

The

# CROW

2019/2020



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# BULLETIN BOARD

On Oct. 3, 2019 Corus Entertainment (Global News) announced the creation of two new awards which will recognize and reward the academic achievement of students enrolled at the University of Regina's School of Journalism.

Beginning in Spring 2020, Corus's donation of \$21,000 will create two \$1,000 awards annually: the **Gord Steinke** Global News Undergraduate Award and the Gord Steinke Global News Undergraduate and Graduate Award.

Steinke, born in North Battleford and raised in Saskatoon, graduated from the School of Journalism in 1988.

"My degree opened up the doors to an exciting career that took me to newsrooms in Canada

and the United States. To this day I rely on the research, interview techniques and the art of storytelling that I learned at j-school," said Steinke, now an anchor and senior producer at Global Edmonton.

In addition to Global News, Corus's roster includes W Network, HGTV Canada, Food Network Canada, Showcase, National Geographic, Disney Channel Canada, YTV and Nickelodeon Canada.

"As a proud Canadian broadcaster, the provision of quality local and national news is one of the most important things we do," said **Doug Murphy**, Corus president and CEO.

"At a time when truth and facts matter more than ever, it's a privilege to support the next generation of journalism through this gift to the University of Regina."

Steinke, who travelled to Regina with Murphy to make the announcement, said meeting the students who will soon be eligible to receive the awards meant a lot.

"I'm honoured to present this award and I'm excited to be able to share my experiences with up-and-coming journalists. In a time when the

media is often under fire it's important to highlight the need for good journalism and that the profession is still a worthwhile career to pursue with many opportunities."



**Clockwise from top: Global Edmonton anchor Gord Steinke; Steinke's U of R j-school grad photo from 1988; Steinke (standing) during the announcement of the new student awards in his honour.**



The School of Journalism bid a fond farewell to this beauty of a human being. In Fall 2019, after 16 years of diligent service, **Leonzo Barreno** left for Mount Royal University in Calgary where he accepted a position as assistant professor of sociology. A perennial favourite of students and staff, Leonzo was never without a smile on his face and always looked out for the school's interests before his own. All the best Leonzo!



Congrats to **Jeanelle Mandes**, our new Asper Chair! Jeanelle earned her BA in journalism in 2015 and then her Master's in 2017. She also holds a BA in Indigenous Studies from First Nations University of Canada, has extensive communications experience and, since 2016, has served as the editor of *Eagle Feather News*. Jeanelle is teaching Indigenous Peoples and the Press and Advanced Print.



Congrats also to **Darrell Davis**, our new Dallas Smythe Chair! Darrell, a well-known and respected journalist, worked at the *Regina Leader-Post* for decades, has authored or co-authored six sports books, is a member of the Canadian Football Hall of Fame and is currently a "Wise Guy" on CJME/CKOM's Green Zone. Darrell is teaching Intro to Print and Intermediate Print.

# CONTRIBUTORS



**JAYDA NOYES** grew up on a farm north of Lumsden, Sask. During her time at the School of Journalism she was the recipient of the CTV Journalism Entrance Scholarship and the NOVA Corporation Award. Noyes interned at Regina's 980 CJME News Talk Radio and at the Prince Albert Daily Herald, where she was hired upon graduating as a reporter and photojournalist and covers crime, agriculture and Indigenous Affairs. Her story about service dogs begins on page 12. Follow her on Twitter @jaynoyesSK

**NTIBINYANE NTIBINYANE** has worked as a reporter with the Botswana Guardian, where he served as bureau chief and head of investigations. He has also worked as editor of Mmegi newspaper—Botswana's only privately-owned daily newspaper, and formed the INK Centre for Investigative Journalism in 2015. In 2016 Ntibinyane was part of a team that worked on the Panama Papers in collaboration with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). The team later received a Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting. In 2018 he spent six months as a fellow at Oxford University's Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. While at the School of Journalism, Ntibinyane earned two graduate scholarships and served as a teaching assistant. He is currently working on a book about the emotional demands of investigative journalism in Africa. His story about Africa's refugee camps begins on page 38. Follow him on Twitter @AlvinNtibinyane



**LYNN GIESBRECHT** grew up in a small town near Swift Current, Sask. While at the School of Journalism Giesbrecht interned at the Regina Leader-Post and CTV Regina and was the recipient of the James M. Minifie Award, the Leon and Dorothy Goldman Scholarship in Journalism, the CTV Journalistic Writing Scholarship, the CTV Investigative Journalism Prize and the Mary Lou Ogle Scholarship for the Study of Communications. During her fourth year Giesbrecht was hired as a reporter at the Regina Leader-Post, where she now covers education and health. Her piece on author Yann Martel begins on page 24. Follow her on Twitter @LynnGiesbrecht

**HEIDI ATTER** was born and raised in Regina. While at the School of Journalism she completed two internships, one at CBC Saskatchewan and the other at CTV Edmonton. Atter was also the recipient of the Joan Wohlfarth Award in Journalism, the Canadian Women's Press Club Saskatoon Award, the Bill Cameron Award, the Canadian Military Journalism Scholarship, the CTV Investigative Journalism Prize and the Kay Robbins Scholarship. Upon graduating, Atter was hired at CBC Saskatchewan. She is also a co-creative director for the Regina International Film Festival's LOOK Program. Her story about Regina graffiti artists begins on page 64. Follow her on Twitter at @HeidiAtter



# CONTRIBUTORS



**LIBBY GIESBRECHT** was born and raised in Winnipeg, where she worked as an on-air radio host for three years. Giesbrecht holds a Bachelor of Arts in criminal justice from the University of Winnipeg and is interested in covering crime and courts when she graduates with her Master's from the School of Journalism. Giesbrecht is scheduled to intern this summer at Regina's 980 CJME News Talk Radio. Her story about para-athlete Shelby Newkirk begins on page nine. Follow Libby on Instagram @libby.giesbrcht and Twitter @GiesbrechtLibby

**ALEXA LAWLOR** was born and raised in Regina. While at the School of Journalism Lawlor received two Saskatoon-based internships, one at CTV and the other at the StarPhoenix. Lawlor was also the recipient of the NOVA Corporation Award, the C. Irwin McIntosh Journalism Prize, the CTV Journalistic Writing Scholarship and the Saskatchewan Innovation Undergraduate Scholarship. While finishing up her degree, Lawlor also had her work published in the United Church Observer, and worked as a reporter at the Regina Leader-Post. Her cover story about van life begins on page 30. Follow her on Twitter @lawlor\_alex



**CÉLINE GRIMARD**'s work has appeared on Global National, the Toronto Star and the National Observer. Grimard was a part of the 2018 Hillman Prize honourable mention and Investigative Reporters and Editors winning series, The Price of Oil. While interning at CKOM News Talk Radio she won an RTDNA award for Breaking News Coverage for her coverage of a shooting in downtown Saskatoon. While earning her Bachelor's and Master's degrees at the University of Regina School of Journalism, Grimard was the recipient of a Canadian Military Journalism Scholarship, RPIRG grant and the Rawlco Fund. Upon graduating Grimard was hired as communications and culture Coordinator at MPC Film in Montreal. Her story about living in a home for senior citizens begins on page 66. Follow her on Instagram @celine\_grimard and Twitter @CelineGrimard

**HARRISON BROOKS** was born in Calgary and raised in Hudson Bay and Fort Qu'Appelle, Sask. While at the School of Journalism Brooks interned at the Bangkok Post and the Western College of Veterinary Medicine. Upon graduating Brooks took a temporary position at the Western Producer before being hired at 650 CKOM News Talk Radio in Saskatoon. His story about a Regina exorcist begins on page 57. Follow him on Twitter @Brooksey34



**ALEC KONKEL** was born in Rocanville, Sask., and grew up in Regina. While at the School of Journalism he interned at the Last Mountain Times in Nokomis, Sask. His piece about giving up video games for a week begins on page 60.



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## THE CROW

is  
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**T**hey say good things come to those who wait. If you're a dedicated reader of this magazine, oh how you have waited! The Crow, the School of Journalism's annual student news magazine, typically hits newsstands every November. However, this has been anything but a typical year. For starters we had an unprecedented variety and volume of material for this issue—so much that if we ran it all I'd still be laying this thing out. At 72 pages and 16 spreads, this is our biggest and most ambitious edition ever.

There is an exceptional piece from Jayda Noyes about how easy it is to pass a pooch off as a service dog—and how that affects people who rely on real working dogs. There is a gut-wrenching story from Ntibinyane Ntibinyane about Africa's refugee camps and a former child soldier who now teaches at the University of Regina. There are two great Q&As with two great Canadian journalists by two up-and-coming journalists, Heidi Atter and Alexa Lawlor, who shot our cover for her piece about van life and also assisted with the layout and design of this issue. There's an intimate look from Lynn Giesbrecht inside the mind (and office) of author Yann Martel and a fascinating meet and greet with an exorcist-in-training care of Harrison Brooks. And for the first time ever, we've also included a complete transcript of our Minifie Lecture. Connie Walker's 2019 address, "We don't need a voice. We need more microphones," was so powerful an excerpt just wouldn't do.

Then, just when we were about to put this issue to bed, along came COVID-19 and the lockdown we find ourselves in now. The challenges of completing this edition were difficult enough we seriously considered not printing it. Would print shops be open for business? We found one. Could we—should we—be distributing magazines at a time like this? Would people even pick them up? Ultimately, we decided the work in this magazine was just too good not to print.

That, and other than the teaser on the cover and Libby Giesbrecht's piece about a para-athlete from Saskatchewan whose path to Tokyo has been put on hold due to the pandemic, this issue makes no mention of COVID-19. Consider it respite from our new normal. Staying home is hard. Hopefully this makes it a little easier. Enjoy and take care.

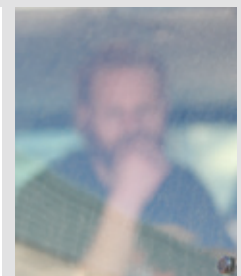
### Mark Taylor

Department Head, School of Journalism  
May 2020

**Please consider making a donation to the School of Journalism. Your support helps fund this magazine and other student news publications, television and radio broadcasts, documentaries and community events like our annual Minifie Lecture.**

## ON THE COVER

Jesse Boldt poses for a photo inside his "home," a 1997 Dodge cargo van named Bertha. Photo by Alexa Lawlor for her story, *Van Life*, beginning on page 30.



# Journalism 100



Madeline Kotzer, centre, reporting for CBC Saskatchewan, where she started as a School of Journalism intern and now serves as social media news editor.

Do you shoot and share photos and videos with friends, family and the world at large? Do you write texts, emails or blogs to communicate news, ideas and other important information? Interested in turning that into a career in journalism or communications? Or just want to better understand how it all works? Get started with *Introduction to Journalism* (JRN 100). For more information contact the School of Journalism at 306-585-4420 or [journalism@uregina.ca](mailto:journalism@uregina.ca).

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School of Journalism  
University of Regina







# Para-athlete keeping eyes on Tokyo 2021

Story and photos

by

**LIBBY GIESBRECHT**

Team Canada para-swimmer Shelby Newkirk's road to Tokyo just got longer—by a year. As COVID-19 continues to spread, public health concerns worldwide have escalated as medical officials attempt to slow the virus, prompting the unprecedented decision to postpone the 2020 Summer Olympics until 2021.

The Canadian Olympic Committee announced March 22 it would not send any athletes to the Olympic and Paralympic Games this summer in Tokyo because of concerns over COVID-19. Two days later, the International Olympic Committee announced the postponement of the Games due to the pandemic.

Newkirk, 23, currently holds the world record in the 50-metre backstroke S7 with a time of 38.00 seconds and is ranked second in the world in the 100-m backstroke S7. The swimmer said the postponement of the Games means a change of plans.

“It was definitely a lot to process,” said Newkirk. “At first, I kind of just took time off to really focus on myself and my mental health and just really make sure I was in a good place to understand what’s happening.”

“It’s definitely a big change but the goal stays the same, it’s just the timing is a little bit different.”

These adjustments have caused feelings of fear, uncertainty and sadness, but Newkirk is no stranger to overcoming obstacles. When she was only 13, Newkirk was diagnosed with a neurological movement disorder known as generalized dystonia.

“My right foot, I started to have issues with it, it started to turn in and I didn’t have control about the positioning,” said Newkirk.

Generalized dystonia is a movement disorder that causes a person’s muscles throughout their entire body to uncontrollably contract. As Newkirk’s condition is progressive and affects her entire body, her physical condition is constantly changing.

“I had no idea what to think,” said Newkirk. “I always just

thought something was wrong, you go to the doctor, they fix you, you walk away and everything's all great ... so hearing these people I thought knew everything saying, 'I have no idea what to do' ... it was really discouraging."

Newkirk said it took some time to realize the changes in her life weren't temporary.

"It was really hard. I had always done ... pretty much any sport available and all of a sudden, I couldn't do that. A lot of my friends didn't know what I could still do so I wasn't invited to go to parties ... I felt really isolated. I isolated myself a bit, too, because I was scared."

Two years after her diagnosis, Newkirk fell in love with competitive swimming. Having swum recreationally prior to her diagnosis, Newkirk enjoyed new mobility in the water, in spite of her physical limitations.

"Swimming was the first place after I was diagnosed that I felt truly free," Newkirk said.

"When I'm at the pool, I can just leave my wheelchair on the deck and swim away."

Although Newkirk has not yet officially qualified for the Summer Games, her current world ranking and time standards make her likely to compete in Tokyo next year.

"Being second in the world, [Newkirk] kind of had a bye into the Paralympics," said Saskatoon Lasers Swim Club head coach Eric Kramer.

Kramer, who began coaching Newkirk in 2016, said the decision to postpone the Paralympics is a letdown for athletes. He also raised concern over whether some para-athletes will still be able to compete in a year.

"Shelby is one of them," said Kramer. "Her condition, being dystonia, is just devastating."

A new date for Paralympic trials has yet to be set. The progressive nature of Newkirk's disease means her performance could change before trials to qualify for Tokyo.

"Everything is up in the air," said Kramer.

Kramer called Newkirk a gold-medal hopeful for the Tokyo Games and said the swimmer will likely compete in the 100-m backstroke S7, 100-m freestyle S7, and the 4x100-m relay events.

"She's resilient to death," Kramer said. He added her ability to rebound from setbacks distinguishes her from other athletes.

Instead of travelling to Tokyo, the athlete will continue training in preparation for the Summer Games next year.

"I guess my summer has changed a little bit," Newkirk said with a chuckle.

What hasn't changed is Newkirk's goal to "come back stronger than ever."

"Every day I practise, I smile a little bigger because I get to do the thing I love," said Newkirk.

The 2020 Paralympics were originally scheduled to take place in Tokyo Aug. 25 to Sept. 6, 2020. The Games will now run Aug. 24 to Sept. 5, 2021. 🐦



Previous page: Shelby Newkirk practises her breaststroke at the Harry Bailey Aquatic Centre in Saskatoon. Newkirk, 23, is currently ranked second in the world in the 100-metre backstroke. She was preparing to compete at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics when the games were postponed due to concerns over COVID-19.







# DISSERVICE DOGS

They say there are no bad dogs, just bad dog owners. JAYDA NOYES reports on how easy it is to pass a pooch off as a service dog—and how that affects people who rely on real working dogs.

Photos by HEIDI ATTER

**I**t felt like everyone was looking at us as we walked down the aisles of the grocery store. Children pointed, turned their heads to their parents and said: “Look, a puppy!” I smiled and thought it was cute. But the deeper I got into investigating service dog laws in Canada, I didn’t think it was so cute anymore. I had heard that people were throwing vests on their pets and taking advantage of laws designed for service animals so they could take their dog to a movie, run errands or get lunch. So I decided to see for myself just how easy it would be to turn my own pet—a rescue

dog from a shelter—into a service dog. Knowing I could buy anything and everything on the internet, I wasn’t surprised when it was as easy as clicking a couple of buttons.

After consulting the experts and genuine service dog owners, it became apparent that the accessibility of service dog certificates and gear poses a threat to the reputation of legitimate service dogs.

Jacquie Donald and Rob Cobb both have psychiatric service dogs for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I spent a couple of days walking around public places with them, learning more about service dogs and observing how people responded to them. Donald is unable to go out into public without her 90-pound English lab, Rowan. He assists her by waking her up from nightmares and, when she is anxious, he will nibble on her hand to alert her or lay on top of her for compression therapy, which is similar to swaddling a baby.

Children either acted scared or excited as we walked around. Many people would stare the dogs down as we walked by and one gentleman asked Cobb what the dogs were for.

“It’s just like walking up to anyone who’s in a wheelchair and asking how the accident happened,” Donald said.

“Saskatchewan needs a little bit more education. A lot of people look at a service dog as a CNI (seeing eye) dog and they get confused when they see a dog with a vest on

and I can see.”

Cobb’s curly black-haired labradoodle, Bear, helps keep him motivated.

“Some days, it’s just too bloody hard to get out of the house. But because of him, he makes you. You have to take them outside. You have to take them on walks,” he explained.

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission lists six

types of service dogs: guide dogs for those with visual impairments, social signal dogs for people with autism, assist dogs to improve mobility or health impairments, psychiatric dogs for people with disabilities such as schizophrenia, hearing dogs and seizure response dogs. These dogs can legally accompany their handlers in housing, transportation and any

public place, regardless of no pet poli-

cies. There are a few exceptions, however, such as a restaurant kitchen where food is prepared.

Business owners are prohibited from refusing the admission of a service dog or charging their handler extra. If the dog is being a disturbance, they can ask for a training certificate and how the dog assists the person, but not for specifics about the disability or about what the dog can do. Rowan and Bear fall under the definition of a service dog because they’re trained specifically to Donald and Cobb’s needs, as opposed to a therapy dog or an emotional support animal (ESA). A service dog costs between \$15,000 to \$30,000 to professionally train. Donald did an intense owner-trainer program with MSAR Service



Dogs to certify her dog.

“A lot of people get all of those categories really confused,” said Colleen Dell, a researcher at the University of Saskatchewan focusing on animal assistance for addictions and mental health. Therapy dogs simply provide comfort for groups of people. ESAs are allowed to live with their owner, regardless of pet policies and can accompany their owner when travelling, such as on the bus. ESAs are not allowed in public places and do not have to be trained.

**I**llegitimate certification websites are flooding the internet. They look legitimate to the untrained eye, even instructing you to know your rights. They are packed with information and claims about what you can and cannot do, yet they don't make it clear to their customers the difference between types of assistance dogs.

I found a popular one called 'Assistance Dogs of America' (ADA) and decided to test how easy it would be to register my dog, Jasper, a German-shepherd cross I rescued as a puppy from a shelter, as an ESA. It took me about 20 minutes from the time I started filling out my information to the time my order was confirmed. The only information I had to provide was my name, Jasper's photo, his name and his breed.

Although there was a question asking why I needed an ESA, there was an option to not specify. For about \$165 CAD, I got a blue ESA vest and an ID card. Even though I registered Jasper as an ESA, meaning he's still not legally allowed in public, the fine print on my ID card could lead anyone to believe otherwise. It states:

“This certifies that the animal listed below has been verified and registered and is in compliance with the requirements of an Official Service Dog...This authorized animal is used in therapeutic/support capacity to the certificate holder (owner). Allowance of this dog in public/private property is appreciated.”

ADA had no contact information on its website nor an option on its Facebook page to send a message. I commented on a post, asking to speak with someone. I received no reply.

“(The websites) are not legit anywhere,” said Dell. “They're taking people's money. Say as a store owner or whomever, they don't know. It looks like you have a certificate or a badge and a nice looking vest and there you go. There's your service dog or there's your emotional support animal.”

Dell said few people are aware of the laws on service dogs and ESAs. Yet the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission is clear when it comes to assistance dogs.

“(People) go to those sites and they think they're legit. And they don't know any different,” said Dell. “So you can't blame the individual in that sense, either. Especially when they're desperate.”

After digging into illegitimate websites, I headed on over to Amazon to see what kind of service dog gear I could find. The answer was all sorts: vests in a variety of colours, leashes saying 'in training,' and velcro patches you can change out on an accompanying vest. For only \$30 CAD, I purchased a service dog vest and wanted to see if anyone would question his authenticity. If anyone did, I had an ID card that did not clearly state what he was certified as or what I was allowed to do with him. But to the untrained eye, it looked completely realistic.

I took Jasper into a grocery store to put to the test what I had heard: that pets, dressed as service dogs, are being brought into stores and cafes and on transport. No-one, neither employees nor customers, questioned me, despite the fact that Jasper could not walk in a straight line and greeted every person who passed.

“I can't pet you, buddy. You're a working dog,” one woman said, as I sauntered through the aisles of the grocery store.

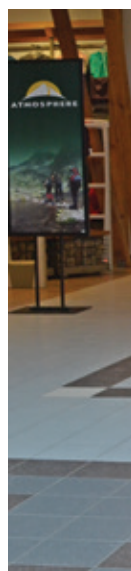
I replied: “I'm sorry, he's still a puppy and is very much in training.” “Aw, that's OK. He will get there.”

**For only \$30, I purchased a service dog vest and wanted to see if anyone would question his authenticity. If anyone did, I had an ID card that did not clearly state what he was certified as or what I was allowed to do with him. But to the untrained eye, it looked completely realistic.**



A service dog costs between \$15,000 to \$30,000 to professionally train. But with **no national standard** or registry, trainers don't always sell dogs that are suitable to assist someone with a **disability**.

Above and opening spread: the author and her dog, Jasper, in a Regina grocery store. Right: Jacquie Donald, who has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with her psychiatric service dog, Rowan, in a Regina mall. Previous page: a service dog ID card purchased online by the author for \$165.







I could feel people's eyes weighing me down like bricks because it did not look like I had a disability. It was only then, when I was walking around with my own 'service dog,' that I truly understood what Donald meant: it feels like people are wondering what is wrong with you that you need to be accompanied by a dog unless you have a visible disability. Having untrained dogs in a public place can distract working service dogs. And if another dog bites the service dog it can put them out of commission.

"That's \$30,000 down the drain. It's like taking away the guy's wheelchair or a walker or insulin, you know, whatever medical device the person needs," said Cobb.

Other people can distract the dog as well, said Donald. "You ask them not to touch the dog. They go ahead and touch it anyway. It says very clearly on them. 'Don't touch!'"

With no national standard or registry, trainers don't always sell dogs that are suitable to assist someone with a disability. In January 2019, a 19-year-old woman from Ontario died by suicide after she got an improperly trained service dog from an American non-profit company. She was forced to give the dog up to a rescue organization because it could not follow simple commands. The company shut down after several complaints. Donald, Cobb and Dell said Canada needs to have a national standard or registry.

"There's no agreement on what service dog organization we're following," said Dell, who works with service dog programs across Canada.

She said the lack of a standard needs to be addressed.

"It's just a mess. It's a mess is what it is," said Dell, who also advocates for animal welfare.

British Columbia is the only province with a standard. All dogs must come from an accredited organization or pass a test before they are certified. The United States does not have a national standard either. Public Service and Procurement Canada said there are no plans for a Canadian service dog standard.

"Public Service and Procurement Canada is committed to the development of voluntary standards that meet Government of Canada operational requirements, that fall within federal jurisdiction and that ensure the safety of Canadians. The Government of Canada currently does not have national regulations, standards or a registry in place for service dogs. Public Services and Procurement Canada currently has no plans to create a registry or standard."

It is a natural instinct for our eyes to light up and to point when we see a cute dog. But service dogs are not pets—they are working. And they are lifelines to people like Donald and Cobb who have serious disabilities.

"People have come up to me and said: 'Where did you get that vest? My wife really wants her dog to come into stores with her,' Donald said.

"People don't understand that he's a service dog and how much work and time and effort and testing he went through. They're thinking they can just go and purchase it and bring their dogs in."

As I discovered, the internet allows us to do just that. 🐦



**It's an old j-school assignment but a new feature here in *The Crow*: a Q & A with a prominent Canadian journalist. Alexa Lawlor and Heidi Atter caught up with two of the best when it comes to pictures and words—**Tamsin McMahon**, California-based correspondent for *The Globe and Mail*, and freelance photojournalist **Amber Bracken**. Whether you consume news or produce it, these are a must-read.**

**ALEXA LAWLOR:** You began your career at the Peterborough Examiner and worked at various other small newspapers. What was it like going from smaller regional papers to national papers and magazines?

**TAMSIN MCMAHON:** The reporting is essentially the same. You're using the same skills and you're on the same kind of deadline. The stories are a bit different. For one, you're competing often with a lot of other news outlets for these bigger, high-profile stories. Whereas when you're at a local paper, you're often seen as the only person or maybe it's one or two other people covering a story.

I do a lot of stories that involve a bit more analysis or investigation versus a local paper where you can focus a bit more on just delivering the daily news. So those are probably the main differences. It's obviously a bit more of a high-profile kind of position and the journalistic bar is very high at the national papers and magazines. But there's lots of amazing journalists at local papers too.

**AL:** What would you say to someone starting out who's maybe shooting for a national paper?

**TM:** When I started, that route was very open. You could go

# erh

from smaller papers and explore, figure things out, make a couple mistakes, learn and move on. I'm not sure that route is as open as it once was just because of all the cuts to local newsrooms across Canada. So, I would say if you're looking at a national paper or national outlet, I would really focus on trying to get an internship with those outlets. I'd focus on maybe a beat that you're particularly interested in. The Globe especially, but a lot of other national papers are really invested in business journalism, which isn't as robust at the local level. If you have an interest in those kinds of beats, that's really an advantage. I would get as much experience as I could as a student still, because you have a lot of internship type opportunities or you can do some freelancing because you're still young and in school.

So I would focus on building up your portfolio, making connections, trying to get those internships, even if they're something short at a national paper, trying to investigate whether there's a particular beat that national paper really needs rather than maybe trying to go the route that I took, which was working for many years at small-



Tamsin McMahon

er papers.

**AL: On the flip side, do you think that, especially with all the cuts, it's still worth it to spend some time at the smaller papers?**

**TM:** Well, I'm biased. I love small papers. I think it's great experience, but it's a slow

route. So I would do it when you're young, and figure out how to use that experience to do some exciting news reporting, improve your writing, make some contacts, get some great clips, and then try to figure it out from there. I've been out of that for a while, so it's hard to know what the state of those newsrooms are. But they've lost a lot of people.

I would say, especially if you're young, and you're going to do internships, any journalism experience is worth it and is relevant. And you're going to have to work really hard at a local paper too, because they have had so many cuts. You're going to be grinding, probably doing I don't know how many stories a day or a week, you're going to be busy. They'll lean on you the way they maybe didn't lean on interns 10 years ago.

So, you'll definitely get great experience. Some of the national outlets look at the local papers and see some of the cuts and aren't as keen about hiring from those outlets now because there's a bit of a perception that they've kind of gone downhill. I think it is still great experience. I'm just not totally convinced it's the route to a national paper the way it has been in the past.

**AL: Was it a goal of yours to become a foreign correspondent?**

**TM:** I'm not sure. I mean it always sounded cool. And I like to travel. But I think it was more opportunistic to be honest. It was more that this position came up in California and it just sounded really fascinating and I just loved the idea of the kinds of stories I might be working on and the fact that you have this president of the United States that's ripping up the playbook for what a world leader should be like. So, it was a bit more the job than sort of a long-time goal of being a foreign correspondent.

**AL: What was one of the main things that sparked your interest in the position?**

**TM:** My husband's American and in 2016, we had this bet about who was going to win the presidential election. I looked at all the polls, I was quite sure, like everyone else, that Hillary Clinton was going to win. He was quite sure Donald Trump was going to win. I thought he was out to lunch, so we made this \$1,000 bet that Trump would lose and of course I had to pay up. It made

me realize that I didn't really have a great appreciation of what was happening and the media, for better or worse in the U.S. was not, I felt, reporting the real story on the ground of what was happening.

Regardless of whether you like Trump or his supporters, it's important to understand what's happening on the ground, and why people feel the way they do and why he was able to capture the imagination of so many American voters. That was the first thing. And then I thought California was interesting because it's not Washington, you know, you're not there with thousands of other reporters. You have a bit more opportunity to pick and choose your own stories. There's a lot of diversity of stories to cover. I'm in Silicon Valley so I do tech stories. I do stories about the U.S.-Mexico border. I do a lot of political stories. It's just very diverse.

**AL: Before you, the position of a foreign correspondent based in California did not exist. Is that right?**

**TM:** Yeah, I think they had somebody here in the 90s but it was different. It was down in Los Angeles and a bit more focused on entertainment. So, this is new. I know the editor really wanted a California bureau for a while. So it was really cool to come here and set up a bureau rather than take one over from somebody.

**AL: What are your career goals moving forward?**

**TM:** I'm quite happy now. I feel like this is a pretty good position. It's a hard position to get, foreign correspondent. There's not many of them left in Canada. I'll keep doing it until, I don't know, something better comes along maybe or I get bored but I can see myself doing it for the foreseeable future.

And who knows, the great thing about foreign correspondence is the world is sort of open to you, so perhaps somewhere down the road there will be another posting that doesn't exist right now that interests me and then I can go somewhere else. But there's so much here that I haven't done. I feel like I'm still just getting to know this place. So I have a lot of other stories to cover here. I'm pretty content with the job as it is. *This interview has been edited and condensed.* 🐦

**HEIDI ATTER: How old were you when you got your first camera?**

**AMBER BRACKEN:** I don't know. I remember being interested in photography as a kid and I got one of those Polaroid cameras and I used up all the film and couldn't get film again. I didn't really have one until I was a little bit older. When I was 16, I decided I was going to be an artist or something. My boyfriend at the time bought me an SLR, a Canon Rebel or something. I shot with that and then when I was older, in school at SAIT, I got my 5D and I started shooting the way that I shoot now.

**HA: What was it about photography that interested you?**

**AB:** It was like a record of all these moments. I liked people's photo albums. My great-grandparents and my grandparents had a giant National Geographic collection. And I always thought that was the most fascinating thing because it can take you all over the world. And I also thought it was, I don't know, it seemed like beauty in service of something. There was always a bigger message to it. And I like that.

**HA: What was it like starting out as a freelancer in 2014?**

**AB:** It was good. It was exciting, it was a little scary. It's not like I had been planning for it. I'd been unhappy for a while and was ready to make a change. That's what was super frustrating about the Sun and what sucked about having a staff job is that they had a very tightly prescribed style. And even though I shot outside of that style, it was like, not appreciated. So having the freedom to do that, and also have it be appreciated, that was really exciting. The first month or two was kind of a bummer. In the freelance schedule, January and February are slow. Then all the self-doubt creeps in. But within about six months I was pretty happy about my life.

**HA: When did you start your Seven Gen-**

**erations work (a series about Indigenous youth)?**

**AB:** I started that not too long after I went out freelancing because at first I didn't have a ton of work. I felt like I needed something to keep moving. Also, I wanted to start working on projects. I said, 'You know what, one of the things that I'm going to work on is building my documentary practice.' That's what I wanted to focus on at the time. So I got started late 2014, maybe early 2015, and that's ongoing.

**HA: Why was it important for you to take on this multi-year project?**

**AB:** In the beginning, I didn't think that was going to be a multi-year project. But I did feel that if I was going to be photographing stories about Indigenous people that I want to do it well and do it right and not be in too much of a hurry and do things wrong or add to negative representation. So I took my time with it. It's not so much that I intended to take on a sprawling project. It's more so that at the beginning, I set out with an intention to

create a holistic representation and something that was balanced and had the appropriate context. Because I was looking at the big picture. The only way to do that is to put in time and actually let people's lives develop over time in that way.

**HA: How did you first meet your subjects?**

**AB:** At the beginning of seven generations, I thought it was a project about Indigenous hip-hop. I came to that because I had been volunteering at a really fantastic youth outreach in Edmonton called iHuman. When I was working there, it was immediately obvious that 90 per cent of the clients there are Indigenous kids. Up until that time I hadn't realized there was so many lost Indigenous kids wandering around my city. I had no idea the types of barriers they were facing. It was just kind of shocking to me. Getting to know them, they're all really funny, pretty damn resilient. Pretty much all of them were involved in some kind of music.



**Amber Bracken**



Morton County Sheriffs - Riot police clear marchers from a secondary road outside a Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) worker camp using rubber bullets, pepper spray, tasers and arrests. In other incidents they've employed militarized vehicles, water canons, tear gas and have been accused of using percussion grenades. Photo by Amber Bracken.

So rap was really popular. They have weekly gatherings, people recording music, writing songs and beat boxing outside. I wanted to tell a story about their lives. I wanted other people to have the same revelation I did—that we have this major problem with this whole group of essentially innocent people who are so unsupported. But I didn't want it to be poverty porn. I'm looking for an empowering angle to take on it. Like I said it evolved past there.

**HA: When did you become passionate about Indigenous issues?**

**AB:** If I have a passion or a driving focus, it's justice and it really bothers me when people face barriers. That, to me, is unacceptable. So in Canada, if you're interested in justice in that way, it's pretty hard to ignore the barriers that are faced by Indigenous people. That's the heart of my fixation in that area right now. I would like to be contributing to the conversations that have the opportunity or potential to improve that relationship.

**HA: How does your work do that?**

**AB:** There are a few different ways I'm hoping to do that. I think one is creating representations of people as full people. So rather than popping in and out of somebody's life at the worst moment and making a picture of them looking really sad, I'm creating these representations where people get to be entire people. For instance, at their kid's birthday party. Often when we represent people who are struggling we fixate on the struggle and we miss some of the parts of their life that are just like all of us, that help us to see ourselves in that position.

There's also really strong Indigenous leadership. So representing people who are powerful, who are leaders, who have good ideas and are working really hard to see them through. I think we're lacking those stories in the mainstream. I want non-Indigenous Canadians to be able to see Indigenous people as capable and smart. How do you have an equal conversation if you don't consider someone your equal? I'm just trying to do that. At the same time, finding ways to represent inequality in a way that, again, we can relate to and be outraged. If you can relate to somebody and they're struggling with something that just comes easily to you, then it becomes harder



to ignore it. It becomes harder to pretend that's not a problem. Ultimately, I just hope that my work is able to facilitate better conversations and people can take it to the next level.

**HA: Are you conscious of being a white woman going into an Indigenous family?**

**AB:** I'm always very aware that I'm the white lady in the room. The way I approach it is that it's an extra level of responsibility. So regardless of who you are and whose story you're telling, we know

that there's power in stories. And ultimately the stories don't belong to me as a storyteller, whether I'm telling stories in the white community or the Indigenous community. So there's an element of responsibility to make sure that the people who are being represented have some kind of voice within the process, whether that be just focused on understanding clearly what the story is about and what exactly their participation might mean. There's just that extra level, the extra step of making sure that when I tell a story that I get it right, that the representation is fair, and that I spent enough time listening and learning.



Land, water, horse - Horses are central in Sioux culture, described "like my brothers," by one youth. To have traditional governance and lifestyles, including horses, on the land is deeply healing and is fundamental to the pipeline resistance. Photo by Amber Bracken.

**HA: What advice do you have for new photographers interested in documentary and longer form photo essays?**

**AB:** I think the best thing you can do for yourself is find a way to make a consistent practice. A lot of people are not going to end up with a newspaper job or maybe any kind of job at all for a while. But if you can create something that keeps you photographing on a daily basis, or as often as you possibly can, that will be the best way to develop your skills. It will take you from the theoretical place where you think about photography to a place where it becomes much more intuitive and you can feel your way through the act of taking pictures. Just keep doing it and do it a lot.

In terms of documentary, I would say start small and start close to you. Because the first story or stories that you're going to do are just going to be a muddle at first. You want to deal with something where you can actually get close to a story and actually take the time that it takes to get into people's lives in a way that is impossible if you're flying in and out. If you want to make it your practice it also makes sense to have multiple skills. I think people used to tell me that and I used to get annoyed. But I'm thinking really seriously about improving my writing and developing my skill set. I think writing gives you a lot of power in terms of framing your own stories.

**HA: Photojournalism is a male-dominated field. What advice do you have for young women entering it?**

**AB:** Don't wait to be invited. Don't turn yourself down before you've applied. It's other people's jobs to decide whether you're good enough or not. It's your job to convince them that you are. I'll tell you that's the biggest difference I've noticed between men and women is that men, they don't wait to know if they're good enough, they just go for it. They assume they are and they put themselves out for stuff and figure it out as they go.

Young women in particular have a tendency to want to be sure they're really good and really capable and then maybe they'll apply or ask. Don't do that. Just apply for stuff. Apply for jobs, apply for grants, apply for internships, apply for contests, apply for fellowships, apply for residencies. Just apply for stuff, whether or not you think you're good enough. *This interview has been edited and condensed.* 🐾

# Saskatchewan

Story and photos

by

LYNN GIESBRECHT





# he - Yann

The acclaimed author on fame, kids and why he loves living and working in the Prairies.

I stand on the concrete steps of a large olive-green house in Saskatoon, feeling nervous. Deep breath. My hand reaches out and presses the doorbell.

“No turning back now,” I think, as I notice a piece of Scotch tape stuck to the house number and a handwritten ‘No-flyers-please’ sign taped to the mailbox. But this isn’t just any mailbox. This is internationally-renowned writer Yann Martel’s mailbox. That knowledge does little to quell my nerves.

I run out of time for thought as the door swings open and before me stands the *Life of Pi* author himself, looking casual and slightly frazzled in a faded blue T-shirt and jeans. His grey socks depict wolves and evergreen trees, with the words “darn tough” emblazoned on the top.

“You must be Lynn,” he says, giving me a smile and a warm handshake, as he steps back to welcome me inside.

I cross the threshold and am instantly greeted by a small ball of curly black fur: a Havanese dog named Bamboo, I’m told.

Then I look up to see Martel’s seven-year-old daughter and four-year-old son dancing in the living room to *Phantom of the Opera*. His two other boys, ages six and nine, play in the living room as Martel’s partner, fellow writer Alice Kuipers, looks on from the dining room with a smile and encouraging words for her dancing kids.

Martel stops to admire his four-year-old’s robot dance moves, before showing me through the house (I spot Lego strewn over the kitchen counter and a piano stashed away in a side room), and out the backdoor. He breathes in the air as if drinking in the silence and then leads me through the backyard to a tiny shed of a building: his writing space.

After what he called the “freak success” of his 2001 novel *Life of Pi*, Martel was catapulted into the realm of international fame. The book won the 2002 Man Booker Prize for Fiction and was a finalist for the 2001 Governor General’s Literary Award for Fiction in Canada.

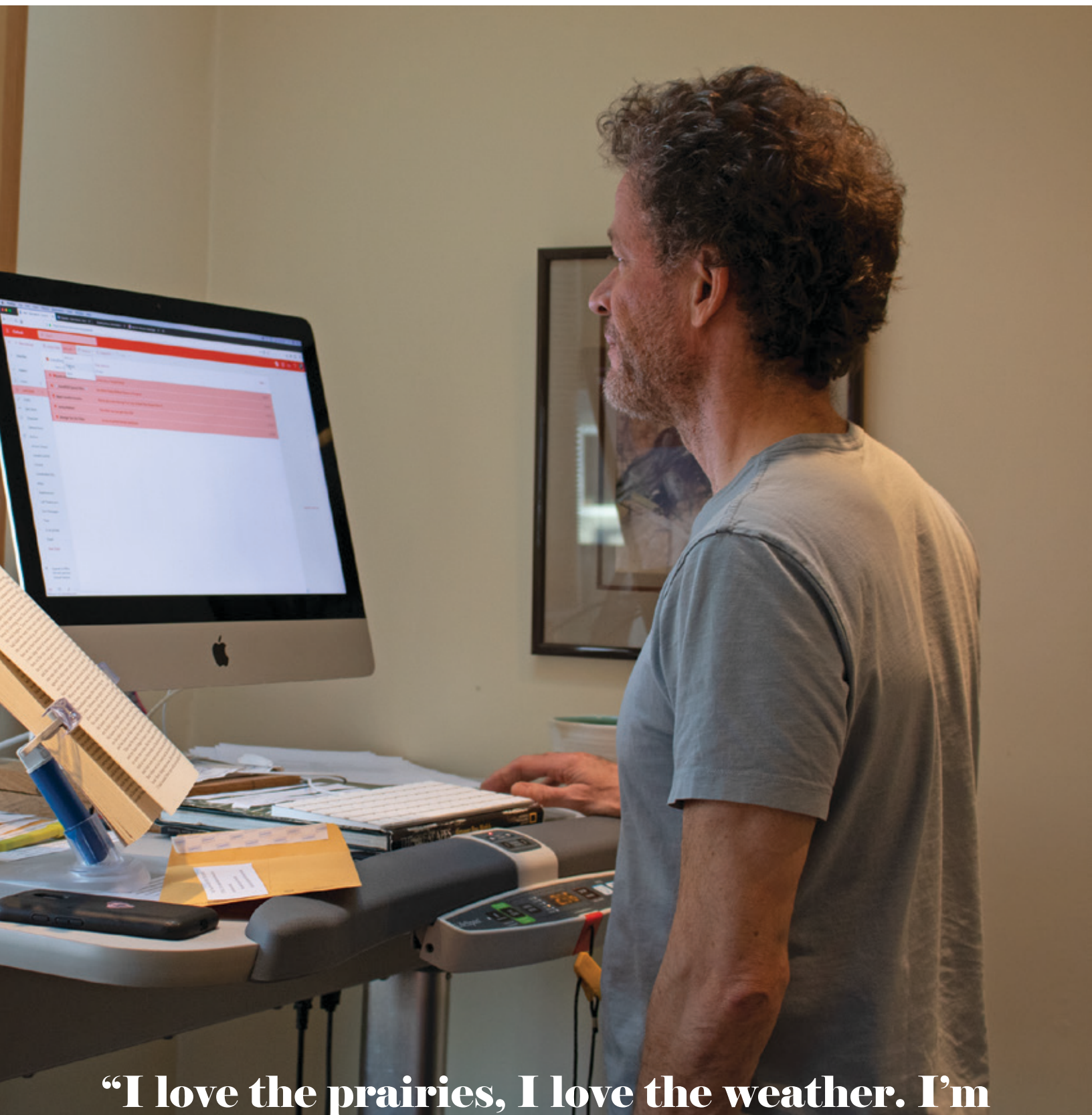
Inside his writing shed, the small space is lighted by a wall of windows facing toward the house and skylights from above. There’s hardly room for the two of us to move, with a treadmill desk taking up nearly half the floor and two tables occupying much of the remaining space. On the tables sit row upon row of boxes filled with neatly organized and labelled envelopes holding bits of research for his upcoming novel on the Trojan War.

Of the many, many story ideas he’s had run through his mind over the years, Martel says not all of them are worth pursuing.

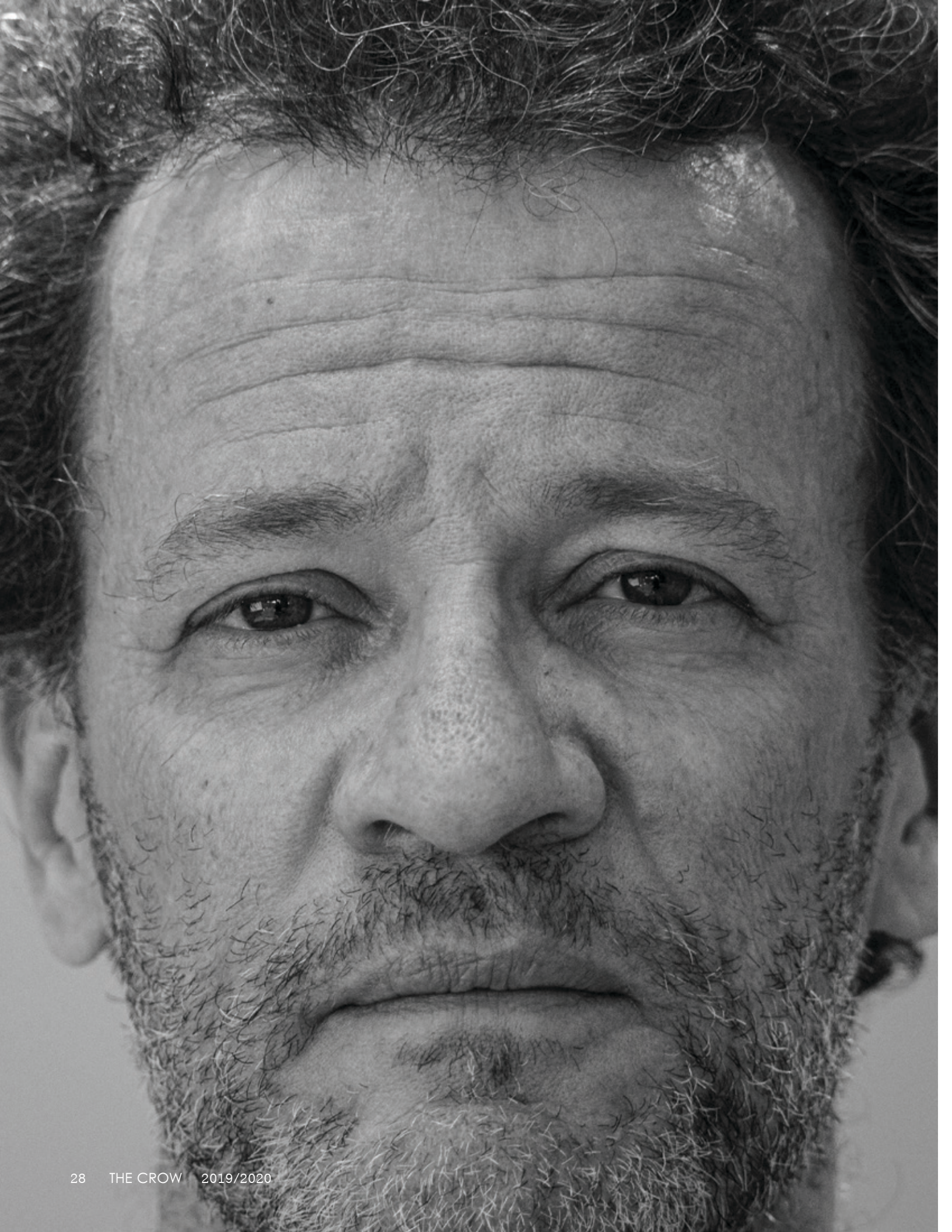
“Some ideas fizzle out quickly. They’re just anecdotal. They don’t have any breadth or depth. And then every so often you get an idea and you say, ‘Oh that’s a really good idea,’ and it doesn’t let go of you,” he said.



Previous page: Martel poses in the doorway of a small writing shed he built in his Saskatoon backyard. Above: Martel works on a new novel in the shed.



**“I love the prairies, I love the weather. I’m the only person who never complains about the weather,” he said. “I love that insane cold. I find it really exciting.”**



Martel organizes research for his new novel on the Trojan War in meticulously organized envelopes in his writing shed.



For those rare ideas that make the cut, he then moves into the research phase of his writing process, which can take him years of reading books on a specific topic, finding more related ideas and then doing more research and so on.

“It’s sort of this zigzag between ideas, research, ideas, research. And so the idea develops into multiple ideas, and then you start getting a novel.”

Martel did not grow up dreaming of being an author. He said he wanted to be an astronaut (“like basically every kid”) or a doctor (“mind-numbingly boring”) but couldn’t settle on any one profession. And growing up around the world gave him ample opportunity to experience many walks of life.

Born to French-Canadian parents, while they were studying in Spain, and who later became diplomats, Martel grew up in Spain, Alaska, Victoria, Ottawa, Costa Rica, France and Mexico. After finishing high school at an Ontario boarding school, Martel went to Trent University where he received a Bachelor of Arts in philosophy.

It was after moving to Montreal as a young 20-something fresh out of university, that Martel accidentally stumbled upon writing. With no obvious job prospects out of his philosophy degree, he was debating going back for his master’s while trying to figure out what he wanted to do for the rest of his life.

“I became a writer while I was waiting to become anything,” he said.

“At one point to pass the time, literally just to pass the time, I started writing little short stories. And for the first time, [I found] something that I really love doing, even though it was for no money.”

From there, his writing career started spiraling upward as he latched onto his newfound hobby out of a “fear of the working world” and began discovering success.

“Suddenly I was being published. Suddenly I have a publisher

and I have a book and then suddenly I won a big prize and suddenly I’m a writer,” he said, almost as if still surprised at where he has ended up.

His literary success landed him a spot as the 2003 writer in residence at the Saskatoon Public Library, and he has called the Bridge City home ever since.

Saskatoon’s small size, its location in the Prairies and its frigid climate are all attractive features to Martel.

“I love the Prairies, I love the weather. I’m the only person who never complains about the weather,” he said. “I love that insane cold. I find it really exciting.”

It was after moving to Saskatoon that he wrote the novel *Beatrice and Virgil*, which took him seven years to complete as all four of his children were born during that time. Since then, he said, he has had to rethink his writing process.

“Those little vampires want to suck my blood every day, so I need to be more efficient,” he said with a laugh and a loving glance through the window toward the house.

“It’s an amazing thing to have children. They’re annoying, they take over your life, they ruin your life basically, but you wouldn’t want to do without them.”

Although he enjoys the freedom fame and fortune has brought to his writing career, Martel could not care less about being well-known. For him, the joy is simply in the art of creating.

“I’m a writer. That’s the art form that I love the most. I love being in words. I love expressing myself in words. I love thinking about words. I love thinking about stories, and how I can express them through words. It’s a wonderful thing to work on a story,” he said.


And despite the wild success he has experienced, having children and writing something others enjoy remain his proudest achievements.

“Those are the two things—my writing and my children—I think are my two greatest accomplishments.” 🐦

A scenic view of a river with snow on the banks, a road with a speed limit sign, and a van partially visible on the right.

# van life

*hitting the road with*

A white van with gear on the roof is parked on a paved road overlooking a large body of water. The shoreline is covered in snow, and the background is a dense forest of bare trees. The scene is captured in a wide-angle shot, emphasizing the natural setting.

Story and photos

by

ALEXA LAWLOR

*Canada's 21st century nomads.*

**T**he large white van with black tinted windows was parked at the far end of the alleyway. It had to be what I was looking for, although I couldn't suppress the split-second thought that this scenario was what I had always been told to avoid.

A tall man came towards me with a huge dog with a wise look in its eyes. "Hi," he said, with a laid-back grin, and welcomed me into his home.

For Jesse Boldt and his seven-year-old German shepherd kuvasz cross, Layla, the van wasn't just their ride. Boldt is one of a growing number of Canadians rejecting a traditional lifestyle and living the "van life."

Van life is a movement of people who choose to live a nomadic lifestyle, living in a van with very few possessions. The movement has been gaining popularity on social media, with the Instagram hashtag #vanlife bringing up about 4.6 million posts.

Boldt, who has a red beard and a wisp of ginger-blond hair sticking out of his grey toque, opened the side door of the van, conveniently on the same side as a huge snowbank. We clambered over the snow, as I tried my best to climb into the van without slipping underneath.

Stepping inside, I felt apprehensive, unsure about what to expect. What I found was surprisingly conventional. The first thing I noticed inside the 30-year-old's "home" (a 1997 Dodge cargo



Opening spread: Jesse Boldt and his dog Layla cruise down Spadina Crescent E in Saskatoon in his 1997 Dodge cargo van. This page and next: Boldt and Layla inside their van, Bertha.



van recently named Bertha) was just how small it was. The second thing I noticed was the carpet of dog hair.

To move around the van, Boldt has to hunch over. He still often hits his head on the roof. With me there too, it took a bit of extra maneuvering to get anywhere.

Wooden shelves, as organized as can be when you're living in a small space, look more like small boxes attached to the wall. They are arranged this way so his belongings, including a statue of the Buddha and a plant, don't fall off the shelves while driving.

At around age 23, Boldt had his first experience with van life. Travelling Australia for 10 months, Boldt, a former girlfriend and a friend (all of whom happened to be around six feet tall) squeezed

into a high-raised van, where Boldt says he could actually stand up. The van also had two beds, a fridge and a stove.

After his time in Australia, when Boldt was pouring concrete, he began realizing how much he dreaded the life he was living. Overwhelmed by jobs he didn't really love, just to pay for a house filled with his material things, Boldt decided to get rid of most of his possessions, sell his house and his truck, and go full van life.

"I kept asking myself, with this one life, 'Is this how I want to do it?'" he said. "As soon as I started asking myself those questions it was pretty abrupt: I was like 'Okay you need to sacrifice everything.'"

"Once I got rid of all that stuff, my mind seemed to simplify





too. I could just focus a little bit more easily on the things that mattered to me.”

Although many van lifers will take the time to travel and see the world, Boldt, originally from Warman, Sask., has spent his time being locally nomadic in Saskatoon—even in the winter.

Boldt said what he loves most about the van life in Saskatoon is his ability to wake up to a different view each morning.

“Most people are smart enough to go in a hot climate. I’m a bit of a dummy, I guess, so I just stuck around here,” he said.

“But I wanted to do at least one winter, just to get the experience.”

During the winter, Boldt rented an empty heated garage. On

nights when it was between -30 C to -40 C, he would stay in the garage—otherwise, he would sleep outside in the van.

But next winter, Boldt says he plans to “put the van to the test” and travel around North America, including a trip to California to see the ocean.

“I’ve got a bunch of connections from Instagram, other fellow van lifers in California, all across the States, South America, so I plan to travel, let (Layla) see the ocean and get out of this cold,” he said.

Tucked in a building behind a flooring store in Prince Albert, Steven Glass and Mitchell Rosko rock out to Paradise City by Guns N’ Roses as they work on their latest school-bus conversion.



Their company, Paved to Pines, converts school buses, vans, and even ambulances into “custom off-grid camper vehicles.”

Paved to Pines has been in business for about a year and a half, and Glass and Rosko say interest in custom off-grid camper vehicles just keeps growing.

“People are finding out that they need a lot less to be happy than maybe previously thought,” Rosko said.

“That’s something we couldn’t believe,” Glass added.

“We knew it was a really popular thing going into it, but over the last year and a half, it’s absolutely blown up when it comes to actually making the decision to live in a van or a school bus, either part-time or full-time.”

Glass and Rosko have converted around nine vehicles so far, in-

cluding The Doghouse, a 38-foot Thomas Built converted school bus for a client who wanted to live the “Skoolie” life, and run a mobile dog rescue from the bus. Some of the features of the vehicle include a full-size fridge, an oven, a walk-in shower, and a bedroom with a queen-sized bed.

The Paved to Pines builds vary based on what the customer wants, from laundry machines and solar power, to adding hooks for dog leashes, or cat tunnels that run through the bus. Not only are the customizations personal to each client, but so are the clients’ reasons for wanting to spend time living the van life.

“Everybody’s been different so far,” Glass said. “They’ve all had a different reason for doing it, and that’s what I think is unique. We get to meet all these really cool people that have these weird

ideas they want to try out.”

“We’ve had some people who are completely fine with having a simple cargo van that they just want to basically be out of the rain—a glorified tent on wheels with a little kitchenette, so they can come inside and stay warm if it gets a little chilly,” Rosko added.

“And we’ve had some people who want to live completely off-grid in their school bus or van.”

Both Glass and Rosko took an interest in the van life when they were roommates in college. They converted their own school bus, Judy, and Glass lived the van life for six months, before moving to Prince Albert.

Glass said one thing he really enjoyed about van life was (since he was living in a smaller space) spending far more time outside, while still being able to enjoy movie nights in the bus.

“It was a blast. I would go back to that kind of lifestyle any day,” he said.

So what motivates people to live a nomadic lifestyle? According to Inge Bierman, an honours student at the University of Regina, it could be a multitude of factors, from a person’s environment to an “interpersonal or personal battle they are trying to piece through,” such as feeling uncomfortable with home.

“Most people go into the van life in the stage of early development or emerging adulthood—when you’re trying to figure out who you are, what you are and what you want to be. So, when you don’t have answers to those questions the van life might be a way of going to find those answers,” she said.

You don’t necessarily need a van to live a minimalistic, nomadic life. For six years, Hudson Brooks travelled across Canada and the United States, mainly by hitchhiking or hopping trains.

While travelling, Brooks, 26, was living on very little money. He would often panhandle or busk, playing either his fiddle or his guitar. So, when it came to food, he would often have to resort to dumpster diving.

“Most of the food in the dumpster is in white boxes anyway so it hasn’t touched anything,” said Brooks with a calm, reflective demeanour.

“It’s usually fresh and it’s not that big of a deal. Even if you find food in the dumpster, on the ground, or if you just ask people for their leftovers when you’re panhandling, it’s impossible to starve to death in North America. You have to actually want to starve to

death in order to starve to death.”

Brooks was living in Saskatoon, working as a detailer at an auto-body shop, when he realized he needed a change in his life.

“I was really depressed,” he said. “I thought ‘Well I can’t keep doing this, otherwise I’m going to do something I regret.’ And so, I just quit my job,” he said.

“I had no goal or ambitions or any direction at all and so I thought maybe at some level I should just live like that, without aim, without goal and without purpose. And what’s the manifestation of that? It’s a wanderer.”

When Brooks set out on his journey, he had no specific plans, other than “to head East.” Over the years, he has visited various cities and towns across Canada, and the United States. New Orleans in particular stood out to him.

“I always felt that it was like a mystical, magical area because there was the voodoo in there. Plus, it’s in a bayou, so the ground is so wet that you cannot dig into the ground. And because of that, they don’t bury their dead. They just stack them on top of one another. So, that was maybe part of the reason why it felt like that, because there were all these bodies not buried and above ground,” he said.

Throughout his travelling, Brooks said he met a lot of interesting people, including a man in his 50s who spent most of his time developing theories based on the Bible, using literal translations from the original Hebrew and Greek, that the Old and New Testament were written in, and translating them into modern English.

Brooks said he also learned his old

life wasn’t so bad, and that he developed a more grounded and realistic outlook, recognizing human nature, which, he says, “gives you a perspective.”

Now out of the wandering lifestyle, Brooks is in the psychology program at the University of Saskatchewan.

Boldt and I sit in the front seats of the van, while Layla sits on the bed behind us. When I ask him how long he plans to live the van life, he says he’s “just going to do it until it doesn’t feel right.

“Right now, I see myself doing it for a few years for sure, and then I’ll readjust and see where I’m at,” Boldt said. “But I’m sure I’ll be doing this for three to four years.”

Regardless of how long he spends living the van life, Boldt will always have a piece of the lifestyle in his heart. And he plans to celebrate his one year anniversary this year by getting his van tattooed on his forearm. 🐦



Mitchell Rosko, co-founder of Paved to Pines, as seen through the window of a bus he is working on. The company converts buses, vans, and even ambulances into “custom off-grid camper vehicles.”

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**Photojournalism** (JRN 312): A detailed examination of the photojournalist's role in the news gathering process. A focus on communicating through digital imagery and the power of visual storytelling, with emphasis on practical approaches, techniques and ethical image editing.

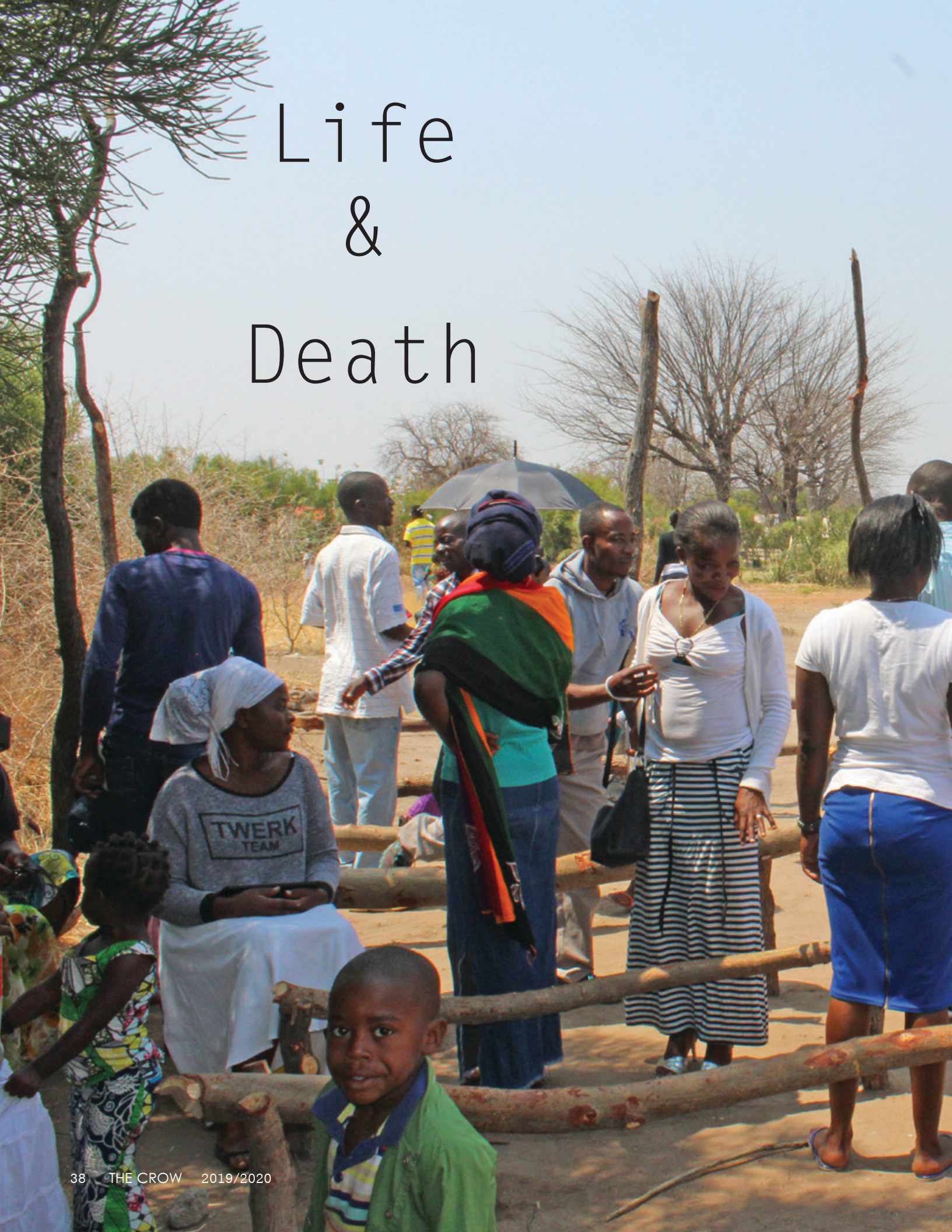
**Magazine Writing** (JRN 413): An intensive writing seminar/workshop with a focus on developing the creative voice and how to apply literary conventions to journalistic writing. A detailed examination of the roots of New Journalism, creative non-fiction, literary journalism, self-directed journalism and the freelance environment.

**Indigenous Peoples and the Press** (JRN 480): This course investigates the fairness, accuracy and inclusion of Indigenous representations in the media. Topics range from under-representation, under-reporting of Indigenous issues, media cultural imperialism, framing from the "romantic Indian" and "the Hollywood Indian" to the "criminal Indian" and difficult reporting challenges and alternatives.

For more information call 306-585-4420 or visit:

[www.uregina.ca/arts/journalism](http://www.uregina.ca/arts/journalism)

# Life & Death

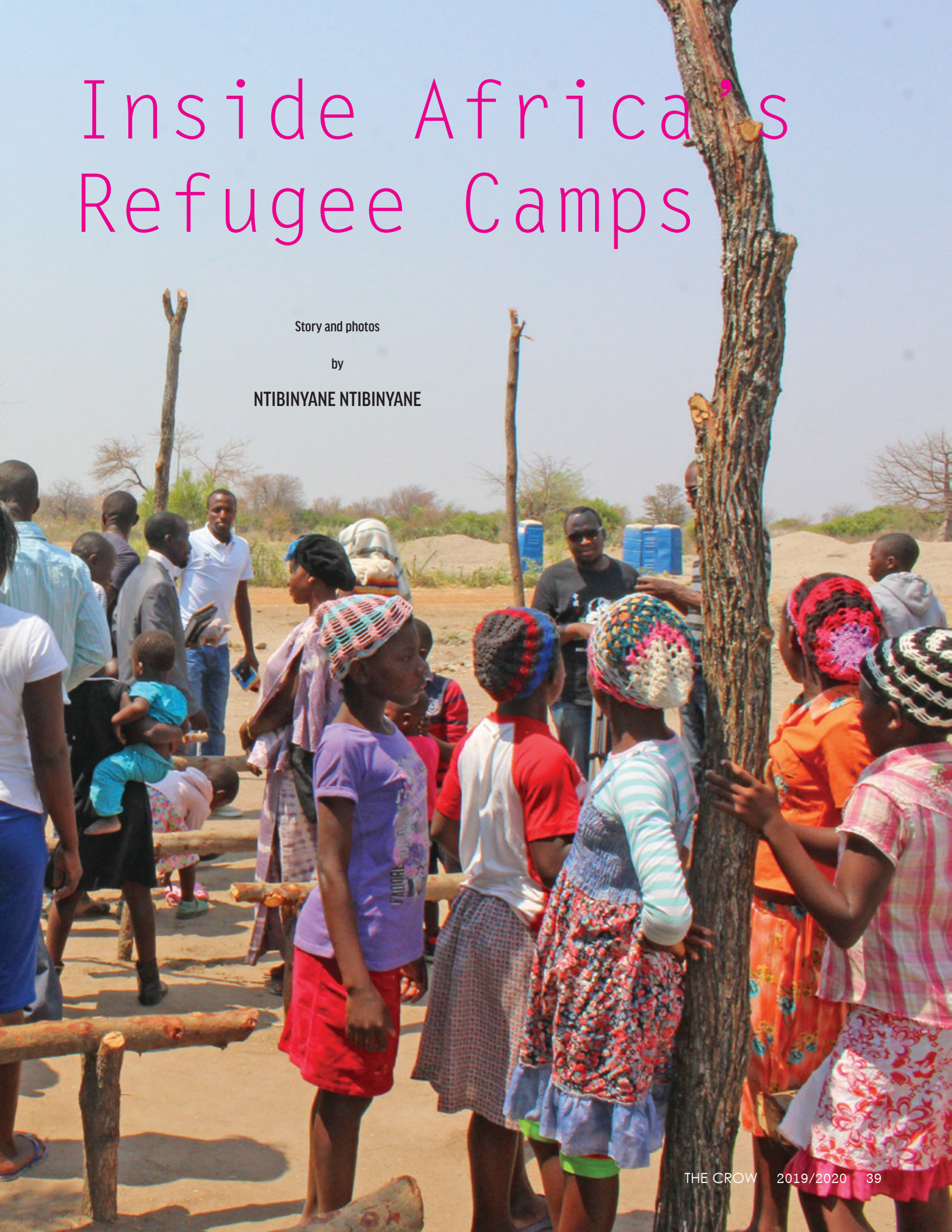


# Inside Africa's Refugee Camps

Story and photos

by

NTIBINYANE NTIBINYANE



**O**n the dusty ground of an unoccupied field, a dozen shoeless boys play soccer with a ball made from plastic waste, and goal posts fashioned from tree branches. When they score, the children celebrate like soccer superstars.

Not far from the playground, hundreds of green and white scout-style tents are lined up in rows. A row of identical portable sky-blue latrines is visible in the foreground. The adult inhabitants are sombre, stoic and withdrawn as they carry out their daily chores. Some patiently line up with canisters to collect water at the sole standpipe. Welcome to Dukwe Refugee Camp in Botswana, a typical African refugee camp.

“I sometimes think that people don’t understand what we are going through,” says Steve Manu, a 32-year-old father of two from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Manu has spent most of his adult life moving from one refugee camp to another in Africa. He is not convinced that the world has any idea what he and his fellow refugees have experienced.

Manu’s lament is humbling and on point. Few people around the world understand the daily tribulations that refugees experience in Africa. Of the 7.7 billion people in the world, there are 68 million displaced people, of which 25.8 million were refugees in 2018. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 26 per cent of the world’s refugee population is in Africa.

I grew up in Botswana, a stable and prosperous country that is often referred to as Africa’s success story. We have not experienced the kind of political or economic strife that forces people to seek refuge in a foreign country.

And, like many people, I didn’t comprehend the scale of the human tragedy until, as a journalist, I spent two weeks living in a refugee camp. For the past few months, I have sat down with refugees in two different continents, Africa and North America, to hear their harrowing stories of resilience and struggle.

**T**he year was 1980. A decision had to be made. It was the decision of whether to leave war-troubled Uganda or face the marauding and vindictive government-backed forces. The former option was the only one that made sense.

A year earlier, Idi Amin, one of Africa’s most brutal dictators, had been deposed from power by Tanzanian military forces supported by Ugandan rebels. The event was supposed to have brought peace to Ugandans, but, for some, it meant the beginning of systematic persecution and a life in refugee camps.

Residents of the West Nile province, Amin’s home province, were forced to atone for the dictator’s brutality, many with their lives. The new rulers of Uganda considered everyone from the West Nile province Amin’s de-facto supporters and enemies of the new government. Hundreds were killed, houses were burned, and thousands were displaced. A 1981 New York Times article called these senseless murders “the cult of killings.”

At the height of the persecution, all of the tribes that made up the West Nile province sought refuge in Sudan (now South Sudan). The West Nile province was left uninhabited and in ruins. In the melee, 20-year-old Ponziano Aluma and seven of his family members began a long, painful trek into Sudan. Led by his mother, the family entered Sudan with the hope that this was a temporary arrangement and that they would soon return to Uganda to con-

tinue with their lives.

That didn’t happen. After living in makeshift huts and even sleeping under trees in Sudan, the family decided to seek asylum in a refugee camp operated by the UNHCR. The family was given two makeshift tents and limited food rations. Aluma remembers entering the refugee camp with the hope that things would get better in Uganda and that he would soon return home to pursue his advanced secondary school studies. For two years, the refugees lived in a state of hopelessness.

“People started to suffer from purposelessness. People who were in school didn’t have a school to go to. People who were employed didn’t have jobs. Family units started breaking up. The consequences were not very good. There was a lot of drunkenness. There was a lot of very unhealthy lifestyles. Children started engaging in risky lifestyles, orgies, and parties.”

Then, in 1982, tragedy struck. Aluma lost his common-law wife and unborn child during childbirth. She hemorrhaged during labour, which he blames on poor medical facilities within the refugee camp. The trauma was the lowest moment for Aluma. He started working as a teacher volunteer in a school that was set up by refugees in the camp and in 1984, the UNHCR sponsored him to do a one-year teacher training course in Sudan. When he returned, he became a salaried junior secondary school (junior high) teacher. With his salary, he was able to support his extended family.

Finally, with the help of the United Nations and the World University Service of Canada, Aluma was awarded a scholarship to study in Canada. He arrived in Regina in January 1987, where he pursued studies in finance and accounting at the University of Regina.

**A**luma remembers how he felt when he learned that he would be going to Canada. For the first time, euphoria and optimism masked the pain he still carried from the sudden death of his wife and child and the trauma of being a refugee.

“I was excited. I was coming to a great country. It was like I was going to heaven. In my mind I was coming to the land of the rich and my troubles would go away. All white people I met in Africa were friendly and I assumed that everyone who is white is friendly as well,” says Aluma, a tall, bespectacled, and genial man, speaking in the comfort of his home in Regina.

He found that his optimism was misplaced, as the heaven that Aluma dreamed of turned out to be something else.

“For the first time, I got to experience racism. In Africa where I came from there was nothing like racism. We have tribalism, but it had nothing to do with colour,” he says, pauses, and continues, “You know, coming here was different. Insidious racism was rife. People thought less of me. That caught me by surprise.”

Gesticulating with his left hand to make his point, Aluma adds, “You know, when this is happening you don’t know what to do and how to respond to these acts of insidious racism. So, some of us never acted on these forms of racism.”

“It took time. One of the things I figured out over time was that while these things were happening there were pockets of good people. Not everybody is racist. Some people as white as snow had good hearts.”

Racism was not the only thing that troubled him. As reality sunk in and the dream of heaven faded, he was forlorn. He fell into severe depression for 10 years.



“I suffered depression for a long time, to the point where I asked myself, ‘Why did I come here?’ It took a long time. I had to get into counselling.”

Counselling helped, and after 10 years, Aluma says he was able to assimilate into Canadian culture and make Canada his home. Now a father and published writer, Aluma is also a chartered professional accountant (CPA) working for the government of Canada. At 57, he and his wife are now in the process of adopting his late sister’s orphaned boys from Uganda.

Noah’s story is different. Noah, a nine-year-old refugee boy, and his mother, Mavis (not their real names), are from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and sought refuge in Botswana in 2015. When Noah was six years old, his father, Flomo Lobo, was brutally murdered by a vigilante mob in the DRC following tribal clashes. Noah, together with his mother and his seven-year-old brother, witnessed the death of his father. The murder happened in the village of Luberezi, south of the DRC.

As if that wasn’t enough, the armed soldiers later took turns raping his mother and forced the children to watch the ordeal. “It was horrible. I don’t want to think about it,” says Mavis, as tears stream down her face.

A mineral-rich country, the DRC is adversely affected by incessant conflict and internal violence. It is a country where thousands of women are raped every year, according to the UNHCR, and rape is often used by the military and the militia as a weapon of war.

Shaken by the experience, Mavis and her sons fled the war-ravaged country the day after. They did not know where they were going—only that they wanted to be as far as possible from the place that had brought them such pain and sorrow. The three walked thousands of kilometres on foot for over a month until they reached Botswana’s borders. They entered the country through an ungated point of entry and immediately reported their presence in the country to the police.

For Mavis, Botswana was a perfect place to hide from the vicious tribal vigilantes that murdered her husband and raped her. The peace and tranquility associated with Botswana was the reason she chose it as her refuge and a potential place of permanent residence for her family. “It was heaven we dreamed of,” says Mavis. But something strange happened the day after the family arrived in the country.

The three were sent to a prison facility in the city of Francis-

town—not a refugee camp or a detention center, but a full-fledged prison facility for illegal immigrants. Mavis was separated from her two sons. She was kept in a female cell, while her sons were taken to a male cell where they shared facilities with hardened convicted criminals, some serving long sentences.

Noah recalls the first day he was separated from his mother. “We thought it was a temporary separation, but we were shocked when we were forced to share cells with older men. Some, we were told, were imprisoned for murder,” says Noah, who recounts his tale sitting next to his mother.

For the three years that Noah spent in prison separated from his mother, he was sexually molested by inmates. His mother, detained in the female detention cells, did not have any idea what he was going through.

“I was worried that I was separated from my children, but I had no idea that one of them was being sexually assaulted,” says Mavis, wiping away tears.

Mavis and her sons were not the only asylum seekers at the infamous prison facility. Between 2011 and 2017, the government of Botswana had imprisoned over 700 asylum seekers, mainly from the DRC, whose only crime was to seek political refuge. In 2017, following a successful high-court application by human rights activists and lawyers, the asylum seekers, including Mavis and her sons, were moved to a highly-protected refugee camp in the northern part of the country.

It was a happy reunion for families that had been separated for years by the heartless policy of the Botswana government. Fearful of vengeance from the government, Mavis and her sons eventually left Botswana for Namibia, where they continue to live in a refugee camp.

“This is very emotional. If I cry, forgive me,” says David Flomo, a former refugee from Liberia, as he prepares to recount his experience as a former child soldier and refugee.

It was January of 1990. Sixteen-year-old Flomo was excited about meeting his grandparents and relatives in Guinea for the first time, after many years apart.

In the company of his uncle, he left Monrovia for Nzerekore, a city in the southern part of Guinea. The two countries, Guinea and Liberia, share not only a border, but also have similar cultures, tribes, language, and strong historical roots. His father was born in Guinea but was now a Liberian citizen.

**David and other boys on the bus, some as young as 10 years old, ticked all the boxes. They were young and healthy. The adults, however, including David’s uncle, did not meet the requirements. They were all executed moments after the bus was ambushed.**



Opening spread: The Dukwe Refugee Camp in Botswana. Above: David Flomo, a lecturer at the University of Regina, was 16 when Liberian rebels forced him to become a child soldier. Right: Ponziano Aluma spent six years at a refugee camp in South Sudan before resettling in Canada.

During the journey, the mood in the bus was jovial, as more than 70 passengers talked and laughed, but a few kilometres before crossing the border into Guinea, tragedy struck. The bus was ambushed by heavily-armed rebel soldiers.

A month earlier, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, a guerrilla movement led by warlord Charles Taylor and backed by the government of Ivory Coast, had launched a guerrilla offensive on the northeastern part of the country. The guerrilla attacks would later become the basis of the first Liberian civil war. While many people on the bus were aware of the guerrilla incursion, no one expected an ambush in the middle of the forest.

Flomo and the rest of the passengers were herded out of the bus and, within seconds, they were all captives. The rebels were not interested in adults but in young boys, to join them and fight the government forces. Flomo and other boys on the bus, some as young as 10 years old, ticked all the boxes. They were young and healthy. The adults, however, including Flomo's uncle, did not meet the requirements. They were all executed moments after the bus was ambushed. Flomo and the other boys were to become child soldiers.

They walked hundreds of kilometers on foot to the Ivory Coast and the rebel militia's camp, where they received military training and indoctrination, were taught how to kill, and sent to the battlefield a few weeks later. The boys were told that they were not rebels but freedom fighters, fighting for a good cause. At the camp, Flomo was helped by members of Charles Taylor's family, who were his neighbours in Monrovia. "I received better treatment because some of them knew me from Monrovia," recalls Flomo.

But that did not stop him from going into battle.

Three weeks after arriving at the camp, 16-year-old Flomo cleaned and oiled his automatic AK-47 and readied for battle. But Flomo and the other soldiers were sent, not to face the enemy on the battlefield, but to terrorize and loot villages in Liberia. In the process, the young soldiers came face-to-face with government soldiers. Unprepared rebels died during the stand-off, and Flomo still remembers the events vividly. He takes a long pause, and continues, "A lot of my friends died. We were young and we had no idea what we were doing. We only carried guns and had no idea how to target or shoot someone."

When it became clear that his comrades were being slaughtered en masse, Flomo and a few others did something that put their lives in great danger. They retreated. For the rebels, retreating from combat was an act of cowardice and could be punishable by death. That day, however, they lived to fight another day. A few days later, when the boys were preparing to be sent into battle again, Flomo did the unimaginable. He refused to go.

"I told them that this is not something I want to do." For this act of defiance, Flomo nearly paid with his life. "Guess what happened to me? I got shot. I got shot in my right leg by my commander to teach me a lesson," he says, pulling up his trouser leg and exposing a large scar just below the knee joint.

Because there were no medical facilities in the camp, the same commander who shot him used an AK-47 bayonet to remove the bullet that had lodged in his leg, without anesthesia. "Imagine the pain I went through as he did that," says Flomo, chuckling gently. After a few days, the wound got infected with maggots and affected other parts of his leg.

Worried that his situation was getting worse, the commanders allowed him to go to Abidjan, Ivory Coast's capital city, to get medical treatment. At the hospital, Flomo found a way to escape from the watchful eyes of the rebels. After a few days of living on the streets, Flomo was able to get in touch with his family members, who managed to fly him from Abidjan to Monrovia.

When Flomo reached Monrovia, the rebels were already approaching. Thousands were displaced and fled to different parts of the country. Those with money escaped to neighboring countries. Alone on the streets of Monrovia, Flomo spent weeks hiding from the rebels. A breakthrough came, however, when a cargo ship arrived carrying peacekeeping forces organized by the regional body, the Economic Community of West African States. When the ship appeared, thousands of people forced themselves on board.

To get into the ship, Flomo and scores of others had to swim. "It was risky, but we swam and clambered on. We had no choice but to take the risk," he says. Many others did not make it. "We watched many others drown before they could reach the ship. It was horrible."

Onboard, Flomo was relieved that he was out of danger, at least for now. The ship then left for Accra, Ghana. "You want to know what we were eating on the ship?," Flomo asks. "Nothing."

In Ghana, Flomo learned what generosity was. When they arrived, the government and citizens of Ghana had organized food. "You can imagine how we reacted when we first saw food after days in the sea. We wanted to kill each other," he says, with a peal of light laughter.

They were later taken to a refugee camp, where Flomo spent a year. The camp was at Gomoa Budubarum, about 40 kilometres west of Ghana's capital, Accra. At the refugee camp, Flomo began life as a refugee. "The good thing was that we were given food and were safe from the rebels. I didn't know where my family was, but I was happy that at least I had escaped Liberia alive."

Living in a refugee camp, Flomo says, did not allow him to mourn and reflect. "One of the outcomes of living in a refugee camp is that because you live among people who are all traumatized, you don't have the opportunity to mourn the loss of your friends or family. And you don't have the opportunity to understand how traumatized you are. You are always operating in adrenaline mode."

With the help of good Samaritans and a former school teacher living in the United States, Flomo completed his secondary school studies in Ghana. He completed his first degree from a Kenyan university before going to the United States for his master's studies in social work.

He would later reconnect with his mother and his three siblings in 2000, after nine years. Flomo, now a social work and justice studies lecturer at the University of Regina, broke down in

tears as he remembered the day he reunited with his family. He had returned to Liberia for his undergraduate field research in 2000, and his sister decided to take him to Guinea, where his mother had fled in 1990.

"Oh man...", he says, shaking his head, before covering his face with his right hand. "It was painful. She couldn't believe it was me," he says between tears. For nine years, his mother had resigned herself to the fact that he was dead. She had used all her savings to hire investigators in an attempt to locate her son, but to no avail.

"She initially refused to let me get into the house. Because we arrived at night, she thought I was a ghost." After she performed a superstitious ritual that involved pouring a white powder all over his body, he was allowed to enter the house.

"According to this superstitious belief, because I did not disappear when they poured the powder [on me], I was a real human being," he explains.

In the course of his ordeal, Flomo says he found that while people can be brutal and evil, the world is also full of decent men and women who helped him to become who he is today. A husband and a father of three, Flomo is also involved in philanthropic causes aimed at improving the lives of young people in Liberia.

Back at Dukwe Refugee Camp, men and women are soaking in the morning sun. It is Sunday. Scores of refugees, neatly dressed, are attending a service at a makeshift church adjacent to the tents. The open-air church is built with tree branches. Poorly arranged hand-hewn logs serve as the boundary fence, and logs pinned to the ground serve as seats. This is not your usual church.

There are fewer Bibles and musical instruments, but the exuberance in worship is abundant. In a trance, some lifting their hands with eyes closed, they sing in Swahili: "Moyoni, moyoni. Nitempata Yesu, moyoni. Moyoni mwangu" (My heart, My heart. I have found Jesus, in my heart. In my heart). In refugee camps like this one, religion is what keeps


many refugees not only hopeful, but sane.

"If it wasn't for the church, I don't know where I would be now. I am sure I would have killed myself," says 25-year-old Pacific Ibochwa. "But there are times, when we are extremely down, that even the Bible is not good enough to comfort us."

According to the Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center (RHTAC), refugee populations commonly suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, generalized anxiety, panic attacks and adjustment disorder.

Aluma, Noah, and Flomo are but a representative sample of millions of refugees in Africa with similar experiences. They are the living casualties of Africa's political instability. Through perseverance and resilience, Aluma and Flomo got a new lease on life. They resettled in Canada where they built new lives. But for Noah and millions of other refugees, the search for a better life, and for peace, continues. 🐦





Most people go the other way when they see a tornado coming. With his truck and his camera, Chris Chittick heads right into the


# Eye of the storm

Story by

JAYDA NOYES

Photos courtesy

CHRIS CHITTICK



When you were young, what did you want to be when you grew up? A doctor? Astronaut? Teacher? Superman?

Or, if you were one of the students who listened to Chris Chittick give a presentation to your school, maybe you dreamed of becoming a storm chaser.

When Chittick was only 18 years old, he ran towards extreme weather situations for fun with his friends. For the past 21 years, he has been professionally capturing North America's severest storms on camera. He describes his job as "extreme journalism."

"Maybe it's not someone else's fun, but for me, it's super fun being on the road with some good friends, chasing Mother Nature, which is unpredictable," said Chittick. "It's a blast. I can't see myself doing anything else."

Chittick is the videographer in a team of three, working alongside Greg Johnson and Ricky Forbes, on the television series *Tornado Hunters*. They are based in Regina, Saskatchewan.

One of his favourite duties is the drive to the storm site.

"Say, we've got to get to Nebraska. It's like a 15-hour drive. That whole drive you're like 'alright, this is what's going to happen. What if this happens? What if that happens? What's your ideal shot? What are you hoping to see?' So it's like adrenalin. Kind of getting pumped up."

The team's storm chasing truck, named Flash, is their protective shield and is sure to stand out in the parking lot when Chittick drives to get coffee or groceries. Its pitch black colour is broken by an ombre into neon orange.

"It's got an external roll cage [so] in case we have a rollover, we'll be somewhat safe: kind of like a bullet proof shell around the outside for flying debris. That's our number one concern," he added.

**“A lot of people think a tornado makes all of these erratic movements and goes crazy. It might zigzag a little bit, but it stays in the same general path.”**



While it is certainly an adrenalin rush, the public tends to think running towards a tornado or hurricane is a lot more dangerous than it really is.

“Once the trail’s on the ground, a lot of people think that it makes all of these erratic movements and goes crazy, but it’s not,” he explained. “It sees the same general path. It might zigzag a little bit, but it stays in the same general path, so if you have a good road network out in front of you, like in front of the storm, then you can really manipulate it so you get the shots.”

When asked “What’s the most memorable chase you’ve ever been on?” Chittick smiled, clearly giddy about his job.

“The cheesy answer is every chase is the most memorable chase,” he said, going on to describe a whole raft of extraordinary encounters with tornadoes.

In El Reno, Oklahoma on May 31, 2013, Chittick captured the largest tornado in North American history. At its peak, the funnel covered a width of 4.2 kms. Another memorable moment occurred on April 27, 2011.

“There was a super outbreak in the state of Alabama, and there were like 370-something-odd tornadoes...I saw four EF5s in that one day,” he said. EF5 tornadoes, which are the most intense, have winds of over 200 miles per hour.



Above and below, Chris Chittick in his storm-chasing truck.



Chittick is compassionate when storms hit populated areas, doing what he can to help stricken neighbourhoods.

“As a human being, you can’t just be like ‘Oh, I’m going to shoot the footage.’ You have to stop. You have to help. The human factor comes into play and then you have to do what you can to try to help others, even if you give someone a bottle of water or do a little first aid,” he explained.

Chittick is a popular guest speaker at elementary and high schools where he not only talks about his unconventional career, but storm safety. The students seem to love it, especially grades six and under, when, typically, the principal has to cut short questions

because the kids get so excited.

“Have you ever seen *Sharknado*?” is a typical question he gets after his presentations. *Sharknado* is a film about shark-infested tornadoes which hurl the marine predators to staggering altitudes.

Chittick returns home from chasing tornadoes to his wife and two children, a three-month-old daughter and a three-year-old son. He said his family is supportive, although hunting down storms is not their forté.

“I took my wife storm chasing once, as a date. And she’ll never go again,” he said. “She thought we were driving too fast. It was just too ridiculous.” 🐦

# MINIFIE

Lecture

2019

**We don't need a voice.**

**We need more microphones.**

presented  
by

**CONNIE WALKER**

The School of Journalism was honoured to have Connie Walker present its 2019 James M. Minifie Lecture on March 12, 2019. Walker, originally from the Okanese First Nation in Saskatchewan, is an award-winning investigative reporter and former host of the CBC News podcast, *Missing & Murdered*. In 2018, *Missing & Murdered: Finding Cleo* won the inaugural Best Serialized Story award at the Third Coast International Audio festival. The podcast was also featured in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Rolling Stone*, *Vulture*, *Teen Vogue*, *Chatelaine* and was named one of the Best Podcasts of 2018 by Apple Canada. In 2017, *Missing & Murdered: Who killed Alberta Williams?* won the RTDNA's Adrienne Clarkson Award and was nominated for a Webby Award. Walker and her colleagues at CBC's Indigenous Unit won multiple awards including the 2016 Canadian Association of Journalists' Don McGillivray investigative award, a Canadian Screen Award and the prestigious Hillman Award for its "Missing & Murdered: The Unsolved Cases of Indigenous Women and Girls" interactive website. Herewith, Walker's lecture in its entirety.



Thank you all so much for coming out tonight. I am so happy to be back home here in Treaty 4 territory. As many of you know, I am a proud member of the Okanese First Nation. I grew up on File Hills about an hour east of here. I live in Toronto\* now with my family. But in many ways, Saskatchewan still feels like home to me.

And as my family knows I'll take any excuse to come back for a visit. But I have to say that I'm especially grateful to be presenting the 38th Annual Minifie lecture to talk about the importance of Indigenous representation in newsrooms today.

And it's great to be back here at the U of R. After I graduated from high school I enrolled here. Back then it was called the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College at the University of Regina. I have a lot of great memories from my time here at the U of R and it's nice to see so many familiar faces here tonight.

I have to admit I was not exactly a model student during university. I probably spent more time at the Owl than at the library. Before I embarked on my journalism career I thought I would be best remembered for something terribly embarrassing that happened in my first year here.

I came to university with my cousin, Shelley Walker. We were inseparable growing up. We were the same age—we were best friends. And in university, we shared an apartment. We took every class together in our first semester except for one. We basically spent every waking moment together.

Still for some reason, while she was at her stats class, I decided to go to the computer lab and write her an email. This was back in 1997, when email was still new and exciting. My email to Shelley was all about a boy I liked, about the party we had gone to the previous weekend and what an amazing time it had been.

I didn't need to write her that email. She was there. And we'd probably already talked about it a hundred times. But still, email was exciting so I laid it all out there on the screen. My biggest crush. My hopes. My dreams. But when I went to send it, I didn't just click on her name. I accidentally also clicked on SIFC ALL. And my email/diary entry went to everyone in the entire college. All of the students. All of my professors. All of the staff read about my latest crush.

A few people even wrote back, including the dean of academics, who encouraged me to take more time with my studies. And for years after, when I met new people at the college or took a new class, people would say, "Oh! You're Connie Walker." So let's just say I've spent the last 19 years trying to be remembered for something other than my first emails.

I'm going to be 40 in two weeks and that means I have lived half my life away from home. But in some ways it feels like I've never left Saskatchewan. So many transformative moments in my career have brought me back here. The communities and people in Saskatchewan are among those I'm still fighting to better represent in my work.

I've been at CBC for almost 19 years. And for the last eight years, I've been almost exclusively focused on reporting on Indigenous communities. I feel like I've had a front row seat to what has been a transformative shift in Canadian media. There has never been this level of interest or appetite for our stories. On all platforms—local and national. I've been to journalism conferences lately where

there's been a lot of discussion about how tough journalism is getting as a profession.

We're expected to do more with fewer resources. We need to file for TV, radio, online and social media. We're fighting against fake news and struggling to reach audiences where they are. And all that is true. But still, I'm excited about the future of journalism. Because there is a hidden world in Canada that we are beginning to uncover. For the first time ever there is a demand for stories that reveal the truth about the realities that Indigenous people live in Canada today. There is a need and an appetite for understanding about how our shared history has shaped those realities and I'm here today to encourage you all to help take on those stories.

I'd argue that transformation was made possible by a sustained and supported effort in newsrooms to improve Indigenous representation. Indigenous representation in newsrooms doesn't just lead to more coverage but to better coverage. And better stories. It improves our ability to meaningfully connect the dots for people who might not be aware of how or why colonization and residential schools are still having impacts in our communities.

I want to talk about that transformation. I want to unpack it and talk about where we go from here. But first I need to start at the beginning. To understand how far we've come, I want to tell you about the first time that I thought of becoming a journalist. I was in Grade 12, living on reserve and going to school in Balcarres when I first heard about Pamela George. Pamela George was a young First Nations mother of two. A daughter and a sister. She was from the Sakimay First Nation but she lived here in Regina. She was killed in 1995. Two years later, stories about her murder trial dominated the headlines. But most of the stories I read were not about who Pamela was. The headlines called her a quote "prostitute." I didn't feel like they explained that much more about her life or who she was.

I felt like I knew more about the two men who were charged with her murder than about Pamela. I'm sure there are many people here tonight who also remember Pamela George, the trial of Alex Ternowetsky and Steven Kummerfield, and the details of her death that were heard in court.

At the time, I remember wondering if there are any First Nations journalists in the newsrooms covering the trial. But I doubted it. After Kummerfield and Ternowetsky were acquitted of second degree murder and convicted of manslaughter, I wrote something for our high school newsletter. It was the first time I really became interested in the idea of becoming a journalist. But I never imagined that two decades later I would be standing here after spending years covering the issue of violence against Indigenous women.

A few years into university, I joined the Indian Communication Arts program at SIFC and after finishing my third year, I got a four month internship at CBC Newsworld in Halifax. I was excited about the impact I could have and my future in journalism. But I quickly realized that having just one voice in a newsroom might not be enough.

Back then, it seemed the only time Indigenous stories made the news was when there was a crisis or a conflict. The summer I was an intern the fisheries dispute between Mi'kmaq people on the east coast and the non-Indigenous fisherman in Burnt Church, New Brunswick, was making national headlines.

I was in Halifax working for CBC Morning as a chase producer. I had booked the chief of the Indian Brook First Nation to come

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\* Walker has since left CBC to host a new show at Gimlet Media.

on the show the following Monday to talk about the latest development in the dispute.

I was pretty green at that point so I remember my senior producer at the time grilling me about the details. Did I tell them where to go? she asked. Yes, I said. It was an early morning show so did I double check with them about the time? Yes, I said, he knows. And then she said to me, “Because you know those Indians, they’ll go out drinking all weekend and they won’t show up on a Monday morning.”

It was a busy, crowded newsroom. I remember looking around to see if anyone else had heard what she said. But no one was paying attention to our conversation. I froze. I didn’t know what to do or what to say. I was an intern. What could I say? So I said nothing. Unfortunately, that wouldn’t be the last experience I had with racism in the newsroom. I didn’t stay in Halifax for long. A few years later I was working on a national news program based in Toronto.

I have always been interested in telling stories about Indigenous people. But for a long time there wasn’t much interest in the newsrooms that I worked in. I remember I pitched my first Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) story in 2005. I wanted to compare and contrast two cases of missing women that I noticed had gotten very different treatments in the media.

Both women went missing within a month of each other in the summer of 2005. The white woman’s disappearance made national and international news for weeks. But the Indigenous woman barely even got local coverage.

At the time, I worked on a national current affairs show whose mandate was to examine the role of media. So I thought my story would be a perfect fit for our show. I went to pitch it to my boss but before I could really begin, she held up her hand and said, “This isn’t another poor Indian story, is it?”

Again, I was the only Indigenous person in my newsroom. And I didn’t feel like there was anywhere to turn to for support. Ten years later, I was part of a unit at CBC News dedicated to helping tell stories about MMIWG. And every national news organization in the country was doing similar work. So what changed?

Three things. The shift to digital. And the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. And the increased representation of Indigenous people in Canadian newsrooms. In 2012, 8th Fire aired on CBC Television. It was a four part documentary series exploring the relationship between Indigenous people and the rest of Canada over the last 500 years. But—and this is key—it was from the Indigenous perspective.

This was significant for a number of reasons. It was the first time in my career that this much time and resources—four hours on

prime time CBC TV—was dedicated to our stories. The directors of the program were all senior people from the documentary unit. But each team also had at least one Indigenous producer and our host was Wab Kinew.

We interviewed Indigenous celebrities, academics, leaders. We tried to be inclusive of the diversity in our communities—First Nations across the country, Métis and Inuit. In English and French, from coast to coast to coast.

But it was also important to me that we hear from and about people whose experiences that I recognized. So, we came to Saskatchewan and met a young First Nations mother of six who was defying the odds, who was going back to school. We travelled to the site of the former Muskowekwan Indian Residential School to chronicle the work of the TRC who were searching for the graves of children who died in residential schools.

I remember the night the first documentary aired. I still get goose bumps when I think of the feeling I had hearing people with native accents sharing their truths, telling their stories on prime-time television for the first time.

It was also one of my first times live tweeting. I was at home in Toronto on my BlackBerry—remember those? And with my laptop on Twitter and Facebook. Wab was in Winnipeg, online too. And we had a social media producer who was also helping to spread the word.

We had no idea what to expect. But it was safe to say that by the next day, all of native Facebook was buzzing. People were commenting on the documentary and using the hashtag #8thfirecbc to talk about it. And it felt like we were tapping into a community online that was just waiting to be engaged with.

Our success on social media was unexpected and led to the creation of CBC Aboriginal. CBC Aboriginal was a digital space on cbc.ca. A place to aggregate stories from across all of CBC News to create a hub for Indigenous content online.

This was in 2013 after Idle No More. And the big news stories in Indigenous communities were starting to be covered by the news service. But it was still largely focused on crisis and conflict.

We wanted to supplement the news with original content that better represented Indigenous life. Not just the diversity of nations across the country but the diversity of experiences. We knew that Indigenous communities were more than the crisis or conflicts that still dominated the headlines. Our theory was that there was an audience out there that we were missing—one that was interested in our stories.

We started with one reporter and one producer. We had a deal in the beginning where we could use five or six other mostly Indigenous reporters across the country for one day a month. We



Connie Walker delivers the 2019 Minifire Lecture at the University of Regina.

Photo by Brandon Harder

were successful from the outset. There were times that our small team had more page hits than whole regions—small regions—but I think it's safe to say we exceeded expectations.

Our success was largely due to the connections we as Indigenous journalists were bringing directly from our communities. The perspectives we were offering were different from the status quo. It was a much needed and refreshing change.

One of those stories was called Boys with Braids. It was about an eight-year-old boy in Saskatoon who was being teased at school because he wore braids. He told his mom he wanted to cut his hair. And she was torn because she wanted him to feel proud of his hair and his culture and not to be ashamed of it.

We put a call out to the community and were soon flooded with photos of other Indigenous boys who wore braids. And the story became a celebration of culture and community. Today, the unit is called CBC Indigenous and it has a team of 10 dedicated reporters across the country, all focused on reporting on Indigenous issues for online and social. That growth was because for the first time we had metrics, proof that there is an audience interested in these stories.

Because for a long time, traditional platforms like TV and radio relied on mostly white editorial leaders who assigned stories and

necting the dots between the legacies of residential schools and my own family.

I took an Indian studies class at SIFC that focused on oral history. One of our assignments was to interview someone, to record their oral history. I decided to interview my grandfather, Harry Bellegarde.

I was very close to my grandfather my entire life, he and my grandmother Margaret Walker helped to raise me. And I lived with them at various points throughout my childhood. We spent a lot of time together. I felt like I knew a lot about my grandfather.

But it was while interviewing him for that assignment that I found out for the first time that he went to a residential school when he was six years old. He didn't tell me much about his experience there. Except for one story.

He said that when he was a boy, before he was sent to residential school, he was also very close to his grandfather. He said they were always together. He said he remembered going with him when he went to play cards and sometimes falling asleep under the card table.

My grandfather told me that sometime after he was sent to residential school his grandfather died. He said he wasn't allowed to go home for his funeral. And he remembers crying underneath a

**Create space for empathy. As journalists, we need to realize that Indigenous people have been misrepresented or underrepresented in mainstream media for decades. Things are changing, yes. But there are still so many widely held stereotypes and harmful tropes we need to be aware of.**

chose lineups and decided what Canadians were interested in.

For example, I remember one of our early stories for CBC Aboriginal gained interest from the network. So, I was asked to file for The National. I remember being in the field and calling the desk to have my story vetted and they said they were pushing my story back a day.

They already had an Indigenous story that night. And they couldn't have two, right? I was slightly annoyed but mostly grateful that I had another day to work on my story. It didn't take long for that attitude to change. Exactly one year later, the final event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was held in Ottawa.

The TRC coverage led The National for five days in a row and on the day that the final report was released the first 15 minutes of the show was all TRC coverage. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission had been travelling the country for six years hearing the stories of residential school survivors. But that was my first time covering a TRC event.

That day in Ottawa chief commissioner Justice Murray Sinclair told a room packed with survivors, intergenerational survivors and media that there is not a single Indigenous person in Canada who has not been touched by the legacy of residential schools.

In many ways, I felt that day was a huge milestone in my career. The growing awareness and appetite in mainstream media for Indigenous issues made the TRC's final event the biggest story in the country that day. But it was also one of the hardest days in my career. Because although I grew up part of a close-knit family, it wasn't until I was a student here at the U of R that I started con-

necting the dots between the legacies of residential schools and my own family.

It was difficult to maintain my composure at work that day but overall I was grateful to be covering the event. I believe that my lived experiences as a Cree woman and my family's experiences allowed me to provide the context needed to help understand the impact of the days' events.

For my story for The National that night I interviewed a woman named Vivian Ketchum. She is a survivor of a school near Kenora, Ontario. She told me: "I don't want my story to be treated as a souvenir. When you get a souvenir, you spend a lot of time looking for it and once you get it, you spend a lot of money. Then you show it off to a lot of friends like we're doing here, and then after a while it's going to gather dust and then put away and be forgotten. I don't want that."

I also wanted to ensure that the work of the TRC helped us deepen our understanding about how those legacies were continuing to impact Indigenous families and communities. In particular, the TRC final report linked the legacies of residential schools and the violence that Indigenous women and girls face in Canada today.

Indigenous women are three times more likely to be a victim of a violent crime. We are seven times more likely to be murdered. In Saskatchewan, 60 per cent of missing women are Indigenous, despite the fact that we make up less than six per cent of the total population.

In 2015, following a report by the RCMP that found more than 1,182 missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls across the country, CBC Aboriginal launched a database focusing on unsolved cases.

We found more than 230 Indigenous women and girls with families still left without answers. Our team included two Indigenous researchers who had the difficult jobs of reaching out to families to conduct in-depth interviews. We interviewed 111 of their families and helped tell their stories. Our goal was to raise awareness about MMIWG but in a respectful way that didn't only focus on the violence that resulted in their death or disappearance.

We wanted to show that like Pamela George, every single woman and girl has a family that loves and misses them. The profiles in our database included photos, anecdotes of favourite memories. And for many, it was the first time their story was covered in the media.

Along with the launch of the online database, we filed a series of stories on individual cases. Leah Anderson was 15 years old when she was found murdered in her fly-in community of Gods Lake Narrows in Northern Manitoba. Her murder remains unsolved. Her family told us she was a gifted artist and performer who loved her life.

Amber Tuccaro disappeared outside of Edmonton in 2010. When her family reported her missing they were told by RCMP that she was probably just out partying and to wait a few days. Actually, I just got an email today that the RCMP is planning to deliver a formal apology to Amber's family next week. Her young son Jacob is being raised by her mother, Tootsie Tuccaro.

Individually they were heartbreaking stories. But collectively it painted an even more tragic picture. If you read through more than a handful of profiles you began to see patterns emerge. So many of them were involved in the child welfare system. Many experienced childhood sexual abuse and had families that were residential school survivors.

We did a few short documentaries. But most of our coverage was comprised of short news stories. That changed once we got a

tip about Alberta Williams's unsolved murder. Alberta was 24 years old when she was found off of the highway of tears in Northern British Columbia in 1989.

it in Canadian history. But I might not have realized that if I hadn't attended a journalism conference in Saskatoon called Reconciliation and the Media.

It was organized by Indigenous journalists Mervin Brass and Betty Ann Adam a few months after Colten Boushie was killed on a farm in rural Saskatchewan in 2015. In the room were editorial leaders from newsrooms across the province. The goal? Building relationships for better news coverage.

At that point, I was writing Episode 4 of the first season of our podcast and I remember being more than a little stressed. We were a few weeks away from our launch. And I was worried that I couldn't really afford to take a day away to attend the conference. But I'm incredibly glad that I did. Because what I learned there changed the way I reported on all Indigenous issues.

One of the keynote speakers that day was Dr. Marie Wilson, one of the commissioners of the TRC. She was an incredible speaker. I encourage you all to listen to her lecture. It's available on their website. A former journalist, she understood the pressures we were all under in daily news. But still, she chastised us all to do a better job when covering Indigenous issues.

She said: "Don't skip the context. That is the biggest trap I know for all working journalists when time is of the essence. If you can't explain it in this story, explain it in the follow up. Explain it. When did this story actually begin?"

I thought about Alberta's story. When did it actually begin? Long before her death in 1989? Even before she was born? In a way, her story, and every MMIWG story that I've ever covered began long before they died. They began with a part of Canadian history that many Canadians do not know.

They began with the Sixties Scoop. With residential schools. With the Indian Act. With colonization. She said: It's our job as journalists to connect the dots. To provide that context. To help people understand. A part of our shared history that we were not taught in schools.

Now that you know it, you will see that intergenerational trauma shows up in our modern reporting all the time—whether we're

**Another thing that is important for non-Indigenous journalists to understand is how trauma is interwoven into the lives of Indigenous people. I've come across this in all of my reporting on MMIWG. Whatever story you're there to discuss is likely not the only traumatic thing that family has dealt with.**

reporting on violence against women or the over-representation of Indigenous men, women, girls and boys in the justice system or the child welfare crisis in Indigenous communities. But too often, we don't take the time to connect the dots.

I finished writing Episode 4 after hearing Marie Wilson's words. And it included the history and legacies of residential schools in Canada. And I used voices and testimonies played at that final event of the TRC in Ottawa.

We also used the podcast to explain the history of the relationship with the RCMP and Indigenous communities. We told how they were often the ones who took children from their families

and communities and sent them to residential schools. Or when children ran away from residential schools it was often the RCMP who forced them to return.

We explained how that mistrust could lead to people not wanting to cooperate with the police during Alberta's murder investigation to explain why decades later, people who never even spoke to RCMP were willing to talk to us about what they had seen the weekend that Alberta was killed.

And after listening to nine episodes of our podcast about Alberta Williams the number one feedback we got from people was that they really appreciated us connecting those dots. We heard from people who said they had no idea this ever happened in Canada. But also people who said they thought they understood residential schools but, after listening, came away with a different, deeper understanding. Even people who worked with Indigenous communities every day—social workers, child welfare workers, health care workers.

So when we set out to do season two of the podcast that was in the front of our mind. We knew that we wanted to dig into the issue of child welfare. And not long after that we heard about the story of Cleo Semaganis. Cleo was a young Cree girl from Little Pine First Nation near North Battleford, Sask., whose family says she was stolen, murdered and was now missing.

Before I talk about Finding Cleo, and our process, I have spent a long time trying to illustrate the importance of having Indigenous representation in newsrooms. Some of you may be wondering: Is there room for non-Indigenous people to tell Indigenous stories? Yes. Absolutely I believe there is a need for non-Indigenous journalists to also take up these stories.

I've never worked with an Indigenous producer or senior producer in all of my time at CBC. Every story that I've reported has been a collaboration. And I've been so fortunate. Especially in all of my MMIWG reporting to be working with the same team. Marnie Luke has been my producer and Heather Evans has been our senior. And for *Finding Cleo*, Jennifer Fowler joined our team.

None of them had done extensive reporting on Indigenous issues before. In fact, it's not uncommon for someone to work for decades in Canadian media and not have ever covered a story about Indigenous issues. And although Marnie, Jen and Heather had limited experience with this kind of reporting they were integral to the stories that we told.

I encourage all non-Indigenous journalists to follow their example by being open to learning about Indigenous communities and mindful of the sensitivities that exist when covering these stories.

I have a few tips for non-Indigenous journalists interested in reporting in Indigenous communities. Create space for empathy. As journalists, we need to realize that Indigenous people have been misrepresented or under-represented in mainstream media for decades.

Things are changing, yes. But there are still so many widely held stereotypes and harmful tropes we need to be aware of. Again, I think of Pamela George. What could we have better understood about her story? If we had looked beyond her being a sex worker?

In *Finding Cleo*, we used the central mystery of Cleo's story to help people understand the Sixties Scoop and how the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system is linked to the legacy of residential schools. We knew that part of understanding Cleo's story would be understanding her mother

Lillian's story.

Lillian Semaganis was a mother of six who had all of her children taken away by child welfare authorities. She was also a residential school survivor sent to a residential school in Prince Albert when she was seven years old. We found her residential school records that showed Lillian never got to go home for seven years. She was listed as in residence every Christmas break and all summer long.

A TRC report says the school she attended was known as a "problem establishment." It was overcrowded and nutritionally inadequate. The year after Lillian arrived, two teachers resigned from the school and wrote a letter condemning what they saw.

They said children were whipped and that their colleagues considered the children dirty breeds and sub-human. The teachers said three boys who tried to run away from the school were put in a makeshift "prison." They said the children at Lillian's school were quote "made to bear the brunt of senile sex instincts...and exposed to the most brutish forms of behaviour."

It was important for us to help people understand what Lillian went through in her life that would have affected her ability to parent her kids. We needed to create space for empathy for her.

Another thing that is important for non-Indigenous journalists to understand is how trauma is interwoven into the lives of Indigenous people. I've come across this in all of my reporting on MMIWG. Whatever story you're there to discuss is likely not the only traumatic thing that family has dealt with.

As a journalist, conducting trauma-informed reporting can affect your entire approach for a story. For *Finding Cleo*, we got in touch with all of Cleo's siblings. In my first phone call with April, Cleo's younger sister, I asked if she remembered Cleo from when they were kids. She said, no, that she almost had no memories from childhood because she had undergone years of electroshock therapy to treat her bipolar depression. She started to go on to explain some of the trauma she experienced as a child. But I stopped her.

I didn't want her to feel compelled to tell me. I worried it could be re-traumatizing for her. And did she have the supports in place if that was the case? We talked a little more and then I hung up the phone and raised my concerns with our team.

We were conflicted about whether we should interview April at all. Her adoptive family was concerned about her well-being and were not sure if this quest to find answers about Cleo would be helpful for her. We didn't want to do anything that could jeopardize her health or safety. But April was adamant that she wanted to participate. And she wanted to do whatever she could to help find answers about Cleo. We wanted to balance our concerns for her health while respecting her agency.

In the end, with the support of her family, we decided we would interview April. We spent an entire day with her. We didn't want her to feel rushed or pressured. And we didn't ask her to tell us about any of her childhood trauma. Learning about Cleo's siblings' experiences in the child welfare system was important for our story. But this was her life and that was the most important consideration.

Another tip for all journalists is to find a meaningful way to connect the dots for your audience. Instead of shoe-horning a history lesson into your story, try to find a natural way to include it.

In Episode 3 of *Finding Cleo*, Cleo's brother Johnny starts describing a painting he saw online that reminded him of his childhood. It was Kent Monkman's *The Scream*. And it's a depiction of

a horrific scene of mounties and priests and nuns apprehending children on a reserve.

It reminded Johnny of what he experienced when he was apprehended as a child. It was a natural moment for us to talk about the history of the Sixties Scoop and residential schools.

Another lesson that I recently learned was about being a storyteller versus story taker. This is something that my talented colleague Duncan McCue writes about in his guide called *Reporting in Indigenous Communities*, which you should all take a look at. He says we need to try to amplify people's voices in our stories and give them agency over their own stories. I haven't always got this right.

At one point in *Finding Cleo* we are back here in Saskatchewan visiting Little Pine, Cleo's childhood home. Within minutes of arriving, we were met by the chief of the community, Cleo's cousin, and invited to a pipe ceremony.

Marnie and I found ourselves sitting in a teepee, taking part in a pipe ceremony, hearing the Cree language with members of Cleo's family. While we were there I thought of Christine, Cleo's sister who reached out to us to help find Cleo.

I realized that what we were experiencing in that moment, the culture, the language, the family, the community, were all things that Christine has been longing for her entire life that so many survivors of the Sixties Scoop talk about.

In that moment, we had become story takers, not storytellers. Christine should have been there. And that informed the way we continued with the podcast. We got special permission from CBC to bring Christine on the next leg of our journey to New Jersey to lead our investigation and find out the truth about her sister's death.

Christine was the person knocking on the front door of the retired police officer who was the first to respond to Cleo's death. And she was the first to read the police report that contained letters written by Cleo. We stepped back to give her agency in her own story. And we were all better off for it.

In fact, I believe that podcasting is one of the best formats for telling stories about Indigenous communities. In daily news, it often feels like we're fighting for seconds. With today's metrics, we know exactly how many people click on a story and exactly how far they scroll. But the reality is it's usually under a minute.

It's the same for social. Videos can't be longer than a minute. And you need to grab people within the first five seconds. But there is a growing audience out there that is willing to put on headphones and listen to a single story for hours. *Finding Cleo* was told over 10 episodes for over eight and a half hours. And it's been downloaded over 18 million times.

By using the popularity of the true crime genre we were able to reach people who didn't even know that they were interested in Indigenous issues. Or attract people who came for the mystery but stayed to learn about Canadian history.

And it's not just *Finding Cleo*. In-depth, investigative reporting on Indigenous issues like Tanya Talaga's *Seven Fallen Feathers* or Ryan McMahon's podcast, *Thunder Bay*, is reaching wide and diverse audiences.

As incredible as these changes and developments are there is still more work to be done. The best way to increase Indigenous representation in newsrooms is to hire more Indigenous people. But that alone is not enough. They must be supported, resourced and empowered. And it will be worth it.

We bring with us a unique set of lived experiences and perspectives that are crucial for understanding the realities that Indigenous people live in Canada and how that connects back to aspects of our shared history that we're just beginning to understand.

I'll leave you with one last story. Last October, I attended a journalism conference in Chicago, the Third Coast International Audio festival. It was the most diverse conference I've ever been to and it made me hopeful about the future of journalism.

Third Coast is known as the Oscars of audio. On the night the awards were handed out a number of the winners were people of colour. It was incredibly powerful to see example after example of people who were supported and empowered to tell their own stories being recognized for their work.

One of the winners was a producer named Sayre Quevedo. He said, "If you think your job is to make the world a better place and a more just place and a more humane place, then help us because we're not the voiceless looking for a voice. We're the voices looking for a microphone. If you have that power, please share it with us." And I hope those words and that message will inspire you as much as it has inspired me. Thank you. 🐦



**JAMES M. MINIFIE** was a crusading journalist and outspoken advocate of truth and the freedom to tell it. Born in England in 1900, his family immigrated to Canada in 1909, homesteading at Vanguard, Sask. He attended Regina College, the University of Saskatchewan, Oxford (as a Rhodes Scholar) and the Sorbonne in Paris. Minifie's career as a journalist began in 1929 when he joined the staff of the New York Herald Tribune as Paris correspondent. Along with contemporaries George Orwell and Ernest Hemingway, Minifie covered the Spanish Civil War and Mussolini's rise to power. During the Second World War he reported on the Battle of Britain from London, where he lost an eye from a German bomb blast while watching an air raid. After the war Minifie began his long association with CBC as Washington correspondent, first on radio, then on television. The Minifie Lectures, hosted by the University of Regina's School of Journalism, salute that courageous reporter from Vanguard, Sask., and what his legacy represents: the importance of Canadian journalism to our democratic society.

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Penny Smoke covers Grey Cup festivities as an intern on assignment with CTV Regina in 2013.

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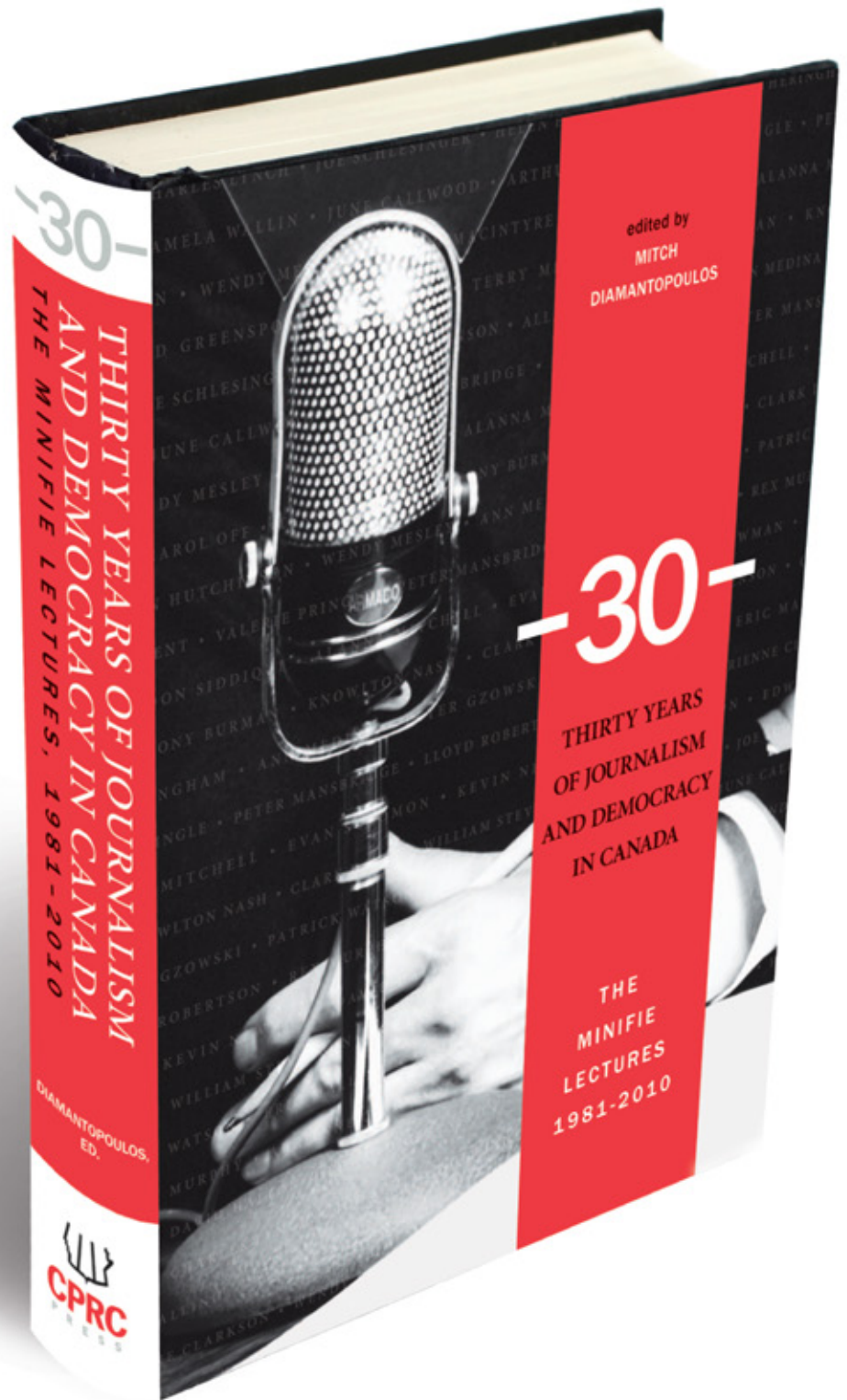
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# PORTHOLES

where the evil comes through

HARRISON BROOKS in conversation with exorcist, Father Stephen Bill

Father Stephen Bill is a tall man with white hair, a strong handshake and a slightly awkward, but friendly, smile. He pretty much fits the bill for how I imagine a priest should look.

But as I peel back the layers of Bill's personality, I discover the things that make him different from other priests in the city. As surely as Bill talks about his faith in God, he also talks about the presence of evil, and the spirits that can torment a house, or lead to the possession—or obsession—of a person.

"Things like drug parties, practising New Age, using crystals. Things like that are what we call portholes where the evil comes through," says Bill, as he explains the different ways people can be tormented by spirits.

At his church in Regina, Bill and I spend an hour sitting in comfortable brown leather chairs in the corner of his office talking about everything from his faith, to his high school days,

had strange things happening within them.

Bill recalls a family who would wake up to find all their kitchen furniture stacked up in the middle of the room, and another family who called him about a basement door in their new house that, despite not being locked, felt as though somebody was holding it closed from the other side. These strange occurrences stopped after Bill performed house blessings.

Hearing stories like this—or the one Bill was told by an experienced exorcist who once saw a possessed woman "pick up a solid oak chair with one hand and throw it across the room" when exposed to a consecrated host—would make the skeptical side of most people's brain go into overdrive, but not Bill's.

He doesn't have a single doubt that what he's doing is necessary and helpful. In fact, he doesn't even seem the slightest bit nervous about his future responsibilities as an exorcist—just excited.

## **Father Steve has already experienced his fair share of the **supernatural**. About four times a year, he gets calls to do house blessings at homes that have had strange things happening within them.**

to the presence of evil, while the hum from his vintage coke machine fills the room.

He recounts how, back in high school, he struggled to choose between joining the RCMP or the seminary; and how he bought a bright-red Chevrolet Camaro before realizing the absurdity of a priest driving a sports car. He raffled it off as a fundraiser for the church.

The thing that stands out the most about Bill is his faith: so strong and so sure. Bill's faith, which he calls a "conscious decision to trust the Lord", remains even in times of doubt.

Bill's faith is most evident when he talks about the subtle ways the Lord guides our decisions and the way God is "speaking to us all the time." Looking back now, Bill recognizes that in his life "everything was pointing towards the priesthood.

"I would feel energized when I was ministering people. I felt the energy of the Lord, the grace of the Lord. This is where God was calling me."

Just as he has been his whole life, Bill is once again being directed by the Lord. Only, this time, it is towards something a little more out-of-the-ordinary: exorcisms.

Bill travelled to Chicago for the first part of his two-stage training in exorcisms in February 2020. By the time he completes his training in the fall, he will be the only priest trained in exorcisms in the entire Regina diocese, which covers the bottom half of Saskatchewan.

Although he has yet to become a certified exorcist, Bill has already experienced his fair share of the supernatural. About four times a year, he gets calls to do house blessings at homes that have

"Being able to participate in this, as a priest, is invigorating in the sense that you really could tell another person to go to hell and mean it, but in a good way," Bill says, with a laugh.

Obsession is the most common way the devil influences people, he contends.

"Lots of times, they're obsessed in the sense that they can't get thoughts out of their head.

Sometimes it's sexual thoughts, sometimes it's hurting themselves or others," says Bill.

Possession, on the other hand, is more rare and dangerous and it occurs when "the person has given their will over to the evil one."

When asked why he isn't scared or nervous about this, Bill simply states: "This isn't the movies," before going on to explain how the premise of a struggle between good and evil and the uncertainty of who the victor will be is fabricated by Hollywood.

"God already won. Christ defeated the power of Satan by giving his life on the cross," says Bill. "You go into that room with the knowledge that the evil one is already defeated and I'm going in there to stamp him out."

As we wrap up the interview, Bill and I walk over to the chapel to take some pictures. As he shows me the holy-water sprinkler that he will soon be using while performing exorcisms, all I can think of is my own doubts.

I have never believed in spirits, evil or otherwise. But hearing someone speak so passionately and with such conviction about their experiences with spirits gives me second thoughts. Do they exist or not? I'm not sure I want to find out. 🐦

Open to all  
students!

# PHOTO

# J U R N A L I S M



Brandon Harder, a 2017 School of Journalism graduate, on assignment for the *Regina Leader-Post*, where he now works as a staff photographer.

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# STEP AWAY FROM THE CONTROLLER

Gaming enthusiast **ALEC KONKEL** gives up gaming for a week and lives to tell the tale.

Okay, so I have a habit: a video-games habit. On average, I can spend upwards of 16 hours a week just sitting in front of my screen, controller in hand. “Why don’t you try not playing games for a week?” someone suggested. I felt my stomach drop a little and, in a gesture of unease, instinctively crossed one arm and covered my mouth with one hand. A whole week without video games? I thought it would be pretty easy to pull off until a colleague pushed it even further. “Stay away from anything game-related on the internet,” he said, “or it’s not a challenge.” I couldn’t shake the feeling that this would not be as easy as I thought. I’m not an addict, right? I can go a week without my games, right? I found myself dreading Monday night, and the promise of a week of no gaming. What the hell would I do instead?

#### **Tuesday**

I found myself setting up the rules for how I would proceed. Obviously, I would not allow myself to play any games. No Call of Duty, no Resident Evil, nothing from my large library of games on either my PC or PS4. But what about online content about games, like YouTube videos? I decided that I would allow myself to watch gaming news but not videos that contained game-play footage in the form of a walk-through, a how-to-play video, or a play-through of a game.

#### **Wednesday**

I began second-guessing myself, wondering if I had gone far enough in my quest to quit gaming. I felt worried and guilty about the parameters I had set for myself. I started watching old Disney cartoons to help take my mind off gaming. But I could not escape the seductive blink of the light on my PS4 in standby mode.

#### **Thursday**

I was beginning to get a bit antsy, and found myself nervously drumming my fingers on whatever surface happened to be close by. I couldn’t stop thinking about spawning into a game of capture the flag in Call of Duty. I clearly needed something else to occupy my time, other than cartoons. I went to the library and took out some books for an essay I was working on, including an 800-page tome on the fall and Russian occupation of Berlin. That should keep me occupied for a bit, I thought. I began reading online articles on my chosen essay topic, and felt confident I was making progress in my quest to quit the gaming habit.

#### **Friday**

Every time I sat down at my computer I felt an urge to open up

my gaming program and play. There were, thankfully, two things holding me back. The first was that I knew I could achieve my goal if I just kept my head straight. The second was something many gamers suffer from: boredom. I have played just about every one of the 200 games I own, at least once or twice. After a single playthrough, the novelty tends to wear off, with a few notable exceptions.

#### **Saturday**

I began feeling there were fewer and fewer things to occupy my time. I kept busy though, going out with family for an early lunch, doing a bit of shopping (no not for games!), and volunteering at my church.

#### **Sunday**

Went to church, which helped take my mind off gaming. It was the beginning of Lent, a time of self-denial before Easter when Christians strive to give up something cherished, just as I was. But after I got home, I began to feel as if I was in a fever dream. Maybe I really am an addict, I wondered, and am going through withdrawal-like symptoms. However, my fingers were tapping less urgently now.

#### **Monday**

I had made it! The end of my torment. I found myself looking at my watch every five minutes just to see how close I was to midnight, the official end of my week without games. In my own mind, I’m not an addict. There have been times when I have been able to put the controller down for months at a time. But like a heroin user returning to the needle, the moment my week was up I went straight back to gaming, scrolling through the many, many games I own, wondering which one to play first. 🐦

# GOAT'S HEAD STEW & A BIKE NAMED SUE

Story and photos  
by  
CÉLINE GRIMARD



“You’re not in Kansas anymore Dorothy,” B’yauling Toni confided to his bike in the middle of the Gobi desert. On a dirt road etched with camel, goat and dirt bike tracks, the Saskatchewan teenager was thousands of miles from the nearest town. Freezing and looking for shelter, his bike, Sue, was his only company.

“Sue’s a hard worker, just quiet. Doesn’t really complain a lot. Does what needs to be done, which really helps,” he says.

Toni is the youngest person in the world to have cycled across the globe, a feat that took him 206 days and across 16 countries, including Europe, Mongolia, Russia, China, and Australia.

On the way, the teenager confronted theft, malnutrition and extreme weather conditions while averaging 20 km/h and 200 kms per day. No map in hand, Toni made it back home, but not without a few hiccups along the way. With a strict budget of \$10 a day and only a compass to guide him, he will always have the best stories to tell at the bar, or on the California road-racing track where he now trains.

“The idea of having just your whole house on your bike—you can go anywhere, do anything. That’s just absolute freedom,” Toni says. “You just show up and you just start riding in any direction, any road, just go and that’s, like, pretty amazing.”

Growing up with a single dad and two siblings, he was homeschooled for most of his life and experienced a lot of independence at a young age. Cycling was an economical form of transport for his family, as a car was too expensive. “We never owned a car, but we played a lot of sports,” Toni explains. “So, yeah, we would cycle wherever we went.”

The teenager from Saskatoon got his first taste of long-distance cycling at the age of 12 when he rode with his dad to Vancouver.

On a block full of monotonous suburban-style houses, there is one that sticks out. Camouflaged by tree branches, the property greets visitors with a stop sign spray-painted with the phrase: “Treaty 6 Territory, Lest We Forget.” Behind the plywood that holds the sign are four well-used bicycles. The front door is slightly ajar. A warm smile, accompanied by a thick mop of dark brown hair, peeks out to greet me. “Hi, come on in,” says a tall, thin kid with a big goofy grin, and eyes that have crossed continents.

Toni’s home is silent and empty. There are paintings on the wall by his sister, a shabby, brown upright piano, and a surplus of plants suffocating the large window. Along the white window sill, the paint has been worn down to reveal the underlying brown wood. The cracks are rooted in the cushion of the faux leather sofa in the living room. He leads me into the kitchen. Toni laughs at one of my first questions.

“Were there any interesting smells on your journey?” “Smells?” he asks, with a quizzical look. “The smell of roadkill. That smell. It’s universal,” he says. His nose wrinkles as he recalls the stench. “It’s really nasty, it’s hard to explain. It’s like a flesh kind of thing, a little bit of iron smell.”

His epic journey began the day after high school graduation when he headed towards Halifax with the new touring bike he had bought with money from working in a bike shop. He had bags strapped to the front, back and bars between the wheels.

From Canada, he flew to Eastern Europe, passed through Russia

then dipped into Mongolia and China before hitting up Australia and New Zealand. For seven months, he slept on the streets, in parks, on benches and in the wilderness, zipping his sleeping bag up around his head with no wiggle room. The teen spent a total of \$32 on accommodation in seven months. He lived off just \$10 a day. “[I would] throw in a kilo of peanut butter, two loaves of bread, a kilo of cheese,” he says.

Toni sits at the round wooden table, one leg crossed underneath him, describing the meal his Mongolian host family prepared for him. To his left, there is a bowl of fresh lemons, oranges and apples. Toni’s expression is twisted in distaste. He is recalling the decapitation of a goat whose head was tossed into a pot and eaten as a delicacy.

“One guy holds the horns, they pass the head, and you just scrape and eat off of the face,” Toni says. “There was no plates or anything. It’s community goat head.” Fresh goat tongue is a taste you don’t forget. “The tongue is high-quality meat, but the problem is nothing is washed there,” Toni says. “It was mid-mouthful when it was killed. So, there is still all the grass and stuff in the mouth. So, I picked it off before eating the tongue. Literally, all you can taste is the smell of goats breath.”

Toni wears an earnest smile that reaches up to his tired eyes, the look in them years beyond his youthfulness, as he describes the most difficult day of his journey.

Glowing in the corner of the wood-fashioned kitchen is a red Buddhist lamp. Toni entered Mongolia from the Altai Mountains range, at the beginning of winter. He battled with snow melting during the day and spraying and freezing both his bike and himself.

“I would just have my knife and cut it off. Ride, cut it off, ride,” Toni says, explaining how his chain and cassette would build up so much ice it would force him to stop.

“My hardest day,” he describes, “was when I first entered Mongolia. It was super cold, and I wasn’t completely prepared. Anyways, here I am wet. It’s a couple of degrees below zero, and it starts to freeze

over. Eventually, it’s so cold that you don’t have the ice problem because everything is ice. It’s not sticking to your bike anymore,” recalls Toni.

Eventually he found an outhouse in the middle of nowhere. “I stood behind it. I just marched on the spot to stay warm and ate a package of ramen noodles,” Toni recounts.

But finding cover from the strong windchill wasn’t his only challenge in the frozen desert.

“The biggest problem was actually my feet,” Toni says. He was wearing running shoes that had clips. “So, you have a paper thin insole, a metal plate, a metal cleat and then your wet sock.” As his body was creeping closer to gangrene, a frozen circle began to form on the bottom of his feet, sucking all the heat out of his body.

Toni ripped through his backpack looking for anything to help insulate his shoes. “I’m scratching my head ‘like what am I going to do?’”

“Eventually I had my bright idea. I got my Swiss army knife out, and I cut off all my hair. Because I had nice, long hair. And I stuffed it under the insole of my shoe.” Toni takes his last sip of breakfast tea.

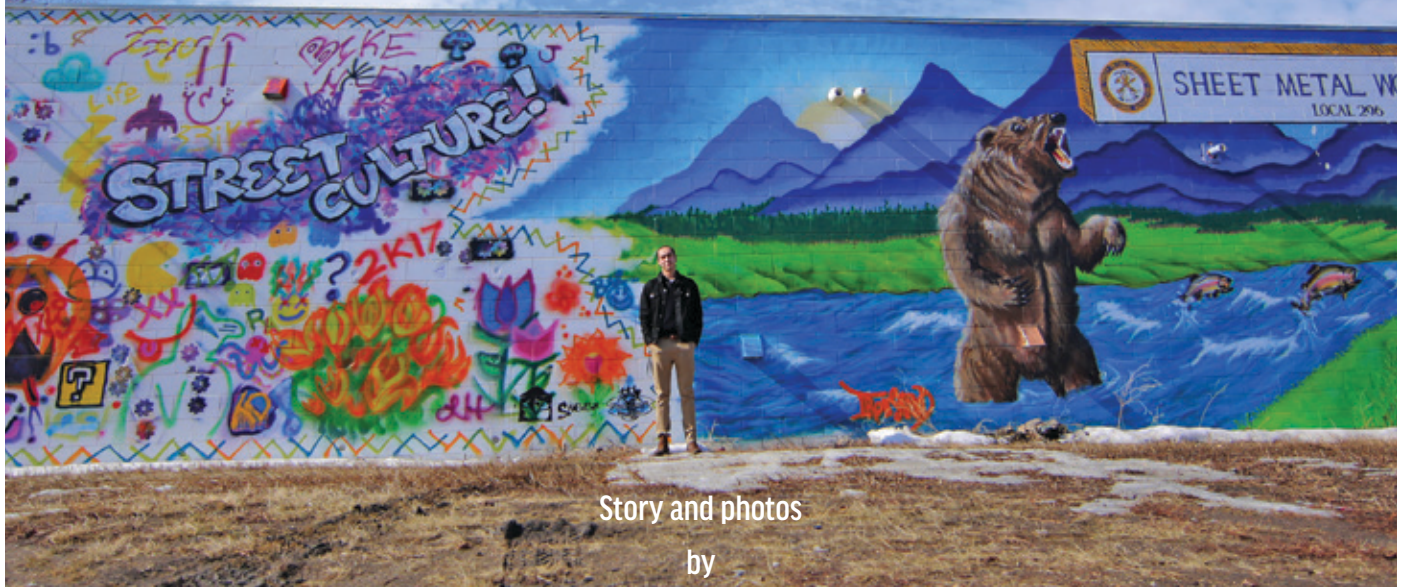
“The haircut you see right now hasn’t been edited since the Gobi desert. It’s just grown out a bit,” he laughs. 🐦



B’yauling Toni, left, and his trusty bike seat, above.

# A fresh coat

Regina muralists are combatting gang culture



Story and photos  
by

HEIDI ATTER

## Regina's graffiti scene is

growing, but maybe not how you think. Positive graffiti art is starting to bloom, bringing bright colours and scenery to life, and making neighbourhoods feel safer.

Walking through one inner-city neighbourhood, past buildings that are a little worse for wear, you turn the corner to find a mural of a large bear by a river with salmon jumping around. Further to the left, there are more styles than you can count.

"When I was younger, I used to do it—like illegally—a little bit," Benjamin Ironstand laughed.

Ironstand is one of the better-known artists in the Queen City. His works are surreal and authentic, and he incorporates his own culture into his work.

The Indigenous artist walks up to his bear and river mural with a smile of pride. There is a lack of representation of Indigenous people and often it is negative or stereotypical, he said. But he reflects his culture through the design and colouring of his work.

"It's important to me that other Indigenous people, specifically youth, can see their culture represented. I wanted to represent Indigenous people and our art, which is just beautiful," he said.

Ironstand was contacted by Lannah Hall when she was hoping to start an art program at Street Culture Kidz, an organization that helps at-risk and homeless youth.

"I was like, super excited," Ironstand said. He signed on quickly.

"It's super enjoyable to make the art," Ironstand said. "Spray painting, it was like a huge learning curve for me because I'm used to working with tiny brushes, right, where I can really get the detail in. But then with the spray paint it's, like, a wider sort of spray. It's

super-fast compared to painting."

Growing up, Ironstand did not have Indigenous art to look up to or a strong sense of his identity as an Anishinaabe person. He talked to his grandparents about their own experiences and started educating himself.

"That's sort of like a history of colonization, residential schools," he said. "My family didn't talk about that a lot, you know, until I started to explore it."

He started reflecting his culture in his murals. One of the first of these was with Street Culture Kidz in an alleyway. Kids walking by used to stop and ask questions about his work.

"I'd give them the spray can or give them tips, or tell them what to do—let them help me. Because I wanted them to feel like they owned the space," he said. "I didn't want it to be just myself making the art."

The Street Culture shelter sees a variety of youths, some of whom have multiple barriers, with mental health issues, addictions or trauma.

When they come into the shelter from out of the area and see the gang graffiti, it can make them feel as though they are in a dangerous place. But having positive mural art around provides a sense of safety and creativity, says Hall, programming manager.

Not only that, art has the capacity to open young people up, allowing their mentors to view them through a different prism.

"The main hope was to get some engagement from youth who were actively involved in street life and transient lifestyles," Hall said.

The aim was also to challenge the gang graffiti that was becom-



ing overwhelming in the area, Hall said.

“We talked about how murals are the best offence to gang graffiti or random graffiti in the community,” she said. “We haven’t seen any graffiti over those murals,” Hall said. “That tells me that it’s being effective in what we’re trying to do [to] reduce that.”

“It’s nice to be noticed for something great and beautiful,” said Shayna Stock, executive director of the Heritage Community Association. “As opposed to being noticed for some of the crime or gangs that are prevalent in our neighborhood as well.

“Inner-city neighborhoods often get a bad reputation for being scary or violent. And when young people are growing up in neighborhoods like this, it can be a source of shame.

“For [youth] to be able to find a source of pride and connection to the place that they live, I think is really, really important.”

Jamie Reynolds is a 34-year-old mother of two, balancing her artistic work with another job and being a single mom. She is the first Artist in Residence at the Heritage Community Association and has been working on an indoor mural at Street Culture’s 11th Avenue emergency shelter.

Her painting overalls have small splatters of paint all over, and her curly hair bounces when she laughs.

Reynolds has been teaching clinics with kids and is planning more murals with young people who have been helping her to paint a sky with animals at the shelter.

Reynolds did her degree in arts as a ceramics major at the University of Regina, but did not pick up a brush until six years ago. But when she had her son, she found clay was simply not as portable and affordable as painting.

It was through Ironstand that Reynolds made the transition from paper to walls. He asked if she could help him paint the teepee liners at the First Nations University of Canada.

“It was fun, being able to translate my skills to a very large canvas. Because those things are, like, six foot by like 50-something feet,” she said.

The next outdoor mural Reynolds is hoping to paint is at the Salvation Army near downtown Regina. It has an L-shaped wall

that is facing an empty lot. To help, she is hoping to recruit Mexican-born artist Roberto López López, who is known for painting murals inspired by the Aztec and Mayan style.

Another artist wants to see all of Regina lit up with murals, and he is starting by trying to change the older generation’s attitude to the art form.

If you’ve seen the large flowers that cover the Ukrainian Co-op from floor to roof, then you will know of the artist Jez 11: real name Jeremy Diewold-Brenner. While growing up in a heritage neighbourhood near downtown Regina, Jez started drawing.

“I’ve been doing it forever,” Jez said. “My parents have old pictures of me when I was like one or two painting for hours and hours.”

His small apartment is littered with artwork where a corner is dedicated to a small studio space with papers covering the floor to catch any paint that falls. For Jez, art is an evolution helping him to understand different parts of life.

“It’s less about making a certain image. It’s more I need to get something off my chest,” he said. “I learn from art and I apply it to my life, and I learn from life and I apply it to my art.”

Jez hopes to open a gateway to more murals in the city by showing the older generation how graffiti art can be full of expression but still true to the neighbourhood.

At the Ukrainian Co-Op, when he was painting, a number of older people stopped and chatted.

“There’s a lot of old ladies who would walk up and be like ‘This is awesome!’” he said.

There is a misconception about graffiti sometimes, he explained. People often think it is by teenagers who are angry at the world, when it’s just 12- to 18-year-olds trying to figure out their place.

“Being able to make kids in the community try something different with their life, or have a little bit more hope in some bad situations ... that’s the best I can do,” he said.

“We have more than enough walls in the city,” Jez said. “Like magic really, is what I see it is. You try to change the world around you.”



**Jamie Reynolds, artist in residence at the Heritage Community Association, poses beside her work. Left: Benjamin Ironstand in front of one of his murals.**

# We ever tell you the one about the young folks living in an old folks' home?



Story and photos

by

CÉLINE GRIMARD

**I**n the morning, before the fireplace was lit and the lights came on, a silence cloaked the building. Hushed tones were amplified. Within a few minutes, there would be a bustle of activity as staff rushed to prepare breakfast and start their daily tasks.

At 8:30 a.m.—early for a student—but for my neighbours, that was almost midday. I was 60 years younger than most of my room-

mates. At 24, I lived in an old folks' home, along with my 10-year-old dog, Rory, known as “the grumpy old man.”

My neighbours were Miriam, who kept busy transcribing and interpreting the Bible, (pushing 97, she had a thing for leopard-print tops), and Joan, an 88-year-old great-aunt whose deep wrinkles told a tale of a highbrow life. Joan often gave disapproving looks at my outfits.



Friends and neighbours of the author pose for a photo.

Then there's sweet Alice, with her fluffy white hair, and her quiet husband, Roy, with his sharp, grey hair cut. The lovebirds, who have been married for decades, did everything together. They typically dress in solid colours, and walk about with ski poles. Yes, it was a bit odd living there, but I liked it.

Sometimes funny things happened, and there's the morbid humour the elderly tend to have. I asked one of the regular ladies in the living room how her Christmas had been. She was in the process of doing sudoku, and she replied, "Well, I'm not dead yet."

You may be wondering how a broke university student ended up living in a 5-star home for the elderly. Well, I had arranged to rent a one-bedroom apartment near the university. It was a steal of a deal, with soft yellow walls. But when I turned the key I found layers of dirt and peeling paint covering the floors and walls. A pipe had shifted in my apartment-to-be, lifting the flooring. It was disgusting, unlike the lavish artworks that decorate the pristine walls

of my current home.

Needless to say, moving in with my golden-aged neighbours was a saving grace. As the brochure explained, my new home offered "comprehensive and customized care" which included registered nurses, therapists, a weekly walking club, a book club, game nights and safe off-site church transportation.

I had explained the desperate state I was in. They took pity on me and even made an exception for my dog. I was one of three resident students in my building. In return for 30 hours of volunteer work per month we received \$100 off rent.

Research has found that mixing young and old can be mutually beneficial. In the Netherlands, they've introduced free living in nursing homes for students. But it's one thing to read about the benefits of mixing the generations and another to live it.

There was a sense of community there; a feeling of belonging. When one of our members went down, people know and they

worry. I worried when I hadn't spotted one of my neighbours, who walks the corridors with his ski poles, for weeks.

I made an effort to get to know my fellow residents, like Alice and Roy. They married in 1956. Their eyes light up every time they speak to one another. One doesn't move without the other. Both were born in Regina, but Alice spent most of her younger years out of the country. Just before the Second World War broke out, her father moved them back to the family farm in Japan. They would remain separated until the end of the war when Alice's family moved back to Regina in 1949.

"Those years were kind of a blur," Alice said plainly. On the opposite side of town, Roy was working at his father's tire shop. In his 30s, he went back to school to become a teacher. He revived the amateur wrestling club at the YMCA. "We had quite a few provincial champions," Roy recalled proudly.

He is also a stained-glass artist, taking pieces of coloured glass, cutting them and binding them into a frame. Their apartment was adorned with a few precious panels. Above their dining table were also pieces of art from his aunt in Japan. At the ages of 87 and 89, Alice and Roy still took the stairs and went for a regular third-of-a-mile walk around the large park nearby.

"Doing stairs is more important than walking around the block," Roy said. They started walking in 1978.

Two of the regular ladies I liked saying "hi" to appeared permanently installed in the common room on the couch and in a rustic-chic grey chair.

"She's going to pop out of her bra," said one lady, with a quiver of concern in her voice, as she watched a reality TV show. "Well, that's to make it interesting," quipped the other lady, semi-jokingly.

*The Big Bang Theory* was always blaring on the television, although it came to my attention that only one of the two ladies was actually a fan of the show.

"The news would be nice," said the lady whose hands have never grasped the remote. I inquired why she didn't ask to change the channel. She replied in a soft-lecturing tone, "There's no point in fighting over crap like that. Life's too short for that."

I was curious to meet Miriam because everyone kept telling me I had to. I found the soon-to-be 97-year-old sitting in a wooden rocking chair, dressed in a purple leopard-print shirt. Her first question to me was: "How long will this take? I'm very busy."

Strewn across her thin legs were a notepad and two Bibles. She was busy interpreting different versions of the holy book. However, she also had a hair appointment. That's one thing I learned with these ladies: not to get in the way of their hair appointments. They take them very seriously.

Miriam is Baptist and was a Bible teacher, a profession that took her to 55 countries. Of all the countries she's lived in, her favourites are France, where she lived for 36 years, Switzerland, Germany and Austria. Miriam went to France in 1948, just after the war ended.

"I sailed on the day that Israel was made a nation," she recalled, as if it had just happened yesterday. "I was on a boat that was a converted troop ship, which meant it was not luxury.

"The French had suffered greatly (during the Second World War)," she explained. Her words were carefully chosen as if each had the weight of the world balancing from it. "There was no place to rent because the buildings had been demolished. Everything was rationed. You bought just what you needed for one meal," she explained. "A little piece of meat, a little scoop of butter."

She looked out the window. What different scenery she must have seen. I too felt the loneliness trapped within those grey, concrete walls. We all go through periods of loneliness: students' social lives are non-existent thanks to due dates and little money. My neighbours managed

their finances, but they felt it too. They marked time until the next visit from their loved ones. Their wrinkle-lined faces light up when they see local children bustling about.

A red-haired lady who loved animals made a beeline for my Adog. Her eyes were vacant. She appeared absent in her body. It made me wonder, "Who was she? What was she like as a child? what was her dream?" But, then you see the lady in front of you and realize she wouldn't know.

Living there I learned the power of patience. Patience, when it took 30 minutes longer to go up to my apartment because of all the people who have to stop and ask "How's your baby (my dog)? He's so cute."

Patience, when they had no idea who I was without my dog in tow. Patience, when they knew my dog's name, but not mine. Patience, when my laundry was plopped on top of the washer, and the cycle wasn't entirely done. And, finally, patience, when I found pale pink knickers in the midst of my laundry pile.

Despite the occasional prying eyes, judgmental looks and lingering odours in the elevator, living there certainly had its perks. There was no sign of grunge there, unlike in student residences. My apartment got cleaned weekly. I never had to scrub my toilet or wash my floors once that year! It has been glorious, like one of those commercials when the lady with the long hair opens the windows, and the wind blows in the flowing white curtains. That's how it felt.

I was privileged to live there amongst so many wonderful people. I think society needs to get over itself about big, empty homes so we can start spending more time with each other. I've got used to seeing the flashing red lights of an ambulance. I learned that growing old together is a privilege few have. There were only two couples in the whole home. I believe now that our souls never grow old, just our bodies. And within every adult, there's a person fighting to be young again.

*Some names have been changed to protect identities.* 🐦



**Roy and Alice, neighbours of the author.**



# MINIMALIST FASHION

Make your outfits simpler and your style classier

by

LYNN GIESBRECHT

We're all familiar with those fashion icons who walk around in their \$4,000 sunshine yellow faux fur coats, their neon pink Prada handbags and their red-bottomed **Louboutin heels**. They're infamous for their flashy style and

eye-popping statement pieces. But as a regular person walking down a street that's not in Manhattan's Upper East Side, I do not dress like that. And I would argue that you shouldn't either.

The term "minimalism" has been making waves across North America—in home décor, in lifestyle and in fashion—making less-flamboyant people like myself feel justified dressing in a calmer, classier style. For those who are just now eyeing up the trend, let me give you a crash course in how it works.

Minimalism is all about sticking to the basics. Neutral colours are a must—camels, greys, whites, navies and, above all, black. "When in doubt wear black" is every minimalist's mantra. If you're feeling especially bold, you might venture out into a cranberry red or an emerald green, but bright colours are an absolute no-no.

Although to newly initiated minimalists these muted colours may seem ridiculously tedious, I'll let you in on a secret: When you're able to pair every piece in your closet to create a thousand outfits out of your tiny wardrobe, it's no longer boring.

Seriously. When all you own is neutral colours, you never have to worry about anything clashing. If you can blindly pick a pair of pants and a shirt out of your closet and know they'll match, you've officially joined the minimalistic ranks.

This style also makes it easier to look expensive. You know your favourite silky black T-shirt comes from H&M's clearance rack, but for all everyone else knows it could've come from Nordstrom. But try picking up something as bold as a yellow faux fur coat from Walmart: trust me, we would know exactly where that came from.

Colours aren't the only thing we minimalists keep, well, min-

imal. From cuts to logos, it's all about subtle elegance. Look for clean lines that aren't cluttered up with bling or lace or large graphic designs. And even if you decide to drop a solid chunk of change on a brand name or designer piece, you don't want to look like a walking billboard. Pick a piece with a small, subtle logo or no logo at all. If you want to spice up your look, pick something with an asymmetrical design to create more interest.

Now let's get practical and talk about how to put an outfit together. Here's a tip you've likely heard before: The rule of three. Translation? Always wear three pieces. Start with the obvious two pieces—a top and a bottom—and add a third piece like a jacket or necklace to it.

But there's an extra consideration when you're going minimal. A maximum of one coloured piece is allowed and going colour-free is preferred. Feeling skeptical? Try living it up with a white blouse, a structured black blazer and your favourite pair of black skinny jeans, and then try telling me you don't feel like you just walked out of *BOSS Magazine*.

If you're still looking for a little more flair, try mixing textures. Maybe you think wearing black on black is too basic for you, but I challenge that assumption. A simple black T-shirt with black leather pants and a black faux fur vest creates an outfit that's anything but basic.

But hey, at the end of the day, remember that ultimately fashion is about expressing yourself to the world. If I haven't convinced you that minimalism is the way to go, and you're dead set on wearing your sunshine yellow faux fur coat, then you "do you." 🐦

# HOW TO CHILL

## (and keep your hair)

by

HARRISON BROOKS

In a gift from the universe, I was given a beautiful head of long, soft, dirty-blond hair. But in a sick ironic joke, I was also given a maternal grandfather who went bald at 15.

I am basically a time-bomb for baldness. Prolonged stress, I've been warned, could be the trigger that has me shedding like a golden retriever.

With this horrible fact lodged in the back of my mind, being calm has come naturally for me. I've been as chill as a cucumber for as long as I can remember.

I was unaware of the full extent of my chilliness until, one night, a classmate asked me how I remain so calm about everything. Without budging from the three chairs I was sprawled across, I replied: "I don't even know what stress feels like: maybe I am stressed too."

It was the revelation that my classmate was so stressed he thought he was going to throw up, that forced me to acknowledge the extent of my calmness. At that time, I could not explain how I achieved my natural state of serenity.

The quick explanation—and one that I'm sure author of *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck*, Mark Manson, would agree with—is: "it really helps if you just don't give a f\*ck." Most people can't help but give at least a couple. So, for those seeking advice, here are some things I do to remain calm in stressful situations:

In the same vein as Murphy's Law, my first tip for remaining stress free is closely adhering to Brooksey's Law. Murphy's Law states:

"whatever can happen will happen." Brooksey's Law states: "you can only do what you can do."

It is physically impossible to do more than you can, so there is no sense in worrying about the giant to-do list you might have. Take it one step at a time and you will not only save yourself some stress—or hair—but might even surprise yourself with how much you can accomplish.

The second, and most important, requirement is a complete and unquestioning faith in the "clutch gene." Have you ever sensed that feeling of impending doom when you don't think you have time to get everything done, but end up finishing more on deadline day than the previous three days combined? That's the clutch gene. It's what lets you come up big in the final seconds before the buzzer.

When I talk about having faith in the clutch gene, I'm not talking about a George Michael-dancing-around-hoping-a-girl-calls-you-back kind of faith. I'm talking about a Jesus-take-the-wheel level of faith where you feel like you are spinning out of control heading for certain death and all you can do is let go and hope that a higher power will save you: that kind of faith.

It may not seem to you now that these words of advice will help keep you stress-free. You might actually have increased your anxiety level by reading this. But, take it from me, in the end, you can only do what you can. So, if you get overwhelmed and don't think you have time to finish everything, just sit back, relax and give in to the clutch-ness. 🐦

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