits, I very much enjoyed looking through the pages of smudgy photographs—ranks of smiling textile workers at their mechanized spools and spindles, youths flashing smiles as they rode their bright red “Belarus” tractors around the collectivized fields, girls in “traditional” costumes handing over bouquets with a curtsy to visiting Communist Party dignitaries from abroad. Later I learned to scoff at the propagandistic naiveté of such imagery—Boy Meets Tractor, Romance Ensues—but would find myself unaccountably weeping over a display case of Soviet textiles in the Guggenheim Museum, rows upon rows of tiny, perfect yellow tractors moving across a crimson red field. I finally understood what Baba and Dido “saw” in those Soviet tractors: the machine that was pulling their family and countrymen and women out of the primordial mud of the village.

So Baba made the rounds of the hall, the shops on Alberta Avenue (118 Avenue) including a co-op grocery and a shambolic “general store” run by “the Jew,” the only merchant she ever really trusted even while she loudly deplored his prices. Occasionally she ventured into the downtown precincts of Woodward's basement food floor, there to meet up with friends. They stood around in a clump with their homespun cloth shopping bags, heads in babushkas, chattering in Ukrainian, to my intense embarrassment. Farther afield still, when she and Dido briefly farmed a market garden (now subsumed by residential neighbourhoods north of 137 Avenue and 82 Street) and, bent now in a permanent

stoop, she lopped the heads off the cabbages and rolled them into gunny sacks that Dido, with horse and wagon, hauled to the city market.

No more ditch-digging for Dido nor, for Baba, peddling cream and eggs around the neighbourhood and taking in laundry. Yes, right there at the house on 93 Street, a haystack and a cow (I've seen the photos) and somewhere a chicken coop, unless the eggs are fictitious.

Of her Ukrainian heritage I learned very little. She cooked simple meals in the Ukrainian fashion (cabbage rolls, borsch, baked cornmeal, boiled carrots) but did bake creditable braided breads for our Christmas and Easter tables. Her cross-stitchery was rudimentary, she never painted an Easter egg, and I learned no songs from her although she would sing them, tapping her foot while strumming a mouth harp between verses. She brought no photographs with her from the village and never owned a camera. Baba was poor most of her life, or at least frugal, although, as a child, I didn't realize that this was what I was seeing—her stooped body lumped inside the homemade dresses she sewed on her pedal Singer (she never wore trousers), patched dish towels made from sugar sacks, chipped enamel ware in which she baked the holubtsi. I grew up on mum's stories of the family on relief during the Dirty Thirties, to the intense shame of Dido, and perhaps it was shame that held them both back from public demonstrations of protest against their condition. But there was always a dollar bill slipped into a birthday card she gave us together with a greeting in Pidgin English.

Baba and I had only "kitchen" versions of each other's language; we more or less understood each other but could not carry on a decent conversation. Our effective communication was in smiles, hugs and kisses, and even though I did go on to study and speak Russian, I wonder now if she was pleased. I imagined her admiration of my skill with the language of the Victorious Working Masses but, really, perhaps she only wanted me to speak to her the simple Ukrainian phrases of familial affection.

I did learn to speak Ukrainian, five years after her death. Now I could ask my questions: How did your first husband, Nikolai, die? Why didn't my mother know where he, the beloved husband and father, was buried? Had she and you never visited the grave? (I've since found it, in Edmonton Cemetery, unmarked.) Who were your siblings and their spouses and children—all relatives of mine too, after all?

Baba, I never heard you speak of your mother: did she love you? How did you get your cow, the big black and white beauty in the photo inside the snow globe mum

gave me one Christmas? Why are you called a Presbyterian on your marriage certificate? You never returned to Dzhuriv—I did—perhaps because there was no one there you wanted to see again on this earth? What about the Revolution of Glorious October: didn't you want to see how that turned out? Did you ever want to go to church again, light a candle, kiss an icon of the Mother of God, ask her for something? Should we have called a priest as you lay dying?

The life of Baba the Edmontonian was lived with little documentation until her daughters each bought a Brownie camera in the 1930s and there she is, in her backyard, at celebrations, sitting behind birthday cakes, holding her grandchildren in blankets while we fuss. But her life is told also in embarkation papers, a marriage certificate, an *Edmonton Journal* description of the dress and corsage she wore to mum and dad's wedding party at the Shasta café, a letter she wrote to the Old Country but never mailed (I have it now: she complains of rheumatism), a Premier's congratulation on 50 years of marriage, an obituary. I'm hauling her out of these data and calling it *The Ghost Notebook*.

From the obituary in *Zhyttia I Slovo*, [*Word and Life*] 12 November 1979, by Mykhailo Holovchak [in Ukrainian]

Palahna Makysmiuk, pioneer, member of AUUC [Association of United Ukrainian Canadians successor to the Farm Labour Temple Association] and the Ukrainian Community Seniors' Club, has passed away . . . With her husband and daughters, she very much enjoyed attending concerts and other events at the old Ukrainian Labour Temple on 96 Street and later at the new one, the Ukrainian Cultural Centre. Palahna Maksymiuk was a subscriber to *Life and Word*, and contributed according to her means to the press fund of *Life and Word* and *Ukrainian Canadian*, to the children's camp at Sylvan Lake etc. Our beloved mother and grandmother, outstanding member of progressive organizations, honest and hard-working citizen of Canada, has gone to eternal rest. May the Canadian land, which she loved and for which she laboured, lie lightly upon her.

Sit tua terra levis. It's a Roman funerary epitaph and an Epigram of Seneca. May the earth rest lightly upon you. The comrades chose well. Baba knew earth, under bare feet, in the creases of her hands, clotted around beets and potatoes, seedbed of life. We dug her grave, and earth took her in. **EB**

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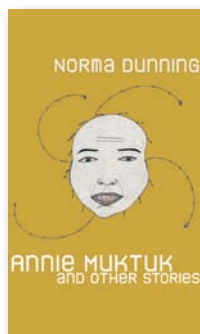
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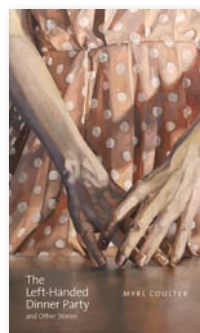
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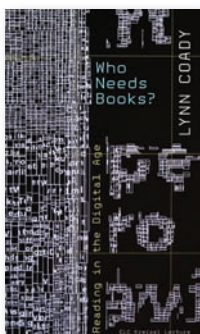
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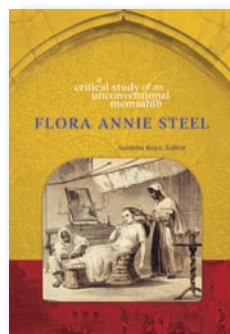
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9

FICTION

MINISTER FAUST

SWEET DREAMS

HIS MOTHER WAS A STRONG WOMAN WHO LOOKED LIKE SHE

ON THE PRAIRIES

COULD HOLD UP THE SKY, BUT COULDN'T STOP THEIR FATHER FROM DYING,

AT THE DAWN

AND COULDN'T KEEP ONE GIANT RAT OUT OF THEIR BARN

OF WAR

ILLUSTRATION MIN GYO CHUNG

DARWIN SHUSHED HIS LITTLE SISTER, but Nadene was so excited she couldn't stop herself from giggling.

"That's okay, you lil sprouts," said Miss Jill Taschuk, the candy-dipper with the candy-orange freckles and the candy-orange hair. "You can come on out."

Dar and 'Dene thought themselves pretty smart, wily as the small game they used to snare back on their land outside Greencourt. But now they were in the big city. Edmonton! And even though they were finally big kids—Dar was 12 and 'Dene was already seven—they were inside an actual, real-life, honest-to-gosh *candy* factory. And not just any candy factory—their family's *candy* factory. And even when they were hiding, they couldn't stop from giggling and oo-ing and ah-ing.



“Come on,” said Miss Jill Taschuk. “Wanna watch?”

Dar and 'Dene slipped from their hiding place and stood vibrating in the sugary steam of the pouring room. Their eyes quivered, too, like ball-bearings between magnets. Miss Jill waved them over.

“It’s okay,” she said to the other grown-ups, who were dressed like nurses or doctors or something. Important, extra-clean, grown-up, city-factory-working clothes. Not like back on the family farm. Well, before *he* sold it.

Dar and 'Dene came closer to the big table. Its marble top looked like a smooth, giant version some of the prettiest stones they used to find out on the big creek on their land, with stripes of red and white streaking through it like fire and ice.

The seven-year-old girl got only so close. Her big brother snapped, more from candy lust than irritation. “C’mon, 'Dene! Hurry up, now! We’re gonna miss it!”

Miss Jill bent down a smidge. “You wanna help, 'Dene?”

The girl’s bright eyes flicked to the 20-year-old’s face. 'Dene still had a wildness to her, not the wildness of a coyote that would kill your cattle, but that of a prancing wild hare with alert ears and vaulting legs.

'Dene said, “Really? Can we?” She was already smiling and nodding hoping to confirm she had permission, her hair bobbing like a busy mop, when Miss Jill waved them over to fit them with gloves and smocks.

Darwin fit his easily. He was nearly as tall as little Miss Jill. But even though 'Dene was big for her age, even the smallest shop-floor clothing was flop-offable on her. Not that she cared. When she was all uniformed-up she smiled like a bright prairie dawn with sun dogs on the way.

Two older ladies—Dar and 'Dene had never heard either of them talk—hefted huge, hot copper pots from their boilers and brought them to the pour table. The kids pranced back, but Miss Jill nodded. “Don’t worry,” she said. “Theresa May and Rose-of-Sharon are careful.”

With their oversized oven mitts, like something a blacksmith would wear, the older women poured steaming goo from their pots, green from Theresa May’s and red from Rose-of-Sharon’s. When the streams hit the marble table they became waves, spreading and rippling until each met the other. When the women had exhausted their pots, Miss Jill handed wooden stir-sticks to each of the children and said, “Watch me, now.”

Miss Jill swirled beautiful patterns, some like the Northern Lights, some like sun dogs, into the cooling sugar concoction. The children’s eyes opened like the full moon meeting clouds of sugar-steam.

Dar elbowed his little sister. “'Dene!” he whispered.

She snapped to, suddenly seeing she’d drooled on her

own shoe. But she wasn’t embarrassed—she laughed. Her brother dug his fingers into her ribs to make her laugh even more. “Stop it, Dar!” she said, still laughing but fighting to frown. “You gonna make me have an accident!”

Both kids looked up, mortified. But Miss Jill wasn’t mad. “Settle now, you two. Unless you don’t *wanna* make candy . . . ?”

A choir: “*We do!*”

“All right, then. Pay attention. Think you can do like I showed?”

Dar started by immediately dunking his wooden spatula into the steaming mass, but 'Dene was only neck-high to the marble surface of the table, so Miss Jill had to bring over a crate for her. After hopping up, the girl began carefully copying her brother’s motions while checking Miss Jill’s attentive face. The kids’ expressions twisted and contorted with every swirl they made. The other adults said nothing but continually glanced over, sometimes nodding, and finally handing them knives while Miss Jill showed them how to slice the hardening stuff.

“Now you won’t cut yourself, right?” she said.

'Dene looked aghast. “Miss Jill, we been snaring and skinning rabbits and ferrets since we could walk! You can sure bet we can handle a mess of *candy!*”

Miss Jill smiled. “I will surely bet you can.”

After a great while they’d finished cutting up their work into hundreds of sweet emerald-ruby gemstones.

Miss Jill said, “You’ve just made your first batch of Christmas candies, children! Want some?” Dar and 'Dene jumped with glee. The silent ladies rolled their eyes, but Miss Jill smiled even more while she handed them finished and wrapped toffees from her apron pockets.

Then a door slammed from downstairs. Heavy boots came tromping up. Miss Jill’s smile disappeared. “That’ll be your father,” she said.

'Dene snapped, “He ain’t our father!”

Dar: “'Dene!”

“*Isn’t* our father!”

And then Jack Dahl appeared at the doorway. His eyes were wrong, stained like beet juice that all the scrubbing in the world would never get out. His ever-stench of coffee, beer, and tobacco smacked every nose in the room. An unlit cigarette squirmed between his clenched teeth.

The kids stood up straight.

“Mr. Dahl,” said Miss Jill Taschuk, “remember what the inspector said? We can’t have any smoking in here. It’s not hygienic and it’ll ruin the flavour of the—”

“Do you *see* me smoking?” he spat, eyeing her like she’d stolen something from him, or was fixing to.

“No, sir.”

He raked the room with his glare while he kept patting his pockets.

Finally he saw his wife’s children. “You two! I told you about interrupting grown folks’ work. Get home and do your chores! Help your mother ’steada eating up our business!”

The children muttered their yessirs and ran with candies hidden in their hands. They popped back fast enough to say, “Thank you, Miss Jill!” and then were gone.

DARWIN AND NADENE HIT THE GROUND OUTSIDE

the factory doors at 114th Avenue and 95th Street. Glancing over his shoulder until they were half a block away, Dar finally reached into his pocket and pulled out a dented, scratched, but still shiny tiny metal box, and then flicked it open just like a grown-up would. A little flame popped out its top.

“Dar!” squealed ’Dene. “*You* had it all along? Jack Dahl’s been looking for that for days!”

“Jack Dahl can look for this the rest of his life.”

“But you don’t smoke,” said the little girl. And then her eyes horrified. “*Do you?*”

“Naw. Could if I wanna. I just don’wanna.”

“So why’d you take it?”

He looked at his little sister, innocent and wondering and afraid.

“Sometimes you just gotta *do* suh’m.”

She nodded slowly, but he figured she didn’t really get it. And he felt his throat bunch up knowing that one day, she would.

They headed home north on 95th towards the back of the Safeway, where their family lived in a tiny apartment. And they would have made it home except for who’d spotted them from down the block, advanced on them like they’d been waiting.

“Dar!” cried ’Dene, grabbing her brother’s hand. “It’s the Prunkles!”

Billy and Karl Prunkle came running at them, knives in their hands, insanely cutting and eating slices of apples as they hurtled themselves straight at Dar and ’Dene.

“*Darwin!*” they shouted, because they were always either shouting or whispering.

“Billy, Karl,” said Dar to the knife-wielding maniacs. “Carve anything nice today?”

Bright-blond Billy offered Darwin and his sister slices of apple, but Dar waved them away and counter-offered candy to the Prunkles, whose eyes went screwy at the sight.

“Thanks!” they both yelled before snatching and snaring their jaws in toffee.

“So . . . ?” said Darwin. “You said you carved suh’m?”

“*Ja*,” munched brown-haired, freckled Karl, the shorter Prunkle. He was born in Canada, but when he got excited he sounded just like his parents, and caught hell for it everywhere, especially now that the war had started. “Ve carved a duck! A little *duck!* Vanna see it?”

“Maybe later,” said ’Dene, tugging her brother’s sleeve and glaring at him. “We got chores, ’member?”

“Forget about the duck,” said Billy. He snapped his head back quickly, flicking his nearly white hair out of his eyes. “Got suh’m way better’n ducks.”

“Like what?” said Darwin.

Billy folded away his knife, and his brother followed suit. “Like suh’m. You comin’ or what?”

’Dene glared at her brother, but went with him anyway. When they got to the Prunkle house a block away they went into the rear yard, where Karl pointed at something hanging from the neighbour’s eaves. Something papery and swarming with noise.

“Big deal,” said ’Dene. “A wasp nest.”

“Arnchu *scared?*” said Karl, wiggling his fingers like a horde of 10.

She stuck out her jaw. “Our daddy usedta *raise* bees.”

“Did not!” said Karl.

“Sure did! Back on our farm! And we had all the honey we ever wanted.”

Karl said, “That’s why he makes candies now? Because of the honey?”

“I already told you a hundred times, Karl Prunkle!” stamped the little girl. “That man is not and never could be our *father!*”

“Okay, okay,” said Billy, who was in charge. He kept his brother back with an outstretched arm. “So Darwin, did your dad really know how to keep bees?”

“Sure. My dad was smart,” said ’Dene’s big brother, sticking out his chest and tilting up his chin. “He had 400 books.” And that was true, cloth-shrouded books whose spines glittered with alien names like *Marx* and *Tolstoy*. And books on every topics: literature and war and farming and science, and one his dad had said was about “electromechanical devices and dynamos you could only dream of.” And he had endless technical magazines, which he used to buy whenever he hauled cans of cream into Mayerthorpe to sell. “He taught himself all sorts a stuff,” said Darwin. “Even beekeeping. If you own your own land, you can do anything.”

“Sounds like you hafta *do* everything,” said Karl. “I heard if you live on a farm, it’s work, work, work. Never stops.”

“Yeah, and so what?” said ’Dene. “If you don’t work in this life, you starve!” She said it with all the authority

of all the adults who'd ever said it around her. "And our farm was beautiful! We got up before the sun dogs and got to feed sheep and cows and horses and geese and goats, and we had all the fresh milk and cream and eggs we could eat!"

"You didn't have no geeses!" said Karl.

"Sure we did! Even ate goose eggs every Sunday morning!"

"You did not!"

Dar nodded. "We really did."

"Who'd wanna eat a goose egg? Prob'ly tastes like goose-poops!" laughed Karl.

'Dene stuck out her jaw. "Whadda you know? Goose egg's two times the size and four times the taste of a chicken egg! Like a steak in a shell!"

"She's right," said Dar. "You got one goose, you could feed your whole family."

"Sure I could! I'd break his neck and roast 'im!" said Karl, barfing laughs till Billy joined him.

"You *could*," said 'Dene, "but then you'd be a dummy!"

Karl's face warped and his cheeks and forehead turned beet. "What'd you say to me?"

Dar stood in front of his sister, who ducked behind him like a doe behind an oak.

"C'mon, Karl. Why kill a goose and eat once when you could *keep* a goose and eat for years?"

"Cuz," said Billy, "I ain't never got a drumstick outta no egg!" He backhand-smacked Dar in the chest, just hard enough to satisfy Karl's honour and kill the fight. They all laughed. Even 'Dene. "A drumstick in an egg!" she giggled.

And then Darwin turned to the side and his eyes went wide. "Karl, what're you *doing*?"

All of them turned, but it was too late. The rock was flying out of Karl's hand straight into the nest. Wasps boiled out of it like a slough surging its banks during a storm, and all of the kids screamed and ran straight for the Prunkles' cold cellar. Billy threw open the hatch and they all scrambled down the ramp, and Darwin slammed shut the hatch above them.

They could hear Billy patting his pockets, probably for matches. It was worse than a moonless night down there, and the earthen walls and floor were dank.

But then light shone next to Darwin's face like he was the sun.

Billy gasped. "You got a Zippo? Wheredja get it?"

"Never you mind where I got it. I just got it."

"Here," said Billy, hefting the oil lantern from a hook on the wall and removing its glass. Darwin lit the wick and put away his lighter, and Billy replaced the glass and

set the lantern on the floor.

Karl started laughing. "You shoulda seen your faces when you saw them wasps!" He howled like a moon-mad wolf.

Billy punched him in the shoulder with his free hand.

"You're a lunatic, Karl Prunkle," snapped Darwin. "Wasps can kill you, you know."

"Can *not*!"

"If enough of 'em sting you, trust me."

Karl said, "You sure don't like your stepdad."

Everyone froze. The remark had crashed that heavily. Karl wasn't smart enough to be calculating. He hadn't been trying to get the focus off his idiotic war on wasps. He was just a scattered kid. But he'd succeeded in steering the conversation anyway.

Karl: "Why doncha, Dar?"

"Because," said the 12-year-old leader of their pack, using one of the worst words he'd ever heard his father say, a word he'd found in some of the books he'd inherited: "He's an *opportunist*."

"What's *that* mean?"

"Means he waits 'til a man's down 'til he steals his wallet."

"He *did* that?"

Darwin shook his head, turning away from the lantern and staring into the shadows. "When our dad was dying, he told our mother she should marry right away so we didn't lose the farm."

Billy whispered, "I'da liked to've grown up on a farm. Sounds nice."

"YOU'RE A LUNATIC, KARL PRUNKLE."

Darwin nodded, turned back to Karl. "Lotsa animals. Lotsa people. Even Blackfoot usedta work there. They came out, kids and all, helped clear the land. They brought their moose-hide teepees when they came. I even got to live with 'em one time for a week out in the fields. They were poor, but nice. We couldn't afford much, but we paid 'em in crops, and they hunted. And then, when the sun dance season came, they were gone."

Karl's and Billy's eyes sparkled from the lantern. All they'd ever known was the rough, dusty city.

Darwin turned back to the shadows. "But Jack Dahl . . . he was a drifter. He worked on our farm, too. And maybe always had his eye on our mum, so when our dad died, he made his move. Married our mum and sold our farm. I heard my uncle Detmer telling her it was a bad deal, but

what could she do?"

He thought of his mother Hazel, a strong woman who looked like she could hold up the sky, but who couldn't stop their father from dying and couldn't keep one giant rat out of their barn. And so Dar put his hand on his sister's shoulder. She gritted her teeth and looked down.

"Three sections—that's around 180 acres—and all our buildings and livestock. And what'd he get for it? A fancy car and a little old candy factory no bigger'n a barn!"

"I wish *our* folks owned a candy factory," said Billy. Didn't sound like envy. Sounded like trying to comfort his friend.

"Yeah, but we're farmers," said Darwin. "What do we know about running a business in the city? And now there's the war, and sugar's more expensive every day . . ."

There was sniffing in the shadows. Darwin stopped his tale.

"Now, c'mon, 'Dene. I'm just talking. It doesn't mean anything."

"I miss the farm," she whimpered. "And I miss —"
"I know."

He squeezed her shoulder and she shuffled and snuffled into his side.

Finally in the awkward silence, Darwin said to Billy, "Well? What's better'n a duck?"

Even in the limited lantern light, Billy's confusion marked his face like clouds blotting the Milky Way.

"You told us," said Darwin, "you had something way better to show us than a carved duck. So what is it?"

Billy smiled and nodded, and reached behind a sack of potatoes to pull out a bomber—a warplane just like on the cover of the newspapers—perfect and small enough to fit in his hand.

"Wow!" squeaked 'Dene. Not even ghosts, not even her dislike of the Prunkles could keep the glee out of her voice.

"That's a beaut!" said Dar. "Can I see it?"

"See with your eyes," said Billy slyly.

"Gimme that," said Darwin, taking the plane. "Golly!" he said, noticing the payload. Twisted wires on the undercarriage carried bombs, bombs that were actual bullets. He handed the plane to his sister, and she flew it through the darkness while making whooshing noises and then sat down next to the lantern for a better look.

Darwin had seen plenty of bullets and shotgun shells back on the farm. Used them, even. When he was five his dad—his real dad, Homer Thomas, the homesteader from Missouri, the patriarch, the Bolshevik, the descendent of Lieutenant Spotswood Thomas who'd fought for the Union in the War Between the States, had taken him

to one of the cut lines on their land and handed him a .22.

"I'm heading into the bush now," he said. Homer wasn't a big man. He could maybe stare into Uncle Detmer's chin. But as his stepfather had said, Darwin's dad was "built like a brick shit-house." Short or no-short, everything thing about the man had crackled with power, like a prairie rainstorm gathering and growing and just waiting to bless all the crops between the hills of sunset and the plains of sunrise. "I'm gonna flush out some game," said his dad, dressed in grey and brown, camouflaged for autumn's trees. "You take this rifle and be ready, now. When game comes out, blast it!"

And his dad disappeared into the brush, silent and invisible as an owl in the branches of an oak.

Darwin waited. And gripped his gun. And glanced around. And waited. And gripped his gun tighter. And waited. And heard a branch snap and screamed.

His dad came running back, furious at his five-year-old holding the rifle and no game and finding out nothing was wrong. He barked at his son: "You stand on your own two feet, or else!"

But he let Darwin keep the rifle anyway.

'Dene was tugging on his sleeve. "Dar!"

"What?"

"So whatcha think?" said Billy. "Ain't she a beaut?"

"I already *said* it was a beaut —"

"Dar!" worried 'Dene again.

"What, 'Dene!"

Crack.

Sudden darkness.

Light flared from the now-open Zippo in Darwin's hand.

They all saw the shattered lantern on the floor, and then turned and saw a puncture in the dirt wall.

A wisp of smoke was curling out of it.

The puncture was just past Billy's head.

They all turned to 'Dene.

"I, I—one of the bullets—it just came loose! It fell in the lantern! I tried to tell you! I tried to tell you!"

"You almost *kilt* me!" screamed Billy.

The little girl scrambled up the ramp and slammed open the hatch and was out.

Billy started to go after her, but Dar blocked his path.

"It was an accident!" yelled 'Dene from the surface.

Dar held up his finger, traced a line from Billy's to Karl's faces.

Billy: "But Darwin, she —"

"She's just little! It's your own fool fault putting bullets on toys when you don't even know how to handle guns!" He breathed out sharply. "Now you don't come outta here 'til you're good and settled down."

The Prunkles stayed in the ground while Darwin backed up the ramp. He glared down at them, but they didn't move. "I'm taking my sister home," said Dar. "We got chores to do. You oughta do the same."

Karl moved over to hold his brother's hand, and Darwin thought Billy would pull it away, but he didn't. His face was cinched tight in the middle, damming back tears.

Dar and 'Dene left the yard, heads down.

"Dar, I'm sorry. I'm sorry! It was an accident!"

"I know."

'Dene stopped, pointed at the cratered, papery nest on the ground. The wasps were gone.

"Those Prunkles!" said 'Dene. "I just think about all those poor baby bees getting chased off by some dummies who wanna beat 'em up and rob 'em of all their honey!"

"Wasps don't make honey. Everybody knows that."

"I know! But still!"

Dar sighed. "Yeah."

They were almost home, the apartment at the back of the Safeway, when 'Dene said to Dar, "You never ate a goose egg in your life!"

"What?"

"You told Karl we usedta feed our whole family from goose eggs."

"Well you said goose eggs're two times bigger'n chicken eggs and four times the taste! Remember?"

'Dene's eyes snapped to the sky, pondering her brother's comeback. Finally, softly, realising: "That's true . . ."

Their mother, Hazel, hugged them tight when they came home. She was a big woman, and they almost disappeared into her like she was a stack of quilts. Her big hands, big enough to ring a chicken's neck in a single twist, held them gently, warmed them. "Had fun at the factory?" she said. They looked at each other, and their eyes confirmed what they wouldn't say. "Yes, ma'am," they said together.

"All right," she said, tucking back silvery hair behind her ears and the arms of her round spectacles. "Now time to help me with supper."

"What're we eating?" chirped 'Dene.

"Panna-cakes." That's how she always said the word, which made her girl smile every time. Dar smiled, too. Pancakes meant there wasn't much food left in the house. But even though the eggs and cream weren't from their land, their mum could turn lard and milk and flour and half a spoon of sugar and an egg—even a chicken egg—into love.

"Now you kids wash up the dishes. And not too loud. Patty and Baby Kenny are sleeping."

The kids set to cleaning and, while their mother was

mixing batter, Darwin pulled out the last two candies with a soapy hand and handed over one to 'Dene.

His little sister smiled and started chewing, and said softly, "That Miss Jill is sure nice."

"She sure is," he whispered wistfully.

"Darwin, you're always talking about Miss Jill. Do you wanna marry her or something?"

He shook his head and whispered. "Don't be a horse's ass." She smiled some more and kept chewing. She didn't say *I'll tell*. Because she never would.

But she was right. He did love Miss Jill. And one day, after he grew up and got a job, he would marry her.

BUT HE DIDN'T. BECAUSE THERE WERE TIMES AHEAD

neither Dar nor 'Dene could ever dream of. Like how they'd all get sick of candy within a few short weeks, and soon enough the factory itself would go kaput on account of wartime sugar rationing and because Jack Dahl didn't know jack shit about running a business. Or that he'd buy a two-ton truck and pack up all their belongings in the middle of the night and hurtle them over gravel highways with grown-ups and their baby sister, Patricia Finnegan, and their baby brother, Kenny, inside the cab, and Darwin and 'Dene riding on top of all their possessions in the payload container behind. Or that no rain would fall on their heads for the whole of the September it took them to cross the giant sunrise of Saskatchewan and descend to sunset on Manitoba's desolate Sand Hills outside Portage la Prairie.

They didn't know that, within a year, the ex-drifter Jack Dahl would drift away for good, or that the family would need to harness all their skills for hunting and trapping and growing food just to stay alive, during their first winter when the children couldn't even go to school because they didn't have shoes for the hour-plus trek. They didn't know about the railways Darwin would build, or the union he'd help lead, or the beautiful Ukrainian girl named Elsie that he'd marry, or the one-room school where 'Dene would teach six-year-old girls and huge farm boys older than she was, or that she'd eventually lead an entire teachers' union in the province of their birth, or that she'd meet a man from a faraway land called Kenya and have a son with him named Malcolm.

There was much ahead for them in their young family in their young country, ploughing under the homelands of many ancient peoples. And there would be enough pain and tears and births and laughter and building and fallouts and reconnections and regrets and deaths and somberness and celebration to fill their lives until the sun dogs came for them all. **■**



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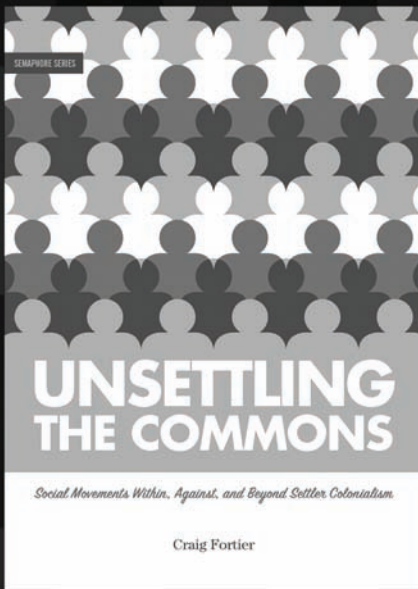
YOU ARE NOT NEEDED NOW

by Annette Lapointe

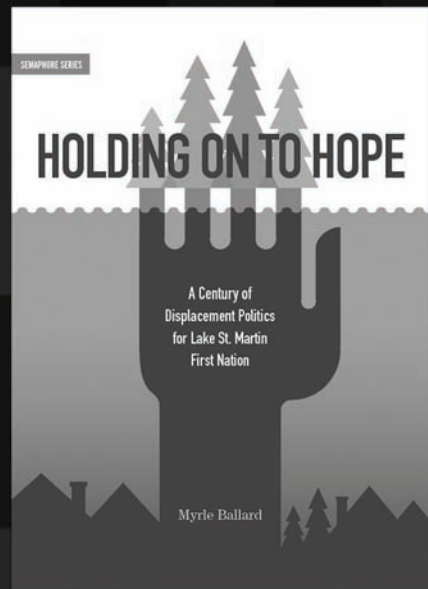
You Are Not Needed Now is a brilliant new collection of stories from Giller-nominated author Annette Lapointe. Often set within the small towns of the Canadian prairies, the stories in *You Are Not Needed Now* dissect and examine the illusion of appearances, the myth of normalcy, and the allure of artifice.

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A HISTORY OF

STITCH BY STITCH, WE'RE WEAVING THE FABRIC THAT TELLS THE STORY OF QUEER EDMONTON, ASSEMBLING IT INTO PIECES SUBSTANTIAL ENOUGH TO EXAMINE

ILLUSTRATION DOMINIC BUGATTO

I REMEMBER 40 YEARS AGO—1977, THE DAY ANITA Bryant took a pie in the face on live television. I remember it because it was an ugly media moment—an angry gay activist tossing baked goods to score political points; a homophobic crusader and former Miss America covered in whipped cream, tearfully praying for the soul of the attacker but not before she quipped, “At least it was a fruit pie.” It was the decade of the Moral Majority, a political organization in the United States with roots in the Christian right.



The other reason I remember that moment so clearly is because it's the moment I realized that the stories on the news about the nation-wide anti-gay crusade by Bryant and Jerry Falwell were actually about me. I was 13, and had pretty much figured me out. That pie in the face showed me that there were gay people fighting back. And that mattered to young me. It was rebellion, defiance. I had never seen that before. I wondered if I would ever be able to put my sense of outrage into action.

In 1981 I read about the raid of Edmonton's Pisces Health Spa (a gay bathhouse) in the pages of the right-wing magazine *Alberta Report*, which wasn't exactly the best way to glean info about the gay community I was planning to move to, but it was what I could find. I wanted to move to Edmonton because I needed to find people like me, whatever that meant. Edmonton was starting to sound like a dangerous place as well, but at least I wouldn't be alone. What I wasn't reading about—because it wasn't being reported—was the emergence of simple, effective activism in Edmonton's LGBTQ community (an acronym not in use back then). When the gay community made the news, it was usually bad news. To hear the positive news, you had to hear it from within the community.

That same summer I was driving up and down Main Street in Rocky Mountain House after school one day (gay or straight, that's what teenagers did) when I spotted him: my first real gay man in my hometown. I had seen men I had suspected before but had never seen one so obvious that I could tell immediately. And because it was a small town, I knew he wasn't one of us. He was well-dressed, for starters. He was new in town, and visibly queer. It frightened me, and I knew I had to meet him. When I finally did meet him and his partner, I learned he wasn't just gay, he was a drag queen from Edmonton. When he told stories of the trials and tribulations of Edmonton's community, it was with relish and abandon. Fighting back was simply part of their mindset. Complacency wasn't an option. Being defiant was part of the gay experience. My dread began to shift to excitement, not only for the freedom I was about to experience, but also because I felt I was about to become part of something more important just by coming out.

By 1982, I was living in Edmonton. When I arrived I immediately heard legends of queens that predated me. Some had already moved on and others had passed away. A few still lingered, gazing upon young queens like me with a quiet reserve and a gentle nod, a signal that, yes, we were the next ones. But there was already a sense of nostalgia, the shared history was just over a decade old and yet there was already a pining for the way things

used to be. The new freedoms had erased some of the old codes that had underpinned the dictates of gay culture, and there wasn't yet a new set of rules for this emerging world.

It was the post-Pisces pre-AIDS era—a period that lasted several months. Then, the growing fear as people started to die.

When I write about that decade, I prefer to focus mostly on the parts covered in rhinestones and crowns. But it was the growing body count that forced me to write down some of the stories of the vanishing royal sisterhood and the mythical family trees they created. I wanted there to be something left other than faded glamour shots and broken, rusty tiaras. I could feel history erasing us.

Silence equalled death.

When I did finally commit the 1980s to the page, I became an unofficial repository for archives, mostly in the form of photos, posters and stories. People shared them with me. They wanted their histories gathered. They wanted their memories heard.

So when the University of Alberta contacted me to ask if I would lead a Queer History Bus Tour, of course I said yes. I'm the expert, I wrote that book, after all. But I lived it from 1982 on, so I can attest to what I saw and heard; my husband lived a similar history, but beginning a few years earlier. Beyond this timeframe, queer history in Edmonton is largely unwritten. How to learn about the rest?

My search for Edmonton's queer history was the search for my own history. Even though there was no bloodline, there was an inherited sense of responsibility, an ownership of something that wasn't written, only experienced. It was something that belonged not only to the community I had adopted and that had adopted me, but to myself.

On the Queer History Bus Tour, the menu of locations that played a significant role in our history expanded year by year, starting at a dozen locales, with me at the front of the bus, like Karen Black in *Airport 75*, hanging on for dear life as the bus wove through Edmonton's omnipresent construction, and with gay political groundbreaker Michael Phair (a piece of history himself) heckling me through a bullhorn. The tour expanded to 30 stops, then 50. Within a few years it was a two hour-plus tour weaving through downtown and a few points north of city centre, repainting the map of Edmonton with a rainbow brush. The bars, the discos, the cruising places, the meeting places where the radical lesbians began to distance themselves from the radical feminists. It was so popular that we added a south-side tour exploring Fringe Festival history where so many LGBTQ the-

atre artists found an uncensored free market for their work. We talked about early activism at the University of Alberta and the parking lot of the Jubilee Auditorium, where a young Phair and his cohorts slid pro-gay pamphlets under the windshield wipers of hundreds of cars belonging to the audience for the anti-gay evangelist Anita Bryant.

The history was there all the time, buried under the prairie dust and oil profits. But until collected, the bigger picture was hard to see: the decades of persistence, small battle by small battle, that slowly inch forward the measure of equality. Viewed from afar, the story looks impossible. But zoom in and every tiny act of defiance, every pamphlet, every charity drag show, every committee, court case, every single challenge to the laws, norms and establishment was not only achievable, but unavoidable. Inevitable. “Justice demanded” eventually became “justice reluctantly served.”

EVERYONE HAD EXPECTED LIFE TO GET EASIER AFTER 1969’S BIG DECRIMINALIZATION MOMENT BUT THOSE BETTER TIMES WERE STILL DECADES AWAY.

Every time a blank spot in the history gets filled in, it provides the luxury of allowing the gaze to cast further back in time, looking for what came before . . . and then what came before that. And before that.

And so I searched ever further back to a time when the triumphs were, by necessity, invisible; when support came in the form of looking the other way. In the years before there were gay bars, the taverns and hotels like the King Eddy, the Corona, the Vega, and the Royal George tolerated one corner of their establishment being an unofficial queer meeting place, invisible to everyone except those who knew to peer through the clouds of cigarette smoke to find their own people. Or the world of show business and theatre and opera where a queer person could hide in plain sight, where pretending to be something you’re not is in the job description. All of those giant old hotels and grand theatres are gone now, razed by booms and busts.

Everyone had expected life to get easier after 1969’s big decriminalization moment but those better times were still decades away.

Travel further back in time and the history is much murkier. The essential invisibility necessary in the years before decriminalization acted also as an eraser, scraping our presence from the record. Rumours and suspicions and assumptions are there, but except for the occasional tragedy of a life destroyed by a charge of gross indecency, or the posthumous confirmation of someone’s secret queer life once the aspersion couldn’t cause any more damage, LGBTQ folk didn’t usually announce their presence.

Whenever gay life pre-1969 achieved any notice, it was more notoriety rather than notice, and served as a warning to those living in secret.

In 1961 the criminal code was amended to address homosexuality more specifically but in doing so, it created so-called dangerous offenders out of men who admitted that they couldn’t or wouldn’t change their orientation. It was a Calgarian arrested in the Northwest Territories who became the example of how flawed that legal shift was: a man who posed no threat to anyone suddenly had a permanent criminal record. His case was debated nationally, and was the case that spurred the national grassroots movement of unapologetic activists who began writing letters to federal politicians. One of those activists was a drag queen named Mr. ted northe in a decade when female impersonation was still illegal. A Vancouver drag queen who led the movement, Mr. ted northe was born in Cooking Lake, Alberta, and later formed a Canadian organization of Drag Societies, which still exists. She was the self-proclaimed Empress of Canada, and when Trudeau the Elder celebrated the decriminalization of 1969, he called her on the phone, saying, “Congratulations, Your Majesty.”

Our history in the 1950s would be marked by quiet furtive arrests, careers ended and futures shattered as queer folk were forced out of their jobs with government, military, police forces. The Cold War paranoia sought out people that were different and blamed them for blackmail that might happen some day, or named them as security risks, shaming them out of their careers. In 1942, a witch hunt took place that resulted in the arrest of a dozen gay men on charges of gross indecency. They came from many walks of life but three of them were prominent in Edmonton’s theatre and opera scene.

Taken into evidence, as proof of their deviance: a newspaper clipping on the life of Oscar Wilde, as well as a biography of Wilde; address books full of phone numbers, journals, and intimate letters. These letters are a rare treasure: candid, detailed gossip of the gay goings-on in the thriving Edmonton performing arts

community. They hint, they inform, they name and—by their very frankness—they condemn the recipients of the letters and every gay man referred to within.

The tragedy was repeated in 1947 when another round of arrests happened. I'm still looking for information on that witch hunt. So far, very little is available.

Being outed usually came about when one was actually caught or reported as having gay sex. Therefore all the mentions of early gay life lie in the coded phrases and damning files of the arrested, the convicted, the ruined. The rest of them—the ones who passed through history like ghosts, their invisibility their key to survival—remained silent. The price for openness was just too high. The price was the end of your career, time in prison, being shunned by family. Even worse, it could mean mental institutions, electroshock therapy or chemical castration. Silence equalled survival.

But there are clues to the queer ghosts in our early history.

To this day there are buildings standing that were designed by a pair of female architects prominent in Edmonton's early decades, both smashing gender barriers, and living together, partners in business and perhaps more. But nowhere does it say they are a lesbian couple. If you look even further back, to Edmonton's first decades there's almost no evidence to find. The only way to track the presence of sexual minorities from those decades is to interpret the court records of men being charged with creating disturbances or public indecency after being arrested hanging around in the abandoned mine shafts of the river valley, or a park or washroom that had a notorious reputation. The history is there if someone can unearth it.

The bus tour was unique because everyone on the tour had something to add, such as a detail, or a new point of interest, and suddenly there was a place to share those memories. One day someone shouted "That's where k.d. lang lived before she was a star!" as we drove past a small house in Riverdale. It was added to the tour the next year.

Stitch by stitch, the fabric of our history was slowly being woven. Until then, it was so hard to follow, because the threads fell in every direction, leading nowhere, tangled and random. Gradually they began to form weaves and connections, coming together into larger pieces that were finally substantial enough to examine.

Alberta has a very queer history. When the more populous gay-friendly metros in the country (all three of them) refer to Edmonton, it's generally with a sense of pity. But I would offer that the stories from my home province are as compelling, if not more, than the big-city

marches and riots and movements that dominate the national narrative.

The fact that my government worked diligently to oppose those rights for the first half of my adult life demonstrates that it was a high priority. The fact that before the local police busted the Pisces bathhouse in 1981 they actually contacted the Toronto police to learn what Toronto would have done differently, places Edmonton at the centre of that history. Toronto had just made headlines with a series of bathhouse raids, the largest mass arrest at that point in Canadian history. Edmonton's boys in blue wanted to know how to avoid causing the same revolutionary reaction the activists gathering in the streets—that Toronto had experienced.

In spite of that, a few short hours after the Pisces raid, Edmonton had its new generation of gay activists. One of them became our first openly gay city councillor. A few years later, the plague years inspired a new generation of artists, and Edmonton's LGBTQ world began to influence the culture of our nation. Long before I wrote *The Edmonton Queen*, the legendary Flashback nightclub was first immortalized in Brad Fraser's *Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love*. Opening night in New York (off-off-Broadway) I was able to hear our queer culture shared with the theatre capital of the world. k.d. lang was high-stepping at the Roost before her brand went internationally supersonic. (Fun facts: the old Roxy Theatre that burned down was not only where Brad Fraser wrote his first play in the lobby while volunteering as a teenage usher, but also where k.d. lang was seen in her first acting role.) Renowned painter Attila Richard Lukacs sometimes lingered at Boots & Saddle prior to his global star exploding. The doors they, and artists like them, opened, released a flood of LGBTQ artists whose work has had international impact. Edmonton queer stories: recorded and shared.

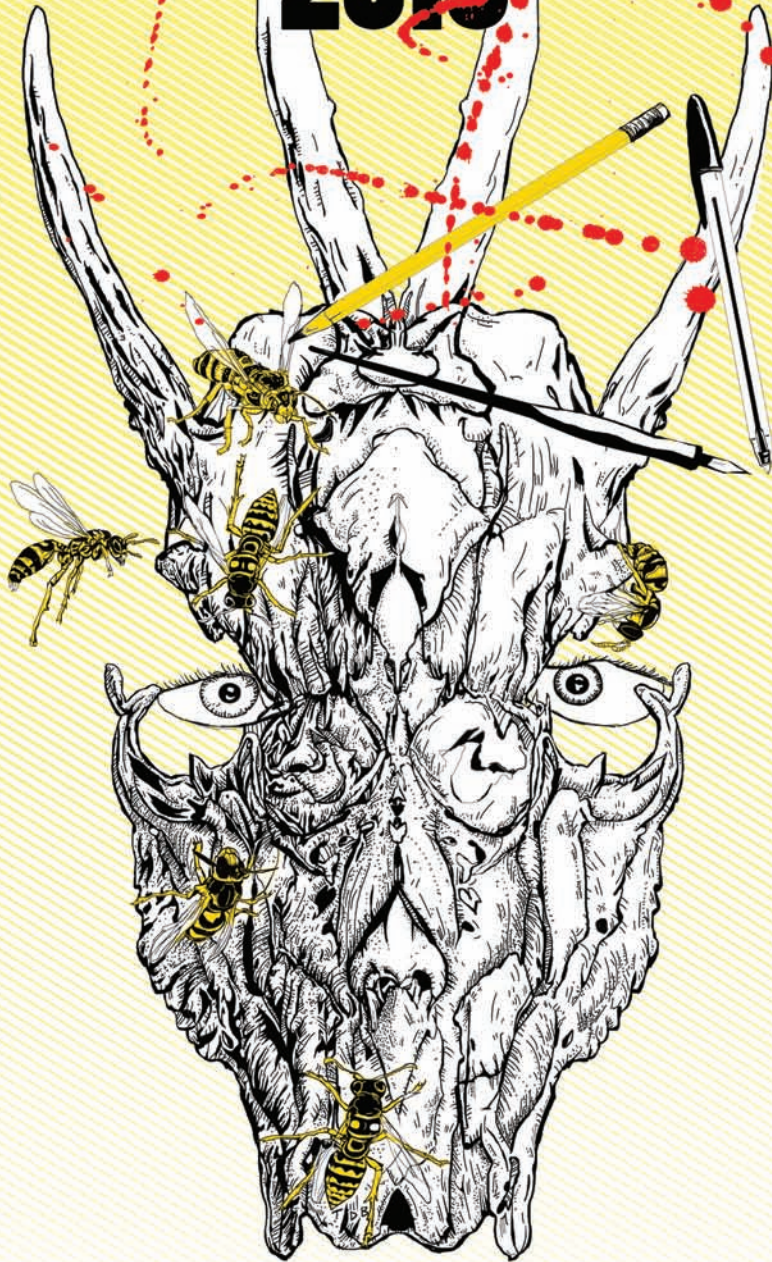
But before the voices got loud enough to hear and too angry to ignore, the story of the fight for the rights of sexual minorities was largely written by the persecution of those who stood out, and by the battles of those who had little to lose.

My search for history is the search for where I belong. I found that place in Edmonton's history, with one foot planted in pre-equality, the other stepping into a bold but fragile future. It's in the context of the gains we have achieved that we can see how cruel history sometimes was. It's a poignant reminder of how new and recent these victories are that the world is still shifting and adjusting to accommodate them. Only our vigilance will keep them in place. **EB**

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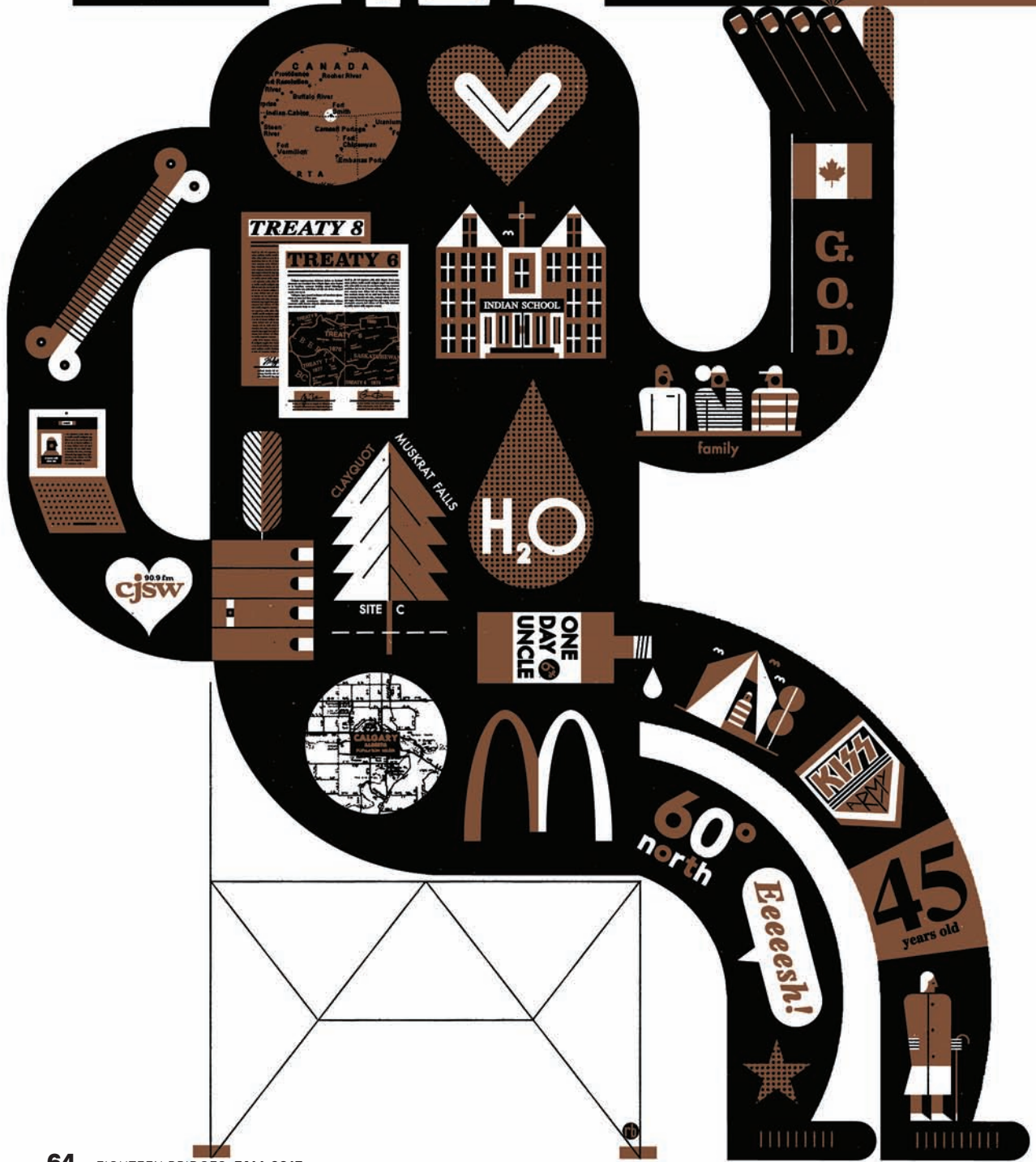
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12





RICHARD VAN CAMP

CANADA, YOU'RE LIKE MY FAVOURITE ONE-DAY UNCLE AND I LOVE YOU

ILLUSTRATION RAYMOND BIESINGER



Canada, Negẖnièhṯ! That's "I love you" in Tłıcẖ Dene. I had to ask my Elder, Tłıcẖ Matriarch, Rosa Mantla, for help on how to do this properly for your birthday. I'm 45 now: a husband, a father, a Tłıcẖ Dene from Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, living in Edmonton with my family and I'm proud to ask for help on how to say, "Negẖnièhṯ!"

“I love you!”

As your 150th comes and goes, I’m learning as much Tłıchǫ as I can for our son, Edzazı̀, and our family, and I’m learning as much of my language and culture for myself.

Edant’e! How are you?

Lıdı̀ neewǫ̀ nı̀? Would you like some tea?

What a life we’ve shared together, hey, Canada? 1989. Remember that? I was working at the Stadium McDonald’s in Calgary for \$4.20 an hour while attending William Aberhart High. My folks decided to head back to university for a year so we went as a family. It was one of the most important years of my life because, as a Tłıchǫ Dene born and raised in the North, I saw how far behind we were with our education. I walked into my classrooms filling with dread as I realized that students were fluent in French, knew how to use computers, knew world history, knew a million times more than me when it came to textbooks and class discussions, but, quietly, I’d never been prouder to be a northerner because I could feel how strong we were as a family. I was proud of my northern accent, my strut, my wicked humour, my thoughtfulness.

1989: that was the year I discovered university radio, the Mission UK, Skinny Puppy, the Sons of Freedom, Chris & Cosey, the Cocteau Twins, the Cure’s *Disintegration* album, and *Floodland* by the Sisters of Mercy. Metallica’s *And Justice for All* just came out and Kate Bush owned me every single night on record and headphones. It was an incredible time, a magic time and Iron Maiden’s *Somewhere in Time* was out and Van Halen’s *5150* was out. I still crank “Mine All Mine” when I need to get the juices flowing. But it was here, growing up on the 60th parallel, graduating in Calgary with a northern heart, that I realized just how blessed we are to grow up in this gorgeous country of ours: we can drink the water; we can breathe the air; the most expensive things for most of us each month are our mortgages. We won the lottery by being born in Canada.

I am so grateful to have been born in Fort Smith, N.W.T., in Denendeh—Treaty 8 Country—and I am so grateful that we live in Treaty 6 Territory in Edmonton, Alberta. I’m so grateful that I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s in Fort Smith. Holy wow, I wish you could have had my life: kids in our town all wanted to be in the KISS Army; my grandparents were medicine people; I was raised in a time where we had GOD (short for the “Great Out Doors”), sleepovers or “camp-overs,” *The Tommy Hunter Show*, the Jolly Green Giant, *Sesame Street*, *The Beachcombers*, hockey-stick nunchucks, pop-can throwing stars, Sho Kosugi, *Star Wars*, Arnie as Conan the Barbarian, Aliens, Predators, Terminator, Ninjas—Turtle Power! We also

had Wham!, the Pet Shop Boys, the Bangles, Prince, Platinum Blonde (you’re not much of a Canadian if you can’t do the drum solo in “Doesn’t Really Matter”), *Good Rockin’ Tonight* with Stu Jeffries, *Degrassi Junior High*—I could go on and on, but, during all of this, I was introduced to the concept of what I call “a One-Day-Uncle.”

Every family has one.

A One-Day-Uncle, according to moi, is an uncle who can charm you and regale you for hours with stories, songs, your language, and promises to take you out in the bush, teach you to hunt, take you to gather medicines and finally teach you Tłıchǫ, but, the next day, as you sit on the stairs of the front porch with an extra pair of socks, some snare wire you found in the junk drawer (pronounced “drunk drawer”), a pack of matches and a sandwich you made all by yourself, while your mom doesn’t have the heart to tell you: *He’s not coming; he’s drinking.*

My three favourite uncles still won’t talk about what happened to them when they were in residential schools.

My mother and my uncles went to residential schools for over a decade each. My mom went for 12 years. The priests and nuns labelled every kid with a number and hers was 12. I only learned of her number last November when I interviewed her for this essay and for another book I’m working on. I also interviewed her for Christmas because I wanted to give each of my three brothers a portable hard drive with Tłıchǫ teachings that I’ve videoed and audio’d this last year.

I explained that we don’t need more stuff for Christmas: we need more stories, songs, teachings, language. Not just for us but for our family on the way. We also need to understand our history and how we got here: yes, even in 2017 the shadow of those residential school mother-ships are still hovering above us.

If you ask my mom, Rosa: “Mom, do you think residential schools were a good idea?” She’ll basically answer with the answer she gave me: “If you think residential schools were a good idea, you give me your children. I will take them for 12 years and return them as a number.”

Eeeeeesh. (Those are my words here: *Eeeeeesh.*)

Canada, you took my mom and uncles for over a decade from their families and you returned them as numbers. Do you remember that? And this is why we have One-Day-Uncles and this is why, at the tender age of 45, I’m proud to be learning my language and all I can with the time I have.

A One-Day-Uncle, Canada. That’s what you are. You make promises, you break them. You give us hope and sell it, too. All the reserves without clean water? Site C

Dam? Muskrat Falls? Clayoquot Sound? You know what this does. Please stop. You are loved. What do you truly need to stop this?

I've always said that residential schools will be the sorrow in Canada's bones and they will be. They have to be so we can learn from this and do better. That means us as Indigenous people as well: we should all be reclaiming as much language and culture as we can. I'm from Treaty 8 Country, signed in 1899. We live in Edmonton. This is Treaty 6 Territory. I like to think my family does our best to help out here and take part in as many celebrations and community ceremonies as possible. I use as much Bush Cree here to honour where I'm from and where I love to live. So many of our Elders speak Bush Cree and Dene. When I hear "Keemooch" or "Neecheemoos" (I'm typing them out like I speak them so you can pronounce them), my spirit glows. Keemooch is "on the sneak." So, as an example, when you suddenly find yourself single in your 40s and you're braiding up to go to the dance, well, you're "on the Keemooch." Or, if you're browsing Craigslist Casual Encounters, um, you're on the Keemooch looking for a Neecheemoos (Sweetheart).

See? Cree is fun and Cree is so sexy. Tłıchǫ is sexy, too. I probably know just as much Bush Cree as I know Tłıchǫ, but we're learning as much as we can for our family, especially now as our boy, Edzazıı (Tłıchǫ for "Marrow"), is talking up a storm. It's awesome. May we all learn our languages with our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. That's a good way. Neezee inkwo: Tłıchǫ for "good medicine."

Canada, I have dropped tobacco for you in the Torngats of Labrador, Pangnirtung in Nunavut, Haida Gwaii, Inuvik, and just about every major city from coast to coast, and I do this to honour the traditional knowledge keepers of this great country of ours. I also do this in honour of all who've dreamt there. I know you are doing your best for what you think you need to do, but please remember your promises.

I do and I will always love you, Canada: with or without a birthday. You know what you have. You are worth protecting, renewing and honouring. The people—the four-legged, the two-legged, the winged ones, those that swim and crawl—and the land will continue...

So, on your birthday, you're old enough now to hear this: keep your promises. Honour the treaties and all of the Supreme Court rulings that respect unceded territory and a duty to consult and quit putting water in jeopardy. Remember what the prophecies say: future wars won't be for gold or money: they will be for water.

Oh. There it is: *the look.* I can tell you want me to go. So let's see what you do with what I've said here. I've shared my truth with you. I hope you listened. I hope you'll remember. Either way, my family shall continue on our pathways of reclaiming. And that is my gift to you.

Mahsi cho and with respect,
Your nephew,
Richard Van Camp
Grandson of Mahnee and Wedzebah. ☒



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12

JALAL BARZANJI

HOME AFTER HOME

MAYBE IT'S NOT THE PLACE YOU BEGIN THAT IS MOST IMPORTANT, BUT WHERE YOU BECOME THE BEST VERSION OF YOURSELF

PHOTOGRAPHY **COOPER & O'HARA** ILLUSTRATION **CHARLES BURKE**



I WAS BORN IN AN INNOCENT VILLAGE OUTSIDE THE CITY OF ARBIL, KURDISTAN, Iraq, and almost since that very day the story of my life has revolved around journeys. They are not all exclusively literal, although many are. Most of them, however, are accompanied by journeys of the mind seeking improvement, revelation, consolation and peace—in other words, a home. A sovereign, democratic country, I believe, is the accumulation of millions of journeys undertaken by those inhabiting it. My story, to that extent, is as much a Canadian journey as any other. It is Canada's acceptance that has given it more meaning. It is important to enlighten people about how difficult it can be to make these journeys of self-discovery without the freedom of a country such as Canada to support them. I want to show how Canada helped accept my journey, and how through this acceptance helped to reaffirm my identity as a writer, father, and human being.

The inherent meaning of journey is that of travel (a concept that has also played a great part in my life), but the deeper meaning of journey has to do with the changes in one's life, or in my case surviving great distances of feelings and beliefs. Changes in geographical locations are significant, most of all in our souls. Our minds and our hearts journey from despair to joy, from freedom of belief to physically forced restraints against expressing one's opinion. So, no matter what implications can be assumed, I will limit myself to what is so fascinating to me about the journeys I have taken. Our journeys may not be perfect, they may be filled with difficult moments and times when we may not wish to continue, but our ability to take these emotional journeys is in itself beautiful. They give us the opportunity to change, to expand, to see new things, and to consider new ideas. All of my journeys were unique, but all ended in one common factor—the person taking them changed.

My village, Ahkafsaqa, was a place without electricity; there I learned about and experienced the simplicity of life. Often, I would ask my mother which day I was born, and as a token of that simplicity, she would not answer with a date, but she would say “you were born when the grass was turning green, and the flowers were beginning to bloom.” This spring birthday, as were so many things, was taken away by the Iraqi government which gave me, and many other Kurdish people, July 1 as our official birthday. I was seven years old when they opened a school in my village. Attending this school became my first internal journey, one towards knowledge and self-improvement. Unfortunately, the beginning of this first journey was short-lived. The Iraqi regime sent two warplanes at the crack of dawn, when only the village's shepherds were awake—two of them were the first victims of the fire bombing. The noise alerted the rest of the us, and we took cover and fled. The adults had heard about the regime's tactics when destroying a village like ours; the war planes would be followed by a bombardment of distant missile strikes that would level the village, making it easy for the coming infantry to clear out the Kurdish fighters or capture those who stayed or were too injured to flee. Every family went in different directions. We never returned. That school, like my birthday, was taken away from me by a regime I had never provoked.

My home as a child was constantly crowded. It was the nature of Kurdish homes, and of mine in particular, to accommodate numerous siblings, married or single, under one roof, along with various other relatives. The school was my refuge, a place where even as a young child I was

able to escape into reading and writing. The destruction of what was to me a sacred place would become a common theme in my life, in which the very pieces of my identity that I would time and time again attempt to cling to would be taken away from me.

Our village no longer inhabitable, my family and I were forced to travel to Arbil, one of Kurdistan's biggest cities. When we arrived early one morning, the city was slowly waking up. There were so many cars on the road and the style of the houses was new to me; each one had light. I soon realized each home had its own lights. I had never seen this before.

**THE HAWLER PUBLIC LIBRARY
WAS A MAGNIFICENT AND
PEACEFUL BUILDING, AND IN ITS
QUIET SHELVES I COULD ESCAPE
THE CROWDEDNESS OF REALITY.**

Slowly, our life began again. My parents were nervous about our new life, but I wasn't like my parents and gradually the city became home to me. This would be another journey, from a familiar life in a village where I knew all of my neighbours, developing an identity that was a reflection of every street corner and alley, to a city I knew nothing about. The transition was difficult not only for me, but for my whole family. I attempted to take refuge again at school, and developed an interest in literature. In high school, the home I inhabited grew even more crowded with the addition of new siblings. I had, at that point, one older brother, four younger brothers and two younger sisters under the same roof. It was quite obvious I would need to go to the library if I wanted to get any studying done.

The Hawler Public Library was a magnificent and peaceful building, and in its quiet shelves I could escape the crowdedness of reality. The library was built in 1940, before the Baath party came to power. You would enter the grey building through a small front garden that led you to a revolving glass door. This was the first of its kind in Kurdistan, and people would come simply for the amusement of walking through that revolving door. Once inside, you were greeted by the silence of the reading hall that featured the tallest ceiling of any building I had been inside. Every wall was covered with shelves of books. At the front of the reading hall, people would sit for hours at beautiful, thick oak desks, studying or reading or writing.

When I did not feel like reading I would wander through the rows and rows of book shelves past the reading hall.

It was in this library in the early 1970s that I established and cultivated my love of literature and began perhaps the most defining journey of my life. At that time there was only one bookstore in the city so this library was the only resource for me to read literature. It was my most beloved place. There the reading of literature slowly turned into a love of writing poetry. I admit that it was partly initially motivated by a desire to attract women. When that failed, I decided to write for myself. Through poetry I explored the range and complexity of human emotions, the nature of the world around me and my own struggle, as a Kurd, for freedom of expression.

My writing and thirst for knowledge were denied by a brutal and fascistic regime that censored and dictated what was to be learned and what could be written. Like life under the Nazis, writers were never respected for their work if it did not amount to propaganda that could be used to push political policies. Publishing anything that did not support or was not liked by the regime could lead to time in prison. This proved to be a difficult life for a young writer striving to experience different feelings and ideas. Despite this intense pressure, I tried to continue my journey as a writer. My first book of poetry, *Dancing in the Evening Snow*, was rejected three times by the Iraqi censorship committee. It was published in 1979, but only after many changes. The censors removed many poems and altered not only many of my words but also my feelings.

In 1986, I returned to the Hawler Public Library in an unexpected way: I stepped through that revolving door as a prisoner of the regime's secret police. My sanctuary inside that building, where I'd enjoyed beautiful books and expanded my world, was now a 35-centimetre-high crawl space where I was allowed to sleep between a routine of beatings and a life in handcuffs. I was being used as a reminder to those who would dare to think critically or optimistically about democracy, freedom of expression or another way of life. I was being used to tell them that their thoughts and imaginations were under persecution. The physical transformation of the library into a jail, not full of tables and carrels, but holding cells and torture chambers, was symbolic of the ever-growing influence of the Baath regime on all facets of our lives. I felt this deeply, being imprisoned in the place that was once my salvation from everyday worries. I had committed no crime by human standards, but attempting to continue on a journey that sought out freedom was crime enough for the Iraqi regime.

After two years in this prison, without a trial or lawyer, I was pardoned on Saddam Hussein's birthday along with hundreds of others as a sign of his "humility." The fear of this inhuman treatment never left me. I explored the idea of undertaking a new journey, one that would free me of the confines of the Iraqi dictatorship. I trusted smugglers to help me cross borders and find a safe refuge in a western country. Initially, after claiming refugee status through the United Nations, I was given sanctuary in the United States. I remembered my geography teacher telling me about a distant place called Canada, about forests that spanned unimaginably vast territories. I always wondered if someone lost in these forests could find their way out. I was compelled to experience this for myself and even after being told I would be forced to wait longer under awful conditions as a refugee in Turkey to get to Canada, I committed to it. After 11 difficult months in Turkey, I was sponsored by the Canadian government and able to come to Edmonton in 1998. Gradually, the new landscapes, huge forests and other elements appeared my writing. I realized that my geography teacher was right about Canada: there are more trees than people. In Canada, I was able to again fully pursue my literary journey, now in a country where there has always been and still is freedom of expression.

I WAS BEING USED AS A REMINDER TO THOSE WHO WOULD DARE TO THINK CRITICALLY OR OPTIMISTICALLY ABOUT DEMOCRACY, FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION OR ANOTHER WAY OF LIFE.

I tried to learn the English language, find a job, and publish newly written books. This allowed my mind to roam for new ideas. Not only did Canada let me expand as a writer, it also confirmed and comforted me as a father and husband in a new society. My new life as a Canadian-Kurdish writer gave me not only a free life but also the ability to express myself. I have been on my journey as a writer my whole life. In the early days, this path was filled with hazards and stop signs warning me not to explore what I longed to explore. It wasn't until I came to Canada that these boundaries and borders were removed and I was able to publish my books. Not only was I given the ability to write what I wanted without constant censorship, I was also honoured for my ability to write. In 2007, I was named PEN Canada's first Writer in Exile,

providing me with one year of exploring ideas with other writers, and a year to share in their journeys and to add to mine.

And my journey brought me full circle in important ways. I was given an office in the Edmonton Public Library. This library was noisier than the one I fell in love with in Hawler, but this time I went to the library as a free writer. It also seemed to have more life. Occasionally, it occurs to me that this may have had more to do with the difference in my circumstances than in the differences in the libraries. I went from being imprisoned for my ideas to being hired to write about them. This was a favourable change. During this time, I was paid by the University of Alberta Press to write and publish two books. One was a prison memoir, *The Man in Blue Pajamas*, about my life under Saddam Hussein. It was exciting for me to go to my office every day and smell coffee from the cafés on the ground floor. It smelled like freedom.

But it wasn't always easy. It was challenging to reshape my books from the original language and cultural context into a new language and cultural context. I still had the scraps of papers which I had written on and had smuggled out of prison, and which I carried with me when I crossed borders. I kept these on my desk in the Edmonton Public Library, and when I looked at them I remembered the harsh, horrible, tragic period I had been through. On the other hand, creating art with words and emotion from my dark past was a blessing and a relief.

**I WROTE THEM IN MY MIND WHILE
IN A LIBRARY CONVERTED TO A JAIL,
AND THEN I WROTE THEM ON PAPER
IN AN OFFICE IN A LIBRARY IN MY
NEW HOME.**


Another difficulty was that I have written poetry since 1970, poetry in which I used few words to create a blank canvas on which a reader can paint with his own mind. Now I was also writing non-fiction, which meant that every piece of a story had to be told in detail. And I faced challenges to find myself as a non-fiction writer. I found that when I wrote non-fiction my life didn't go chronologically from birth to childhood to adulthood; nothing progressed in a straight line. I have been a refugee, always on the move. My life has been lived in

pieces, and turning these pieces into a readable story for western readers was another challenge. As was finding a Kurdish translator!

Some days, I sat back and thought, I guess I should thank Saddam for putting me in prison and supplying me with the life experiences to write my prison memoir.

It is difficult to be a writer in a new country and not be able to fully express myself in the spoken language, but by having my story and poems translated into English, and published by University of Alberta Press, I have had the chance to introduce my work to a new audience. The same writing, the same voice, the same spirit that I was punished for in the country where I was born was now giving me the opportunity to continue my journey without restrictions in Canada. I held the stories I went on to write about in my books in my memory for so many years. I wrote them in my mind while in a library converted to a jail, and then I wrote them on paper in an office in a library in my new home. How can I describe the excitement of seeing them in print without fear of jail or censorship?

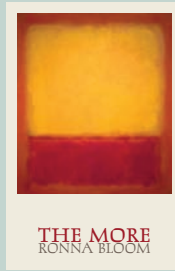
My story begins and ends with a home. What is home? Is it the place where you are born and form your first memories? Or, as Orhan Pamuk says, is it the place where your mother is? Might it be a combination of all of the above?

The definition of home continues to change as migration increases and cities expand. It has all led to a splintering in the definition of exactly what and where home is. Perhaps it's about creating a combination of homes and cultures. When I first moved to Canada, I sorely missed the place I was born, the place of my mother—Kurdistan. Now, many years later, Canada has also become home. This has created an irreconcilable personal dilemma, because when I am in Canada I miss my home in Kurdistan, and when I am in Kurdistan I miss my home in Canada. Perhaps home is not necessarily the place you were born and created your first memories and began your life journey; perhaps it is the place that encourages you to be the best version of yourself. In the process of creating new homes, a person doesn't need to abandon their roots, their childhood, their memories and their culture. Instead, we can and should carry our identity with us wherever we go, and share it with others in our new home. That is the Canada I know: a home away from home, a refuge, an opportunity to continue the journeys I once thought impossible. That is the Canada I wish to celebrate on its 150th birthday. A place to continue our spiritual journey. Home. 



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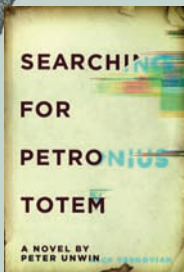
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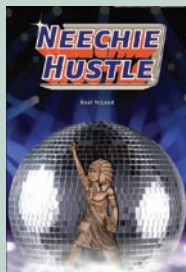
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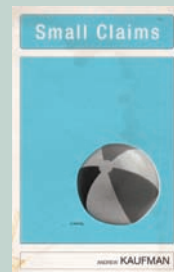
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