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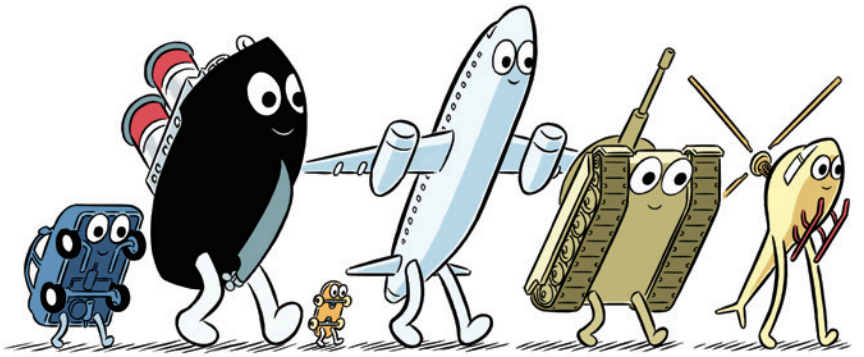
The Childhood Issue

# TADDLE CREEK

THE PREVIOUS GENERATION'S HOT NEW MAGAZINE

THE THIRTY-FOURTH NUMBER



SECTION ILLUSTRATIONS BY ETHAN RILLY

# THE CONTRIBUTORS

Cary Fagan ("Westfalia," p. 4) is the author of the short story collection *My Life Among the Apes,* which was long-listed for the Giller Prize.

Carolyn Smart ("Inside the Telephone Cupboard," p. 7) is a professor of creative writing at Queen's University. She has written several collections of poetry, including *Hooked.* Her next book, *Careen,* will be published in 2015.

Alex Boyd ("Now It's a World," p. 9) co-established the annual anthology *Best Canadian Essays.* His poetry collections include *Making Bones Walk* and *The Least Important Man.*

Hal Niedzviecki ("Here We Are, Charlie," p. 10) has published numerous books, including the short story collection *Look Down, This Is Where It Must Have Happened.* He is the fiction editor, founder, and publisher of *Broken Pencil.*

Julie Cameron Gray ("Dorothy and the First Tornado," p. 13) is the author of *Tangle.* Her work has appeared in the *Fiddlehead, Prairie Fire, Event, Prism International,* and *Carousel.*

Michel Rabagliati ("*Paul dans le nord,*" p. 27) has written several books featuring his character Paul, including *Paul Joins the Scouts* and *Song of Roland,* which both won the Doug Wright Award for best book. The French edition of his next comic, *Paul Up North,* will be published in 2015.

Sarah Meehan Sirk ("Moonman," p. 34) was nominated for the Journey Prize for her story "Ozk." Her work has appeared in the *New Quarterly, Room,* and *Joyland.*

Jennifer LoveGrove ("Dark Red," p. 37) recently published her debut novel, *Watch How We Walk,* which was long-listed for the Giller Prize. Her other books include the poetry collections *I Should Never Have Fired the Sentinel* and *The Dagger Between Her Teeth.*

Catherine Graham ("Kick the Can," p. 39) is an instructor of creative writing at the University of Toronto School of Continuing Studies. Her poetry collection *Her Red Hair Rises with the Wings of Insects* was a finalist for the Raymond Souster Award and the CAA Award for Poetry.

Chris Kuriata ("Only the Bear Survived," p. 44) has published stories in *Blank Fiction* and the *Feathertale Review.*

Shari Kasman ("Special Delivery," p. 47) writes short, medium, and extra-long sentences, which take up significant space on her hard drive. Her work has appeared in *Joyland, Little Brother,* and *Chickadee.*

Jason Kieffer (The Spots) has published two full-length books, *Zanta: The Living Legend* and *The Rabble of Downtown Toronto.* His new comic book series is entitled *Cabbagetown.*

Matthew Daley has been *Taddle Creek's* fiction illustrator for five years. His most recent comic is *Errol Dynamic,* written by Cory McCallum, with whom he also recently curated *Chilly Tales,* an anthology of contemporary Canadian cartoonists.

Pascal Blanchet (The Cover) has illustrated for the *New Yorker* and Penguin. His books include *Nocturne* and *White Rapids.* He is working on an animated short for the N.F.B.


# TADDLE CREEK

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# THE EPHEMERA

## PLAYTIME IS OVER

Collectors take note: *Taddle Creek* did not skip a number in 2014. If you're panicked by a gap in your long box between the previous-winter and summer issues, you'll want to track down the magazine's bonus comic broadsheet, published back in the spring. This once-in-a-lifetime-to-date special is available only at select comic shops and newsstands, and at press fairs in which the magazine is in attendance. Subscribers can receive the issue for free by making their desire known to *Taddle Creek,* while non-subscribers unable to make it out to any of the above-mentioned locations can obtain a copy by sending their name and address, along with five dollars, to the magazine's attention, either by post or electronic mail (cash, PayPal, and all major credit cards accepted). Sadly, at sixteen by twenty-three inches, this issue will not fit in a comic bag, so you might as well read and enjoy it, destroying all future monetary value in the process. Fun fact: at only eight pages long, it is, considering its physical dimensions, smaller on the inside than on the outside–a reverse TARDIS, if you will.

*Taddle Creek* No. 32 features the comic stylings of Michael Cho, David Collier, Matthew Daley, Jason Kieffer, Dave Lapp, Cory McCallum, Joe Ollmann, Ethan Rilly, Philip Street, Jason Turner, and Maurice Vellekoop, and will remain available until supplies last, which, considering the minimum print run for a newsprint publication, should be for some time to come.

With this issue, *Taddle Creek's* 2014 trilogy of childhood comes to a close. The magazine thanks readers for indulging its kid-friendly vibe via the above mentioned broadsheet comic, the summer kids' issue, and, finally, this special issue dedicated to stories of childhood. *Taddle Creek* promises to grow up over the winter and produce a regular adult-oriented issue for summer, 2015.

## WHO'S (MAYBE) HONOURING TADDLE CREEK NOW

Earlier this year, Ethan Rilly's cover to *Taddle Creek* No. 31 was nominated for a National Magazine Award, in the Illustration category. Competition was stiff, with fellow nominees including the illustrious *Taddle Creek* cover-artist alumni Michael Cho and Gary Taxali. Unfortunately none of these huge talents were crowned the dominant *Taddle Creek* cover artist by the jury, but the magazine offers a hearty congratulations to all nonetheless.

And congratulations to Andrew MacDonald, whose short story "Four Minutes," from *Taddle Creek* No. 30, was named to the Journey Prize's most recent long-list. For those blissfully unaware of such matters, the Journey Prize is awarded each year to an author still early in their career, for a short story appearing in a Canadian literary magazine. It is a rare acknowledgement and show of support both for new writers and the supposedly unpopular art form that is the short story. Andrew's tale appears in *The Journey Prize Stories 26* anthology, now on sale.

Finally, *Taddle Creek's* Web site recently received a nomination from the Canadian Online Publishing Awards, in the category of Best Website Design: Red, the colour apparently placing the magazine in the non-news consumer division. *Taddle Creek* is pleased to see acknowledgment for the fine work of Matthew McKinnon and John Piasetzki, the developers behind *Taddle Creek's* recently refreshed site.

## THE CONTRIBUTORS' PIN

It's hard to imagine, given the state of today's job market, that employers not only once took pride in their employees, but damn it, they showed it! For *Taddle Creek's* ephemera-friendly money, there's no better expression of a job well done than the service pin: a lapel-sized item, usually featuring a company's logo.

Sadly, the glory days of well-made service pins are long gone at most organizations. But once again leading where others fear even to follow, the magazine recently introduced the Taddle Creek Contributors' Pin: a lovely, two-layer metal pin in the shape of the *Taddle Creek* crest, and manufactured by Dominion Regalia, provider of Freemason cufflinks, hats, and other items of corporate and fraternal pride. All contributors to *Taddle Creek* will receive a pin, which the magazine hopes they will wear in good health, and with pride. You're welcome.

## SO LONG, AND THANKS FOR ALL THE SLUSH

One of the first contributors *Taddle Creek* will be honouring for her service is Grace O'Connell, the magazine's associate editor, who, sadly, is moving on following this issue. Grace's nearly three-year tenure was short but delightful. *Taddle Creek* wishes her well, thanks her for reading the slush pile with a joy the magazine still has trouble comprehending, and hopes to see her in its pages again soon.

–TADDLE CREEK

THE FICTION

# WESTFALIA

BY CARY FAGAN

My family wasn't like others in the neighbourhood, not in the mid-seventies, when we lived on a crescent of nice homes with almost no traffic. Bikes and roller skates lay on front lawns. In the summer the constant smell of backyard barbecues made the dogs whimper. It was always the men who barbecued, supposedly giving their wives a break while constantly barking out commands.

We, of course, didn't have a barbecue, because we didn't eat meat. Nor did we drive a Buick, Ford, Chevrolet, or a used Cadillac. Instead, we had a Westfalia, a small German camper van complete with miniature stove and sink, and back seats that could be removed to put up a table and bunks. For our holidays we got into the Westfalia and drove: to an Indian reservation (as we called it then) to help build a community centre, to the Alberta badlands to dig for dinosaur bones, or sometimes just to "see the country." At night we would pull up in a farmer's field, a deserted drive-in theatre, or a school parking lot. We never went to water parks or zoos or beach resorts. We saw logging camps, fish plants, leftover communes where kids ran around naked and wild. Sometimes my sister refused to get out of the van.

My father worked for a small carpenters' union that had so far resisted merging with a bigger one. He went to work in a suit and tie bought at the Salvation Army, riding a bicycle to the bus that would take him to the northernmost subway station. If he was late he might ask a neighbour for a lift–neither my mother nor father was shy about asking for favours.

My mother had a job too, working from home so she could take care of us. A fundraiser for whichever organization hired her at any given time, she would sit at the dining-room table with a monstrous black I.B.M. Selectric typewriter, piles of stationary, envelopes, stamps, and a telephone with a separate line for follow-up calls. She had a higher than average success rate, I think because of her voice, which was warm and sultry and didn't at all match her appearance. The background noise of my growing up was either the breathy whisper of her telephone voice or the rhythmic tap of her high-speed typing.

Our dining table was made from two old doors and a couple of sawhorses, which was something else different about my parents. They didn't believe in buying stuff. We had armchairs found at the side of the road that my mother recovered using flannel shirts. Our books stood on shelves made from bricks and boards, or were piled in corners. Only our mattresses were new, and our shoes. We didn't have real friends, but sometimes kids would drop in just to look around.

My older sister, Joni, who was sixteen at this time, was in a continual state of smouldering anger. She was a beautiful girl–I knew because people said it so often–with waist-length blond hair and blue-green eyes and a small nose and a slightly severe mouth. Even in a state of repose she had the sort of look that drove boys crazy. She was an object of intense interest but, as I said, we didn't have any friends, in my case because I was a "dull loser," in hers because she told everyone to piss off. Our parents were concerned about her; was she punishing them for moving to the suburbs from the city just when she was entering her teens? Did her looks give her a sense of unearned superiority? Was she confused about her identity, possibly a lesbian? They asked all these questions out loud, which usually resulted in Joni's running to her room and slamming the door.

But I'm not happy either, I said to them once, right after Joni had stormed out of the room. Yes, my parents said, of course you're not. But at least it's clear why.

In fact, I wasn't so very unhappy. My parents (who had no friends either, although *that* was never discussed) spent all their free time with us. Every Saturday night we went to a film society showing of a black-and-white movie–Preston Sturges or Frank Capra or early Bergman or Hitchcock. I liked to read, and at twelve was halfway through the Horatio Hornblower novels, luxuriating in the knowledge that I still had a half-dozen left. My goal in life was to have a capuchin monkey as a pet and I was compiling a notebook of information about them. I built balsawood airplanes from kits I bought at a toy shop in the mall, carefully cutting out all the pieces with an X-Acto knife, pinning the first struts onto the plan and gluing the rest, applying the tissue paper to the wings before shellacking them.

One thing I didn't like was my parents' predilection for bringing home strangers. In our neighbourhood of Willowdale I never saw a homeless person, only mothers pushing carriages, and delivery people stepping out of boxy trucks. But downtown must have been full of stray people, some of them sleeping right in front of the Old Yorktown Carpenters' Brotherhood office, because every few weeks my father brought one home. They were almost always older men, sometimes with a blurry tattoo on the forearm, or a couple of fingers missing. Men whose hands trembled when they lit a cigarette. Dad often said they were "drying out." Sometimes they had no jacket, or their trousers had ragged cuffs or a broken fly, so my parents would buy them brand new things, as they never did for us. The men slept in the spare room next to my own, where I would sometimes wake to hear them pacing, or talking to themselves, or weeping.

It was ungenerous of me to prefer that they slept on the sidewalk rather than the bedroom next to mine. Mom always asked them about themselves–where they were born, what sort of job their fathers had–and I'm sure there would have been a great deal to learn if only I had listened. Yet much as I didn't like having them around, what I felt was nothing compared to my sister. One day she stomped around the house, screaming, "If one of them rapes me it will be *your* fault!" After that my parents still invited men to stay, but

MATTHEW DALEY

not so often, and my father installed a sturdy lock on Joni's door. Which meant, of course, that she could keep her door locked all the time. It never occurred to them to worry about me. One of the men did once put his hand high up my thigh and tell me that I was a very strong boy. But I never told my parents about it.

Anyway, Lewis wasn't like them. For one thing, he didn't come from downtown. One early December evening we all went to the open house for my middle school. It was the year my sister grew even thinner than usual. My mother clearly worried because she was always urging Joni to eat. I didn't want to go to the open house, where the other kids would point us out to their parents. (My parents would be easy to spot, Mom in her sari, Dad with the open-toed sandals he only stopped wearing when it snowed.) Dad would insist on telling my history teacher about I. F. Stone or start to defend Louis Riel. Of course my sister didn't want to come either, but she was also conflicted about being left out so always got into the Westfalia at the last minute.

This evening turned out to be less awful than others, and then we piled back into the van to drive home. It was dark, and every third or fourth porch light was on, illuminating the pots of dead flowers. My mother was talking about the "unimaginative work" on display in the art room when my father said, "Whoa, Nelly," and started to slow down.

Through the window I saw us pass a very tall woman. She was standing by the side of the road holding a double bass with one arm, and a thumb stuck out. The van came to a stop and my father began to reverse.

"Now, Marty," my mother said, but he was already rolling down the window.

"Where are you going?"

The woman picked up the double bass, which wasn't in a case, and hurried up to the window. I saw that she wasn't a woman but a young man with shoulder-length hair.

"Anywhere I can get to."

He smiled.

"If you need a bed for the night you're welcome to stay over. We're just up the road."

"That would be fantastic."

"Not sure what you're going to do with that instrument. You couldn't play the harmonica?"

Dad chuckled just to show he was making a joke.

## INSIDE THE TELEPHONE CUPBOARD

Secrets lived inside and there were coats. It was a cupboard where you could shut the door and hold the phone, in private. I would push my face against the coats and breathe, damp winter air in nylon, wool and gabardine, some camel's hair. The furs let me push in. I crouched and listened for the voice of my best friend. "My nanny's dead," I said, and there was silence. Then a sorrowful small voice said she was sad. I told her what I knew, that she had died before she went to carol service, half inside her coat. Headmistress told me that. She told me Nanny was with Jesus now. I did not say that part. Outside the cupboard my parents listened in on everything I said. That's how they knew I knew. The fur coat took my tears upon its pointy ends and held them, shining in the dark. I put the phone back on its cradle. When I came outside it was all done. They never said a word.

–Carolyn Smart

The young man said, "I've got some rope. I can tie it to the roof, no problem."

"All right, then."

My father got out of the van, but the young man had already hefted the double bass onto the rack. He tossed a rope across and instructed my father to pass it through the window. We had to draw it through the interior and out the window to the other side.

"I can't believe this," my sister said as we listened to the scrapes and thumps above us.

Dad got back into the driver's seat and the young man climbed into the van with us, causing Joni to push against me. He had a small suitcase he put under his knees although there was room behind us. His head touched the ceiling.

"Hi," I said to him. "I'm Malcolm."

"Like Malcolm X?"

"Uh-huh."

"Cool. I'm Lewis."

Dad said, "I'm Martin, and this is my wife, Shelley. And that's Joni sulking beside you."

"Dad!"

"Like Joni Mitchell?"

"That's right," Mom said, sounding pleased.

"Also cool."

"No it isn't," my sister said back.

We pulled into the drive and Dad and Lewis got down the double bass. I offered to help Lewis carry it, but he said that it was easy for him and he tucked it under his arm as if it were a big guitar. Inside, I saw how scratched up it was–scarred everywhere, chips taken out of the curving edges, a couple of cracks messily repaired. There were even some worn stickers on it and initials carved in the back. Mom made herbal tea and warmed up some muffins and we sat at the table, the typewriter pushed to the other end, while my parents asked Lewis about himself. He was from a farm outside Saskatoon. Since the end of high school–Lewis was nineteen–he'd worked full-time alongside his father, but this year, as soon as the rapeseed and sunflower and wheat harvests were in, he had "lit out," leaving only a note, because otherwise his mother would have stopped him. The double bass was from the high school; when the music program got shut down he had bought it for fifty dollars. He didn't play any particular kind of music, just his own, which he didn't know how to write down, so he kept it in his head. He'd been hitchhiking for a few weeks now, staying wherever people would put him up, moving on again. His intention was to go to Quebec, first Montreal and then maybe somewhere on the Gaspé. His high-school French was bad–in Saskatchewan nobody cared about bilingualism–but he figured Quebec would be as far from what he knew as any place in the country. Except maybe Newfoundland, which he might get to eventually. He had a passport, so maybe he'd even see some other countries. Of course he'd have to find work, but he had a good feeling about it. Farm life makes you pretty handy, he said.


"Funny thing," Dad said. "I work for a carpenters' union and I can't hammer in a nail. Nineteen is pretty young to be on the road. You sure you don't want to go back?"

"I send them postcards. This is a nice home. It has your personality. Your family's personality, I mean."

"What a sweet thing to say," Mom said. I could tell she liked him.

"If it isn't too much trouble, I'm wondering whether I might stay a few days. I could do any chores you wanted."

"Yes," Joni said before anyone else could answer. "Yes, you can stay."

My parents both turned to stare at her. Dad looked especially pleased by this generous impulse.

"Of course Lewis can stay," he said.

Lewis smiled. His eyes started to close and he blinked them open again. "You're falling asleep in that chair," Mom said, getting up. "It's time for bed."

She got out new sheets while he used the bathroom, and when he came out he was wearing old pajamas with rodeo riders on them that were too short in the sleeves and legs. Mom showed him the room and he asked if he might play his double bass for a few minutes. I went to bed and, lying in the dark, heard the sound of his bow over the strings, slow and melancholy, like music from deep underwater. I fell into a dreamless sleep that lasted until morning.

Lewis was up before the rest of us and already had coffee made. My parents shared the newspaper over breakfast and he asked them about various world events, what they thought of Pierre Trudeau and Gerald Ford and the metric system and the fall of Saigon. Naturally Joni chimed in with her opinions–Ford was "an asshole," etc. My parents didn't even tell her to watch her language. Then Dad picked up his briefcase with the broken latch and wished us all a splendid day. It was cold and grey but still hadn't snowed, so he rode his bike to the bus stop. Neither I nor my sister wanted to go to school–we wanted to stay home and hang out with Lewis. But Mom shooed us off.

I remember that day as a particularly

bad one at school, when my teacher asked me to read aloud a passage from a book called *Pale Feather's Last Buffalo Hunt.* Reading was hard for me and I avoided it; nobody understood dyslexia back then and my father's patient tutoring wasn't helping much. I stood up and began, but immediately got mixed up and stopped. My teacher asked me to sit down and had the girl in front of me continue. Nobody laughed and at recess I didn't get teased because nobody talked to me at all. But I felt humiliated and stupid and wished that I never had to set foot in that classroom again. Then the bell rang and I went back inside.


The high school was three blocks further on and as Joni got out before me, she always came by so that we could walk home together. Even though she was never nice to me anymore she still came, as if it were some unbreakable tradition. So both of us got home at the same time and smelled something lovely as we walked in.

"Lewis baked bread," Mom said, her hands lifted off the typewriter keyboard. "With nuts and raisins in it. Go have a slice."

We rushed into the kitchen. There was the loaf on the cutting board, already cut into, knobby and misshapen. Joni cut us each a thick slice and we slathered on honey from an open jar. Lewis came into the kitchen, he must have been in his room, and poured us milk. The bread and honey was delicious. I asked him about living on a farm and he told us about watching calves get born and how sometimes you have to help. "Gross," Joni said, but she listened, too.

Dad was late coming home, looking as if he'd had a bad day himself. Mom finished up the stir-fry and Dad opened a bottle of homemade wine given to him by a Portuguese carpenter and he even let Joni and me each have half a glass. But Lewis said he didn't drink, that his family had a long history in the temperance movement going back to his great-grandfather. Besides, he'd seen enough of his classmates getting sick-drunk on a Saturday night to last him a lifetime.

Dad said, "So tell me, what did you stay-at-homes do while the kids and I were slaving in the salt mines?"

"We had a very nice day," Mom said. "Lewis insisted on cleaning up the house while I got an extra couple hours of phone calls done. Then we washed his clothes and when I saw the shape of some of those things I drove us over to Kmart to buy him two shirts and two pairs of jeans. That's a new shirt he has on and isn't it nice?"

"I tried to stop her," Lewis said.

"Very nice," Dad nodded. "I wouldn't mind a shirt like that myself. A toast to Lewis's new shirt."

Lewis held up his water glass. It somehow never occurred to my sister or me to resent his new clothes. Joni was more talkative than she had been in months. She made fun of her teachers. She admitted to submitting a poem to the high-school literary journal, which surprised me. I didn't even know she wrote poetry.

"I'd like to read it," Mom said, and Dad said he wanted to read it also.

"I don't know." Joni looked at her plate. "It's really personal. Lewis can read it."

Lewis wanted to clean up, but Mom said he had done enough and made us help instead. Afterwards we did our homework and then Joni asked who wanted to play Probe. She had gotten the game for her birthday a few years earlier but we'd stopped playing it. It involved guessing other people's words one letter at a time and, naturally, I was miserable at it. Plus Joni and my father were both fierce competitors who liked to win. But we played anyway, sitting on pillows around the coffee table and laughing a lot more than usual. Lewis was even a worse player than me, although Joni accused him of losing on purpose.

When we finished Lewis asked if anyone would like to sit on the front porch and get some air.

"It's really cold out there," my father said. "You won't last two minutes."

"On the farm we had to go out whatever the weather. I'm used to it."

"I'll go," Joni said.

"Me, too."

"Not for long," Mom said. "There's still school tomorrow, remember. And bundle up, all three of you."

We put on our coats and hats and gloves and followed Lewis onto the porch. My father was right, the cold made me wince. We crowded in together on the top step, the concrete under my bum making me even colder.

"I have a question," I said. "Did you have a television on the farm?"

"Sure. Now that I think of it, I haven't seen one in your house."

"We've *never* had one," Joni said. "I never know what people are talking about in school. My parents actually *want* us to be freaks."

"Did you watch a lot?" I asked.

"Every night."

"Which shows?"

"All the good ones. *Welcome Back, Kotter. All in the Family. The Six Million Dollar Man.* My dad liked *Starsky and Hutch* and my mom liked *Mary Tyler Moore.*"

"I've heard of them," Joni said grumpily.

"Can you tell us about one?" I asked. "I don't mean in general. I mean an episode. Like the plot and whatever. What about *All in the Family*?"

"Let me think. There's one episode when Mike and Gloria hire a babysitter so they can go out. But Archie, that's Gloria's dad, the one who's a bigot, isn't too happy about it."

"Start from the beginning," Joni said.

So Lewis described the whole episode and sometimes used voices. We listened open-mouthed to every word.

Each day was like that. We would rush home from school and eat the bread, or the banana loaf, or whatever Lewis baked. He and I took to tossing a football around in the cold, something my father did only reluctantly. He showed me how to line my fingers along the seam of the ball to throw a spiral and how to put my hands together to catch it, skills that had previously eluded me. Before dinner he would help Joni with her homework, the two of them going into her room and Joni locking her door, as always. Sometimes we played a game, but we never skipped our time on the porch when Louis would tell us the plot from another television episode.

At bedtime came the music, deep and mournful tones without any real melody. Once in the kitchen I heard my father say to my mother, "That boy doesn't know how to play a lick," but I didn't think it was true. I thought his music was beautiful.

There really isn't more to it than that– no big scenes, no late-night confessions, no secrets revealed. A couple of years later, when I became rather obsessed with questions about sex, I did wonder about his relationship with the females in our house. What did he do with my mother all day long? Or those homework sessions with my sister in her room? Joni

## NOW IT'S A WORLD

The radio is a mute tortoise, and beneath
our perception the thousand things it'd say
drum like impatient fingers on the window,
as each car on the street pushes a killing space
ahead of it. Now it's a world with my daughter
in it, and nothing matters more to me. Last night
I balanced a book on my head at dinner
because it made her beam. Electricity hides
in the walls, wanting to stop our hearts.
But in a shell of safety she puts Superman
in a pink toy stroller and wheels him away,
all muscled patience. Soon enough, this will be
the forgotten soft loam of early childhood,
below the floorboards of her memory. Already,
the world I remember has been replaced:
people sit quietly together stroking devices
as though putting a curl of hair behind an ear,
even as the stars above, slowly turning screws,
will bring her a new life, and another one.

–Alex Boyd

was a far better student than he had ever been and certainly didn't need his help. Of course my mother was almost twice his age, but she had a warm personality, and Joni was beautiful if emotionally scary. But these thoughts, so icky and appalling, yet fascinating to me for a brief while, spoke more to my state at the time than anything else.

Anyway, I know what he did for me in just those few days. He taught me how to throw a football. And he instructed me in the ways of plot–set-up, complication, false climax, true climax, the resolve, the kicker. I suppose he also showed me that everyone is capable of making their own kind of music.

After breakfast on Saturday morning, Lewis went to his room and came back with his suitcase packed.

"You've been so kind," he said. "You're rare people."

"Now we find out you're going?" Joni's eyes flashed.

"I think Lewis has his own calendar," Dad said. "He knows when to move on."

"Well, it'll be like one of the family leaving," Mom said, suddenly tearing up. "Don't mind me." She reached for a tissue. "So you're really heading for Montreal?"

"Unless a ride takes me in some other direction."

"Let me at least drive you somewhere," Dad said.

"That would sort of break my method. Malcolm, let's say goodbye."

I awkwardly held out my hand but Lewis leaned down and hugged me instead. He hugged my father, too. Mom gave him a kiss on each cheek. Joni gave him a long hug and then smacked him on the chest with the flat of her hand.

He fetched the double bass and we all went to the door. "I don't know how I should live, forget about anyone else. And maybe this is a stupid suggestion, but you might consider getting a television? See you again one day, I hope."


We kept the door open to watch him move past the Westfalia parked in the drive. It was snowing lightly, and even our dull street looked pretty. The double bass under one arm and his suitcase in the other, Lewis reached the sidewalk, raised his foot in a comic gesture, and kept going.

About a week after Lewis was gone my father noticed that he was missing a lapel pin given to him by the carpenter's union. My mother couldn't find an inexpensive beaded bracelet. Lewis took something from me too: a wooden propeller I had painstakingly carved with a pocket knife, only to nick one of the blades. Joni wouldn't tell us if he'd taken anything from her.

"It's not really stealing," Mom said. "They're just little souvenirs, to remember us."

Christmas came, but because we were totally secular Jews who didn't even celebrate Hanukkah, and my parents disapproved of the commercialism of the season, we never got presents. But on the first day of the holiday I woke to find an enormous box in the living room. There were words printed on it: "YOUR NEW SONY COLOR TRINITRON TV!" I stared in disbelief and then roused Joni out of bed. She swore at me for not letting her sleep until she saw what I was excited about.

That Christmas we watched hours and hours of television. It's almost all I remember doing, although there were several snowfalls and outside the window kids were dragging toboggans to the local hill or carrying skates over their shoulders.

I don't know why, but things got better for both of us after that. I discovered a kid in class, Herschel Litbaum, who was also into balsa-wood airplanes, and we started to go over to each other's houses. Joni got her first boyfriend, whose name was Wayne, and who could almost grow a beard and wore a black leather jacket that made him look like, in the words of my father, "a Stasi agent." My father got promoted to a desk job, meaning he no longer had to visit union members on job sites, but he didn't like it much. Mom thought we were old enough to stay by ourselves after school and got a position at a fundraising operation in the city. She had to buy a "working girl's wardrobe" and went off with Dad in the morning. I had to remember to take a key, especially since Joni didn't come to meet me anymore. If I wasn't seeing Hershel, or didn't have a baseball game, I would come home to an empty house that did, however, have a television.

We hoped to hear from Lewis, a postcard maybe, but we never did. Sometimes at the dinner table one of us would say, "I wonder where Lewis is now?" and the rest would offer possibilities. Halifax, New Orleans, Prague? We liked the idea that he had passed through our own house, on his way to the rest of the world.

THE FICTION

# HERE WE ARE, CHARLIE

*An excerpt.*

BY HAL NIEDZVIECKI

Here we are, Charlie!

They step off the elevator into the dingy hall. All the other kids are downstairs in the main floor recreation room, where there are balloons, streamers, and plates of cookies. There's a banner that reads, "WELCOME WINSTON CHURCHILL SECONDARY." Up here it's dark and quiet. There's a nurse's desk, but nobody's sitting behind it.

The lady steers Charlie by the elbow of her red parka. She's not Charlie's teacher. Charlie's teacher stayed downstairs with the rest of the kids.

It's just at the end here, the lady says cheerfully. Are you sure you don't want to take your coat off? I can hang it up for you downstairs.

Charlie crosses her arms and hugs the fat red jacket.

No thank you, she says in a small voice. I get cold.

It's true. She does get cold. But it's hot in the old peoples' home. The rest home, Charlie thinks, correcting herself. Their teacher told them to call it the rest home.

It's like the dog pound, but for old people! Billy Zuckers called out. He was sent to the principal. He's always getting sent to the principal. All the other kids asked stupid questions like, What do they eat? and, Are they allowed to leave? On the school bus everyone talked about how lame it all was. Worst. Field trip. *Ever.* pronounced Katie Mills, before pulling out her cherry lip gloss and reapplying it for the fourth time.

Charlie knew it was the fourth time. She'd been watching her. Katie wears skirts with leggings. Her long brown hair shines and shimmers down the back of her tight white sweater. Charlie wears jeans and a sweatshirt and her red parka.

They got to the home and all the other kids were introduced to their senior partners. Then the lady came over and explained that Charlie's senior partner, Rose, was still in her room. So the lady asked Charlie if she'd mind going up to her room to visit her instead of having the visit in the day room like everyone else. Charlie shrugged. There were supposed to be games later. And there were the cookies. Everybody else was already busy meeting their senior partners.

Here we go! the lady says, knocking loudly on the door. Rose is very special. You'll see. She's the oldest person in Wississauga, you know.

I know. Her teacher already told Charlie that her senior partner was named Rose McCallion, and that Rose was the oldest person alive in Wississauga, and she knew Charlie was the right person to be her partner because Charlie was so mature for her age.

The lady knocks again. Rose! Yoo-hoo! Hello! Rose!

She doesn't always hear, the lady mock-whispers to Charlie, smiling brightly. Rose! I've got your student from the school here! The lady pounds on the door a few more times. She needs a lot of prompting, the lady whispers to Charlie.

Charlie blushes. The lady talks like Rose is stupid. But Charlie's dad always tells her that respect for your elders is the most important thing. Until today, Charlie hadn't actually gotten a chance to meet any seniors or ancestors. Only one of her grandparents was still alive, her mom's mom, but she still lived in Mumbai. And the few friends her parents had over to the house weren't much older than her mom and dad. But Charlie has read lots of stories with old people in them, and not just Grandpa and Grandma, those kindly storybook figures Charlie's never met and probably never will. Charlie likes to read about other places, other times. Her favourite stories are about the Indians. Not the Indians like Charlie, but the other kind. In those stories, the old people are called "elders" and everyone is always listening to their stories. They tell important stories about the gods and hunting and who should marry who, which is way better than calling them seniors and putting them in a home to rest.

Rose! We're coming in!

The lady pushes the door open and walks in. Charlie, embarrassed, head down, chin on the slick surface of the red parka, follows her.

The room is dimly lit by two shaded lamps. It smells dusty and stale. This makes sense to Charlie. Why wouldn't old people smell old? It's not a bad smell. It reminds her of the books she takes out of the library. A lot of the books are really old and they smell like no one has opened them for a long time.

Hi Rose! the lady says, her voice reverberating loudly in the enclosed space. Charlie looks around. She doesn't see her, Rose.

I'm old, not deaf. You don't have to yell. The voice is throaty and irritated. Charlie sees her now, just a small withered head sticking out of an easy chair, the body lost under a heap of knitted blankets. Charlie looks, then looks away. The lady takes Charlie's elbow and steers her in front of Rose.

Rose! This is Charlie!

It's like she's the one who's deaf, Rose mutters. Charlie peeks up at Rose. Their eyes meet. Rose's eyes, sunken into a shrunken wrinkled face that looks like an apple, peeled then forgotten, sparkle blue and silver.

Who's this? Who are you?

I'm . . . Charlie.

Well then! I'll leave you two to get acquainted!

The lady swishes out of the room. The door closes behind her.

Why are you wearing a coat? You're inside for goodness sakes. Take that off immediately.

Charlie shrugs, reluctantly shimmies out of her parka. She holds it awkwardly.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY

Didn't they show you where the coats go downstairs?

Charlie nods.

Never mind. Just put it on the chair.

Charlie carefully drapes the coat over the back of the empty chair.

Now, what did you say your name was?

Charlie.

Charlie? Come closer.

Charlie steps forward. She can see the plaster of yellow-white hair sticking to Rose's scalp.

You're a girl.

Charlie nods.

Charlie's a boy's name.

Charlie nods again.

Do you understand me? Do you speak English?

Charlie nods again. Why wouldn't she speak English?

What's a girl doing with a boy's name? Or don't they believe in that where you come from?

What could she mean? Charlie was born in Wississauga.

My real name's Charulekha.

Well never mind. Go make me my cup of tea.

Charlie follows Rose's gaze to the kitchenette. She finds tea bags and an old rusty kettle. She boils the water and dunks the tea bag. She knows how to do it. She's made tea for her mother lots of times.

She returns with a steaming mug.

Your tea's ready.

Thank you, Rose says pleasantly. Just put it on the table here.

Charlie carefully puts the mug of hot tea on the table beside Rose's chair. Then she hovers near Rose, not sure if she should sit in the empty chair. The quiet in the room is occupied by the rasp of Rose's breathing and a farther away background sound, a kind of steady, empty thrum. It's cars, Charlie realizes. The sound of traffic trawling Wississauga's busiest thoroughfare. Rose regards her with a bright-eyed stare. Charlie blushes again. Rose is supposed to tell her stuff. About how it used to be and everything. Charlie looks away, looks around the dark crowded room. Silk white roses graying in a vase, fraying quilts, the credenza heaped with yellowed cuttings from old newspapers.

See anything you like? Rose snaps suspiciously.

No . . . I . . .

It doesn't matter. I'll be gone soon either way. I don't even lock my door. Why bother?

## DOROTHY AND THE FIRST TORNADO

The sky was greening, foaming
like the top of a bubbling pot. And look,
there–see how the clouds climb down

to dance with us? How the animals
rush up to meet them, to conduct
the thrashing white sounds? But the clouds

want to circle on their own, thick rounds
across the fields far away, growing near.
Shingles, rakes, shovels through the air–so many things

learning to fly, or could they do this all along?
Come down from the sky, you silly cows.
Come back to the barn, blown open.

–Julie Cameron Gray

Rose waves a dismissive, translucent hand. They're always barging in here, trying to get me to take this pill or that pill. I don't need it! Before they stuck me in here, I didn't see a doctor in . . . well, they had just built that new road leading from the highway. So that would have been . . . let's see now . . . 1992? That busybody son-in-law of mine insisted.

Charlie nods. In 1992, she wasn't even born.

Doctors! Rose lowers her voice conspiratorially. They make a good living, don't they?

Charlie looks down at her sneakers. Both her parents are doctors.

Rose slowly raises her mug to her pursed, pruned grey lips. Liquid sloshes.

Did you put in the sugar?

Charlie nods.

Put three in next time. I can't taste it.

Next time? Charlie thinks.

They sit in the silence of passing traffic. Rose takes a few more sips, then shakily puts her mug on the tray beside her. She closes her eyes. Charlie stares at her white running shoes, at her knees–the weave of her blue jeans. She concentrates on the distant hum of traffic and the steady rumble of the old woman's breathing.


But then, suddenly, she can't hear it anymore.

Charlie holds her breath. She hears: car wheels treading asphalt, thousands of shoppers circling the Middle Mall.

Uh . . . excuse me? Mrs. . . . Rose?

She tries again, louder: Rose?

Finally she wills herself to look up. Rose is a shapeless form tucked into a heap of patched quilts. Charlie's never seen a dead person. She gingerly approaches. She inspects the old lady's pruney lips. In first aid they talked about the airway. Signs of breathing and movement.

Rose?

Charlie leans in close. She puts her ear over that wrinkled gash of mouth.

I'm not dead yet, dear!

Ah! Charlie jumps back.

Ancient crone eyes sparkling.

Scared you, did I?

Charlie's heart pounding.

That'll teach you to sneak up.

I didn't– I wasn't–

Ha! You're just like the Chinalady. Sneaking around! She stopped coming. I asked them where the Chinalady went and they said cutbacks. Cutbacks! Well, they'd skimp on their own mother's gravestone. I remember when you could walk right into the office and see the mayor. Walletville had the same mayor for twenty years, you know. A very respectable man from a wonderful family. The Cartwrights. A very proper family. But things are different now, aren't they?

I . . . I don't know.

Never mind. Rose sighs. Well, I suppose you'll have to do. So let's just get to it. Rose looks at Charlie expectantly.

Uh– I–

Rose holds up her see-through hands. She shows her long gnarled nails. Never had any use for them, Rose says, even when they were the fashion. They just get in the way of doing what needs to be done. Now you'll need to get the scissors. They're in the bottom drawer in the kitchen.

Charlie stands there. Rose looks at her expectantly.

In the kitchen, dear.

In the kitchen Charlie finds an ancient pair of steel scissors, a heavy ominous object nipped with rust. She returns to the living room, holding them in front of her like a gun about to go off.

*These?*

Of course. Now let's start with my toes. If you'd be a dear and just help me take off my slippers.

Your . . . feet?

Well where else would my toes be?

Rose wiggles her feet, soft lumps under blanket. Charlie digs around underneath. She finds pink slippers, the fuzz long since flattened and worn away. The smell is mothballs, talcum powder, wool, decay.

Take them off now, dear.

Charlie tugs off the slippers. She starts pulling down a thin brown sock. Rose winces.

Gently now.

Sorry.

Fabric keeps catching on the nails. Charlie slowly reveals them, long yellow serpentine twists, some kind of relic holdover from past times, evolution's not-yet-completed task. Charlie gingerly grasps a big toe, wizened and turtled into itself. The flesh is cold and listless. The scissors are huge, not altogether inappropriate. Charlie fits the blade around the nail–a spiralling thick fossil.

Um, are you sure I should–?

Just cut them right off dear.

But I think it might–

It'll be fine.

Wouldn't it be better if I ask . . . the lady?

Just cut them. Go ahead, girl.

Charlie closes her eyes. She wishes she was in the woods by the river. She goes down there sometimes. I'll go there right after school. Nobody else ever goes there. It's quiet. She lies in the leaves by the river and thinks about how it used to be a long time ago when the First Peoples Indians lived down there.

Go on now, Rose says. Get it over with.

SMALL PRINT

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*Children at the opening ceremonies of the Northtown Plaza playground, in 1962.*

THE FEATURE

# GROWING UP IN TORONTO

*Twenty-five arts-related citizens reflect on how the city shaped and inspired them in their youth.*

A favourite pastime among Torontonians–along with insisting far too early in the season that the Jays might have a shot at the pennant–is looking for ways to compare their city to New York. With arguably more cultural and social vibrancy than its counterpart to the south, the intersection of Yonge and Dundas continues to be referred to by locals as "Toronto's Times Square." And despite a beautiful new sidewalk (even if it tries a bit too hard), the stretch of Bloor Street between Avenue and Yonge remains unofficially dubbed "Toronto's Fifth Avenue." As a student of the Robertson Davies school of believing Canadian locales can be interesting on their own merits, *Taddle Creek* doesn't care for such comparisons. So when *New York* magazine, last spring, published an oral history of growing up in Manhattan and its surrounding boroughs, *Taddle Creek* saw a chance not only to completely steal an interesting editorial package idea, but also to showcase Toronto's uniqueness.

Across the next ten pages *Taddle Creek* presents its own oral history of growing up in Toronto, as told by twenty-five artists, writers, and (generally) arts-related people–ranging in age from seventeen to seventy-four–who called the city home in their formative years, and in most cases still do.

*Taddle Creek's* interviews yielded many obvious differences between Toronto and New York but, in the end, comparison wasn't the most interesting theme that emerged. More interesting was something that shouldn't surprise readers of an arts-centric magazine such as this one, but is worth pointing out in light of Toronto's recent political climate. The subjects interviewed on the following pages may run in the same circles today, but their backgrounds vary: some come from well-off families, others from working-class. A number grew up downtown, while others–many, in fact–were raised in the suburbs. Some of the subjects' families have lived in the city for generations, while at least one arrived in Toronto as an immigrant. Yet no matter their background, nearly all were shaped by many of the same things: a city with one of the most respected library systems in North America; a transit system consisting of subways, buses, *and* streetcars that not only moves citizens within the core but offers access to downtown cultural centres and events to those living on the outskirts; an–albeit wanting–infrastructure of bicycle lanes and trails; and an eclectic group of neighbourhoods that embrace a variety of cultures and lifestyles.

All of these things that make Toronto so livable have been under attack–both verbally and fiscally–over the past four years by many of the city's civic leaders (one or two in particular) who frequently and proudly tout their ignorance of what truly makes a so-called "world-class city." That the outcome of Toronto's recent municipal election is still cause for celebration despite lacklustre campaigns from the front-running candidates demonstrates just how desperate the city's situation has become. But the high voter turnout in the core also shows Torontonians are willing to fight to keep the things that make their town a great place to live. Hopefully, under new–though still imperfect–leadership, the next generation of citizens will feel as inspired by the city as those presented here.

*All interviews conducted, edited, and condensed by Conan Tobias. Mia Kirshner submitted a written memoir.*

## HALEY MLOTEK

*Publisher, editor, writer; born 1986*

I grew up more or less around Downsview station, but I had a very good friend, Sarah, who grew up at Bloor and Dufferin, right across the street from Dufferin Mall. I wasn't really allowed to go on the subway or wander around by myself until I was in my teens, so she was my "bad friend"–I would go and visit her and we would walk the streets together because her parents thought it was very important for us to be free to walk around Toronto. I have really strong memories of her taking me to the stores on Queen Street, right at Queen and Spadina. There were all these really scary–to me, as a thirteen-year-old–goth clothing stores, but we just loved them. We would go every Saturday, or every other Saturday at least, and would buy candles that had Buffy the Vampire Slayer's face printed on the side, or those tattoo-style chokers, or Emily the Strange patches–all of these pre-Hot Topic clothing accessories. I know Sarah saved up all her babysitting money and bought this crazy long leather jacket at the peak of *Matrix* hacker fashion, and I loved that. I was so terrified all the time because we were around all these cool goth teenagers and I was this sheltered small child. But I think it's really important for your teen development to hang out at places you're really afraid of.

## DAVID HAYES

*Writer, teacher; born 1953*

I had a *Globe and Mail* paper route when I was about eight or nine. I had a bike with a big basket on the front that a bundle of newspapers could lie flat in. I'd ride to the corner at 6 A.M. and there'd be three or four bundles there for different paperboys for different routes. I had about forty-five papers on mine. Every bundle had a couple more papers than you needed. I think the reason for that was in case a neighbour came out of their house and said, "Hey, paperboy! I'd like to start the *Globe,*" you'd have an extra paper you could hand to that person and that would make them happy. You'd write their name and address on a card, notify the circulation department, and they'd become a new customer. If they called in to the *Globe* to start the paper, you'd get an extra paper and a card in your bundle, and you stuck the card into your booklet of cards, one for each of the people you were delivering to. You'd go and collect money each week, and then you'd punch a hole in the card to show they'd paid.

So what I had been taught by an older–and obviously criminal–boy that I took the route over from, was if someone calls you over and says they'd like to start the paper, you've always got extra cards in your booklet, so you would write their name and address down on that card, but you wouldn't notify the *Globe.* As I was doing my route over a year, there might be three or four people who'd talked to me directly. So I'd have two extra papers, but three or four extras to deliver. So then I'd have to go to one of the *Globe* boxes, which in those days worked on an honour system. There was a slot to put your change in, but the papers were just sitting there. I'd look to make sure no one was around, and I would take however many papers I needed out of the box and add them to my bundle. So if the *Globe* thought I had forty-five customers, they were expecting me to give them whatever I collected from those customers each week, minus whatever amount the paperboy kept. But I was collecting from, say, forty-nine customers and keeping a hundred per cent of whatever I collected from the extra people.

Obviously there were dangers associated with this system. This kid had told me to say, "If by any chance you need to stop the paper because you're going away on holiday, or you want to stop the *Globe* completely, just let me know when I come by to collect," because you don't want those extra customers to phone the *Globe* to say they want to stop the paper for a week and cause the circulation people to look and say, "Wait–this person isn't on that guy's paper route." I can't remember anyone ever getting caught, but if you did you would probably say, "Oh, I'm eight years old. I forgot. I filled out a card and I forget to tell you. I'm sorry," and hope you could get away with it.

That was basically the criminal system that I had going at the time. I knew you weren't supposed to do it, but it wasn't like I was breaking into a store. I'm not proud of my criminal past, but I guess at eight years old, my sense of morality wasn't what it became later.

## DAVID COLLIER

*Illustrator; born 1963*

I got my comics education at Crosstown Discount Variety, at the corner of Heddington and Eglinton, and from the Forest Hill library, where you could find things like *Birdseye Center* collections and *The Great Comic Book Heroes,* by Jules Feiffer. When I was in Grade 6 I had a big cultural change because my parents bought this place on Walmer Road and all of a sudden I was hanging out downtown. There were all these cool kids at school whose parents worked at places like the CBC. One day in class I dropped my eraser on the floor and they saw that it had my initials, D.C., on it and they were like, "Hey, man–D.C.! That's like DC Comics," and all of a sudden I was in with the cool kids. The big thing the cool kids did for me was they took me to Memory Lane, the comic store in Mirvish Village. "Captain" George Henderson, the owner, was bitter at the comics industry and the comics-fan mentality of collecting, so he had comics with no covers, beat-up comics–they were good comics, like Carl Barks comics for twenty cents–and the walls of the store were papered with Sunday supplements from 1910. He just didn't give a shit about value, but he loved the medium. I'd be really nervous in there because there'd be all these guys talking about smoking marijuana and older guys in college and guys working for the CBC and the National Film Board, and I was twelve years old. That was a big thing for me.

## NATHANIEL G. MOORE

*Writer, landscaper; born 1974*

*I remember the valley that Leaside was in, that hill, was a great place to toboggan. I think in Grade 7 and 8 we used to go there on Friday nights and steal trays from the McDonald's to slide down on. I also had my first date at that McDonald's with a girl named Darby Burger. I thought that was really funny.*

## BIANCA SPENCE

*Arts administrator, born 1973*

In 1979 the Art Gallery of Ontario exhibited King Tut's treasures and my mom took me to see it. She used to be a teacher–librarian, and at the time was the president of the Ontario Library Association and was planning their conference. We were wandering around the exhibit and I had the big cassette-recorder audio guide and Dennis Lee was there wearing this big African dashiki. My mom had been in touch with him to come to her conference, but she hadn't met him in person, so she went up to say hi and I spent ten minutes having a meltdown, jumping up and down with this giant tape recorder banging against my leg, screaming, "*Alligator Pie*!"

COURTESY THE SUBJECTS

## DAVID MIRVISH

*Producer; born 1944*

For the first few years of my life my parents lived with my grandmother in a fourplex on Page Street, which is just south of Bloor, off Clinton. I always remember the milk bottles that would be delivered. They were glass and the cream would separate and be at the top and the milk at the bottom. They also used to deliver ice in the summertime, pulled by a horse. You used to get a chip of ice to suck on as a kid. I worked Saturdays at Honest Ed's as a ten-year-old, putting the goods in bags. I didn't know how to run a cash register, but I did know how to take merchandise and put it in a bag!

I remember all the restaurants, like Larry's Hideaway. My father used to take me on Sundays. They had a set meal of about ten courses they brought you, starting with this big Lazy Susan with all sorts of open-face sandwiches. All you had to decide is if you were going to have a steak or southern fried chicken or a fish dish–you picked your main course and everything else just kept coming. I remember the carrots being cut up into small little balls and cooked in red wine. I never tasted anything quite like that again. Or the Cork Room, which had the best cheesecake. They had a Latin American band, and on Saturdays my parents would go there and dance the cha-cha and I'd sit eating my lamb chops with mint sauce. Occasionally my parents would take us to the Victory theatre–not to see the girly part of the show. I was never shown that part. But I remember a magician: they lowered him into this case of water and he had to escape. They had headliners like Johnnie Ray come and sing.

"OCCASIONALLY MY PARENTS WOULD TAKE US TO THE VICTORY THEATRE—NOT TO SEE THE GIRLY PART OF THE SHOW. I WAS NEVER SHOWN THAT PART."

In the fifties we had all the crazy promotions at Honest Ed's–dance marathons and roller derbies and clown bands. We painted an elephant pink until we realized elephants breathe through their skin. We got it half painted and the Humane Society said, This isn't a good thing, so we washed all the paint off. Apparently you can only see pink elephants if you drink, not in reality.

## MIA KIRSHNER

*Actress; born 1975*

*Toward the end of my time at Jarvis Collegiate, I would wander around the city, eventually winding up at Courage My Love, in Kensington Market. Inside was dark and musky, with the smell of incense, steam from the radiators, and puddles from melting snow on boots. I would hold photos of languid naked men and women wearing crowns of dried flowers, lying on thick Bukhoro rugs, my eyes stopping at their erect penises and large breasts. At the back of the store, piles of tin red hearts from Mexico made me wish I had someone to give that heart to. For those few hours, my imagination took hold and allowed me to be my true self. A dreamer.*

## MICHAEL LISTA

*Writer; born 1983*

I grew up just outside of Toronto, in Mississauga. I sort of grew up as a lot of kids in the suburbs did, with the sense that you were on the outside of a lot of what was happening. I saw Toronto as this strange metropolis I couldn't navigate, that I couldn't have access to. At the time I was coming of age, the Scarborough Rapist, who turned out to be Paul Bernardo, was making his way across the G.T.A., and it sort of informed the way I saw the city–this menacing beast that was sitting across the lake, where these dangerous and terrifying things were happening. As a suburban kid you watch a lot of television, so for me Toronto, at least in my imagination, was also the Toronto I saw in a show like *Today's Special:* Queen Street seemed like this foreboding place that emptied out at night, and the shopping mall would be populated with these semi-mythic creatures that had guard over the merchandise–a mannequin that would turn into a man when everyone had left. So it was this kind of intrigue and menace that I only really began to understand in a more secular way when I started attending high school in the city. But for a long time it was this menacing place that I guess, in the end, is just a stereotype of what a suburban kid would think.

## YVONNE BAMBRICK

*Cycling consultant, photographer, B.I.A. co-ordinator; born 1976*

I was always on my bike, which clearly I still am. I started on the back of my dad's bike, in Taylor Creek Park. My parents had matching red Peugeots. I started taking the subway by myself in Grade 2, when I was about seven years old. I was in the French school system, so I would go from East York to Gabrielle-Roy, which is on Pembroke. It was dodgy then and it still feels a bit dodgy now. My mother, in preparation, sent me to street-proofing classes. It's basically, What's a stranger, Who's a safe person to talk to for help, What's the best way to walk home, How do you choose your route, Assessing the situation–just a general awareness of how to stay safe as a kid if you're on your own. My dad and I did the route together for about a month, and then we would walk together but take separate subway cars. So I'd get on the car myself and then we'd both get off and he'd make sure I got on the bus. Even when I thought I was on my own, apparently he followed me for another few weeks after that. I only had one bad experience. I was one of those kids who would squat in the doorway of the train, with a book, usually a comic book, and I remember arriving at Main station, almost home, and as people got off the subway this one guy turned around and he hoofed me, just as the doors closed. And then all the nice ladies and gentlemen came to my rescue. I still kept sitting in the doorway after that.

## EMILY POHL-WEARY

*Writer, editor, arts educator; born 1973*

I grew up in south Parkdale, in a big house with my mother, my little brother, and my mom's best friend and her daughter, Sheena, who was my age and practically a sister. It was me, Sheena, and a whole neighbourhood of boys–at least that's what it felt like. Sheena and I would go on these adventures. I'd read *The Nancy Drew Sleuth Book* and had my own magnifying glass and fingerprinting kit. We would explore abandoned buildings looking for "clues." Now I realize they were probably crack houses or flophouses. I just remember feeling fearless.

I spent so much time at the Parkdale library. I would check out plastic shopping bags filled with books every week. There was a children's librarian there named Rita Cox. She was a storyteller and she would tell Jamaican Anansi the Spider Man stories that just lit up my childhood. She also collected costumes for Caribana, so all of the kids in the neighbouhood would dress up in them. Rita considered us all her kids–she remembered everything about our lives and our families. She also got a massive Caribbean literature collection established there, and she screened sixteen-millimetre cartoons every week. She kept tabs on all the kids and she made such a difference in so many people's lives. If you have a librarian like that, a love of reading develops organically. When I bumped into her in my thirties she remembered me, and asked about my mother and brother–she even asked about Sheena! She was just one of those astonishing people who make life in an urban neighbourhood special.

COURTESY THE SUBJECTS

## CHRIS CHAMBERS

*Poet, magazine distributor; born 1963*

Everything comes back to Toronto's parks for me, especially Eglinton Park. It's where I learned about hoodlums, learned how to smoke cigarettes, learned how to drink beer, all at Eglinton Park. There's a pool there–they had this waterslide where these big guys would slide down and just kill anybody who was underneath. One summer we were there and three teenage girls removed their bikini tops and got kicked out. They also had dances on the tennis courts with an orchestra that all kinds of strange people would show up to. And I played hockey there–it was a really central place.

I had amazing experiences in High Park too. I was a pretty serious cross-country runner as a teenager: I won the city championship in High Park in Grades 10, 11, and 12. The track club would meet there on Sundays and go for a long run. We'd run down to Old Mill some days, so I got a feel for the Humber from that.

And the beach. I remember in high school, a friend, David Shaw, a year older than me–he was the first guy I knew to get his parents' car and drive down to Rockaway beach. He was walking around the beach late one night and met someone who claimed to be from a different planet. He told me the next day, "I met his guy and he told me he was from another planet," and I'm like, "Oh, come ooooon," and he gave me this look like he was offended by my response and said, "You never know." That was the first story I ever heard about the beach.

"I REMEMBER IN HIGH SCHOOL, A FRIEND WAS WALKING AROUND THE BEACH LATE ONE NIGHT AND MET SOMEONE WHO CLAIMED TO BE FROM ANOTHER PLANET."

## GEORGIA WEBBER

*Illustrator, born 1989*

I had a unique experience because I grew up on Algonquin Island, so I lived in a really small town that was also ten minutes away from a gigantic city of two million people. It was only needing to memorize the last four digits of anyone's phone number, because the first three were all the same. It was walking around with no shoes on most of the time. If you wanted to hang out with your friend, you just walked to their house. There was no sense of road safety or anything, there was no fear of the distance between the houses being something you might need a parent for. It's just a simple small place where you know everyone, at least by face if not by name, and everyone knows you. There was this thing called "playing in a field" that doesn't really exist anymore, where you could just go and be in a field and be with some friends and you could have a ball or a Frisbee, or maybe nothing, and you could make a game of it. There were meadows and wild areas to explore, and you could go down all the way to Centre Island, where there's a theme park and tourist attractions just a ten-minute bike ride away. There were a lot of places where the sidewalk was patched with tar, and sometimes in the summer it would get really soft. So when tourists came by we would offer to write their name in the tar for a dollar, claiming it would be preserved forever, and then they'd walk away and we'd pat it down and offer to do it for someone else for a dollar. There was a lot of cheating the tourists. But I grew up with a really big fear of alleys and strangers, which I would say is unhealthy–it gave me a scary vision of what a big city is like that eventually I had to unlearn.

*Georgia Webber, right.*

## ZANE CAPLANSKY

*Deli owner; born 1968*

I had a very idyllic childhood, growing up in North York. We never locked our doors when we were kids. It was just the safest, nicest, almost Mayberry-like urban setting in that you knew all your neighbours. It was very multicultural. You didn't live with any of the fears I think people have downtown. But one of my favourite things to do was take the subway downtown by myself. I would do it when I was ten years old–I don't even think I would tell anybody–and I would get out at Summerhill and I would walk down Yonge Street, get down to Front, and then turn around and walk all the way back. My favourite thing to do in the city today is walking, but back then I'd do it at eight, ten o'clock at night on a weekend and people-watch. There were all these head shops and the punk scene and the goths and the gay community–you'd see all kinds of different people. It never even occurred to me until years later that that's a remarkable thing, that you couldn't do that in most cities, or you wouldn't *want* to do that in most cities–that Toronto's just this incredibly safe place.

*Zane Caplansky, right, with his grandmother and sister.*

## GILLIAN HOLMES

*Artist, book designer, customer service manager; born 1958*

I went to Cottingham public school, and we lived west of Yonge Street, by the CBC. We used to cut through the CBC parking lot every day. You'd sneak through and just run across the parking lot, then head home. I remember one day cutting through, and my friends were ahead of me, and they turned around and said, "Duck!" So I went down and was waiting behind a car, and I remember a hand on my shoulder, and the hand very gently kind of lifted me up, and I turned around and came face to face with a belt buckle. I looked up and it was Tommy Hunter. He's looking down at me and I'm looking up at him, and then he winked and let me go and I just took off. I didn't cut though the parking lot for a week or two after that.

## LIZ WORTH

*Writer; born 1982*

I was really into the punk and goth scenes when I was a teenager. In Kensington Market there was a place called Who's Emma that was like a punk-rock collective kind of place, and there was a store upstairs that sold zines and stuff, and downstairs there was a little space that they used for shows.

Lee's Palace used to have all-ages matinees on Sundays and that was a formative place for me, because that was really my first exposure to independent culture—bands like the Monoxides, Change of Heart, the Shuttlecocks, the Killjoys. It was a mind-blowing experience to be thirteen or fourteen and going to see bands and meeting a whole bunch of other kids from across the city, because you're so used to seeing the kids who are in your neighbourhood or in your school. To find all these other kids who were interested in the same things you were was exciting. I really connected with some of the people I met at those shows. As adults, that doesn't really happen. There isn't as much openness to making new friends, and there was when we would go to shows like that.

COURTESY THE SUBJECTS

## SHARY BOYLE

*Artist; born 1972*

I went to Wexford high school, which was an art school, where I discovered music, punk music in particular. And I had a band. Sometime around 1986 there was kind of a mild gang scene–youth gangs–that were in Scarborough, on the subway. There was a phenomenon of "rolling": gangs of kids who would roll other kids for their leather jackets or their Doc Martens. So a couple of times I and the people I was with were targets of that because we were punks and we had leather jackets and boots and stuff. Downtown was a place you could almost escape this violence–which was hilarious because our parents would be like, Downtown is the violent place but the suburbs are where you're safe, which is the exact opposite of what's true. So being an outsider and kind of feeling like a freak in the suburbs you could come downtown and go to Kensington, go into Black Market and all the different shops and find your clothes and hang out at bars. Living in Scarborough was so isolating–no visual culture. What is amazing about Scarborough is that I did grown up in a really culturally diverse area, so there were a lot of different people with different racial, religious, or income backgrounds in my school, and that's something that educated me. But overall it was bleak if you're a kid from a family that was not culturally rich and they weren't really introducing things around reading or music or visual arts. Going to Wexford was a massive driving force in my life.

"WHAT IS AMAZING ABOUT SCARBOROUGH IS THAT I DID GROW UP IN A REALLY CULTURALLY DIVERSE AREA, AND THAT EDUCATED ME."

## MAURICE VELLEKOOP

*Illustrator; born 1964*

After eight years of Christian school, I was thrust into this completely alien world of the public school system–Thistletown Collegiate Institute, on Islington, north of the 401. I was very small and very effeminate and it was one of the worst times of my life. I got called "faggot" every single day of school and I lived in fear of getting beat up all the time. But what I thought was kind of special about the school, it was a very working-class neighbourhood and there were basically two groups, kind of like the Sharks and the Jets–you had the Discos and the Rocks. The Discos were all the Italian immigrants, basically kids who were into disco, and the Rocks were all the Scottish and English second-generation kids who were into metal and rock 'n' roll. They had rumbles outside the school where they'd beat each other up. There may have been knives, but I do remember food fights in the cafeteria. I'd just get down underneath the table and wait for it to be over. A week later you'd notice chocolate milk that was still caked eighteen feet above your head.

## JIM SHEDDEN

*Publisher, filmmaker; born 1963*

## SARA HEINONEN

*Writer, landscape architect; born 1964*

Jim: My friend Lisa Godfrey started a zine in high school and I kind of nudged my way in. It was called *This Tiny Donkey Looks Rather Lost,* which was a caption in a kids' book. There were two issues before Lisa moved on, and then I changed the name to *The Hanged Men Dance,* from a poem by Rimbaud. And then Sara joined, and that was really welcome for several reasons, because doing it alone was a drag. Sara had a really good visual sensibility that she could translate, which Lisa also had, but I didn't have the patience for. We started when we were seventeen or eighteen and it lasted into university when I started doing it with David Keyes. We were in Scarborough in a high school of two thousand people, but there were maybe a dozen people in school who were into punk and new wave. We were trying to create a culture that didn't really exist in front of us, and we were trying to create connections, which of course is easy to do now, with the Web. We'd be excited about a band, we'd talk about the band, we'd interview the band, we might promote some event coming up, we might promote each other's zines–all of this stuff happens throughout the day now.

Sara: We also wanted to bring to light bands and discussions that weren't happening in the regular media. There was all this new music we were hearing, sometimes, on the radio, but no one in the media was talking about it otherwise. It connected us with it and validated how we felt about feeling different. Everyone would be at these shows of bands coming to town and we'd all review it, and we'd do interviews, but you'd read everyone else's interview and see what they thought of that band. It was a community. We all wanted to do something creative. It wasn't all about music either. The other thing about the fanzine and the culture was there were no rules. I had a short story in there–my first published story.

Jim: The Record Peddler, at Queen and Jarvis, sold our zine. You'd go up these stairs and on the right was the Record Peddler and on the left was a little bookstore called This Ain't the Rosedale Library. And one day I turned left instead of right and that completely changed my life. When I look back, rock 'n' roll old led me to everything I care about today. I met a lot of writers and other people in that store: Ron Mann and Elliott Lefko. I remember another time going to Records on Wheels, which was on Yonge then, and seeing this guy on the street selling his book–it was Stuart Ross. Here's a guy, he wants to make books, so he writes them and then he designs them and he prints them and then he sells them. There was such an enthusiasm for D.I.Y. culture. That was a huge moment for me.

COURTESY THE SUBJECTS

## PEARSE MURRAY

*Broadcaster; born 1943*

I came to Canada when I was about nine years old, from Ireland. We didn't know anyone when we came here, so it was a little difficult for the first while. But when you're nine years old you quickly meet people at school. Back then there was a young man, about my age or a year younger, and when we were about nine or ten, we went to the Metro theatre. Movies were a big thing for kids. The theatres planned activities just for them. There'd be a matron, and she'd make sure the kids were behaving themselves. At Saturday matinees they'd have three features. There'd always be a western for sure. I loved the old Roy Rogers movies. And they'd have yo-yo contests! It was a simpler time. You'd learn how to do all sorts of tricks. I could never do cat's cradle. Around the world, walk the dog, I could do, but I could never master the more intricate ones.

I remember at one point we discovered that instead of putting a dime in the Metro's pop machine, if we put a penny in, it would work.

There were three movie theatres right around there: there was the Alhambra, and there was the Midtown, which is now the Bloor. I loved horror movies and sci-fi, so I would scope out the paper and see if there was a horror movie playing. I'd go all over the city to see a horror movie.

"MOVIES WERE A BIG THING FOR KIDS. THEATRES PLANNED ACTIVITIES JUST FOR THEM. THEY'D HAVE YO-YO CONTESTS! IT WAS A SIMPLER TIME."

LAUREN KIRSHNER

*Writer; born 1982*

*In high school I loved going to Goodwill Buy the Pound, where I could buy weird vintage clothes and books in one place. I'd also go into the World's Biggest Bookstore to see what books I really wanted to read. But I couldn't afford those books, so I'd go next door to BMV and hope to find a used copy of it, and then if that failed I would go to the public library. And that was Friday night. You didn't need to go out after that.*

## CLEA CHRISTAKOS-GEE

*Student; born 1997*

In elementary school I was a big fan of going to the Big Chill ice cream parlor. I went to Clinton public school, up the street, so every time there was a school event or a concert everyone would go down for ice cream after. We moved to Jane and Annette before I finished elementary, which was a pretty big change. We didn't want to leave Clinton, so every day my mom or dad would T.T.C. me and my brother to Clinton and then go to their jobs, and my mom would come pick us up at school and take us home and then would go back downtown to teach or whatever else she was doing. Jane and Annette really wasn't what we were used to or what we liked. Everyone there was very conservative, with their perfectly mowed lawns, and they all drove cars. But it was still pretty beautiful out there. We liked going to the Humber River, we liked doing family bikes rides, we went for walks. I remember liking it better on Halloween. The candy was definitely better in the wealthier neighbourhood. We only lived there for two years, which was enough. Our parents had enough with the back and forth, so we ended up moving back very close to Clinton public school.

## ALEXANDER MAIR

*Music industry executive (retired); born 1940*

The first concerts I ever attended were in the early to mid-fifties. They were held at a place called the Palace Pier. I saw Johnny Cash and the Everly Brothers there. The Palace Pier had found a loophole in the laws of the time that said if you were serving food you could have entertainment. So you paid your admission, which at that time was probably two or three dollars, and they gave you a plastic plate with a couple of crackers and a piece of cheese on it, covered in Saran wrap. Most people never ate them, and I'm sure they picked them up and used them again the next night.

Ronnie Hawkins used to play six nights a week at the Concord. On Saturdays he had a matinee and you didn't have to be twenty-one to get in, you just had to pay a dollar or something for chips and a Coke. The stage and the dance floor were in the middle of the club, and if you were over twenty-one you sat on one side, and if you were under twenty-one you sat on the other. Some people would get up and dance from the under-twenty-one side and, when a song finished, would sit down on the over-twenty-one side. If you're on the over-twenty-one side the doorman had already checked your I.D., so the waiters didn't ask your age.

I remember a promoter named Irvin Feld put together these road shows that would play Maple Leaf Gardens. They'd play for one night and then go on to another city the next night. They'd have at least half-a-dozen acts on it. People like Paul Anka, Buddy Holly. Usually Chuck Berry finished the first half, because no one could follow him. There was no security. After the show anybody could go back to the dressing rooms and talk to the artists. I have a picture hanging on my wall of me with Buddy Holly.

## REBECCA CALDWELL

*Writer; born 1973*

It's important to understand just how nerdy my high school was. I went to the University of Toronto Schools, an academically focused school. We didn't have a football team, but we had a math team, we had a classics team. One day in our final year we had to go do some St. John Ambulance training off-site. About five of us arrived late, and they wouldn't let us in to do only part of the course. So suddenly it was nerds sprung—we were on the loose. What are we going to do? School isn't expecting us, we have three or four hours, this is amazing! So, of course, we did the nerdiest thing ever and went to the Royal Ontario Museum. Part of the attraction was they had a baseball exhibit. While we were there we got to see all these old interesting artifacts, but the highlight for me was that they had the footage of the "Who's On First" routine, by Abbott and Costello, which I'd never seen before, and I thought it was the funniest thing ever, and maybe still do today. Other kids would have been playing pool, smoking cigarettes—we went to the museum.

I also remember my father taking us to the David Dunlap Observatory, in Richmond Hill, where they would have open houses on occasion. There was no development up there at the time, so it was all dark. There were all these people hanging out with their own telescopes. It was like, these people have found their tribe, and they were hanging out and they were happy to let everybody look through their telescopes. One guy was focused on Saturn, which, I don't know why, was always my favourite planet. It was really a magical moment. It was cool, it was interactive. The observatory's telescope would be focused on a boring cluster of stars, so it was the hobbyists outside that were more interesting.

*Michael Redhill, right.*

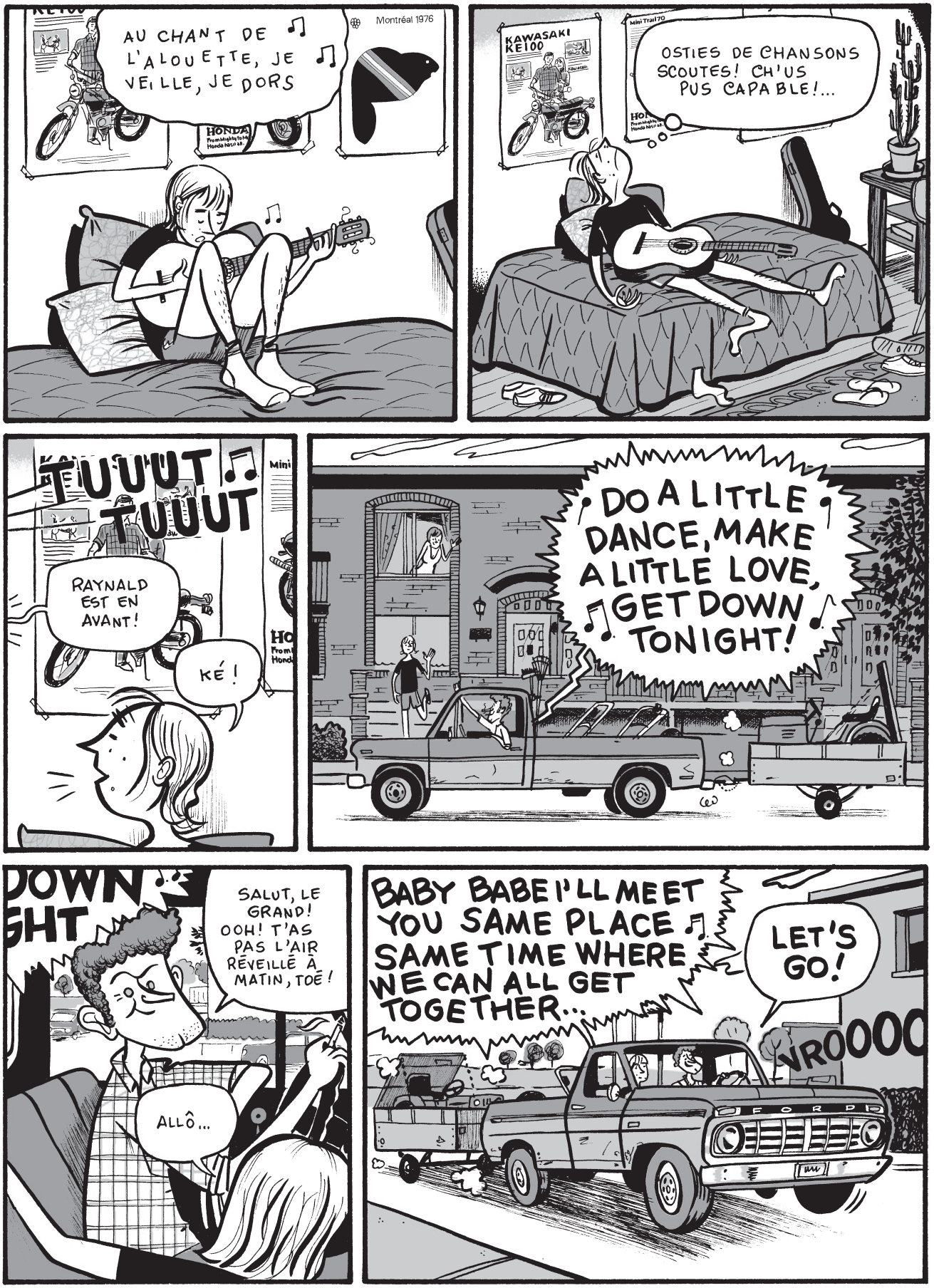
COURTESY THE SUBJECTS

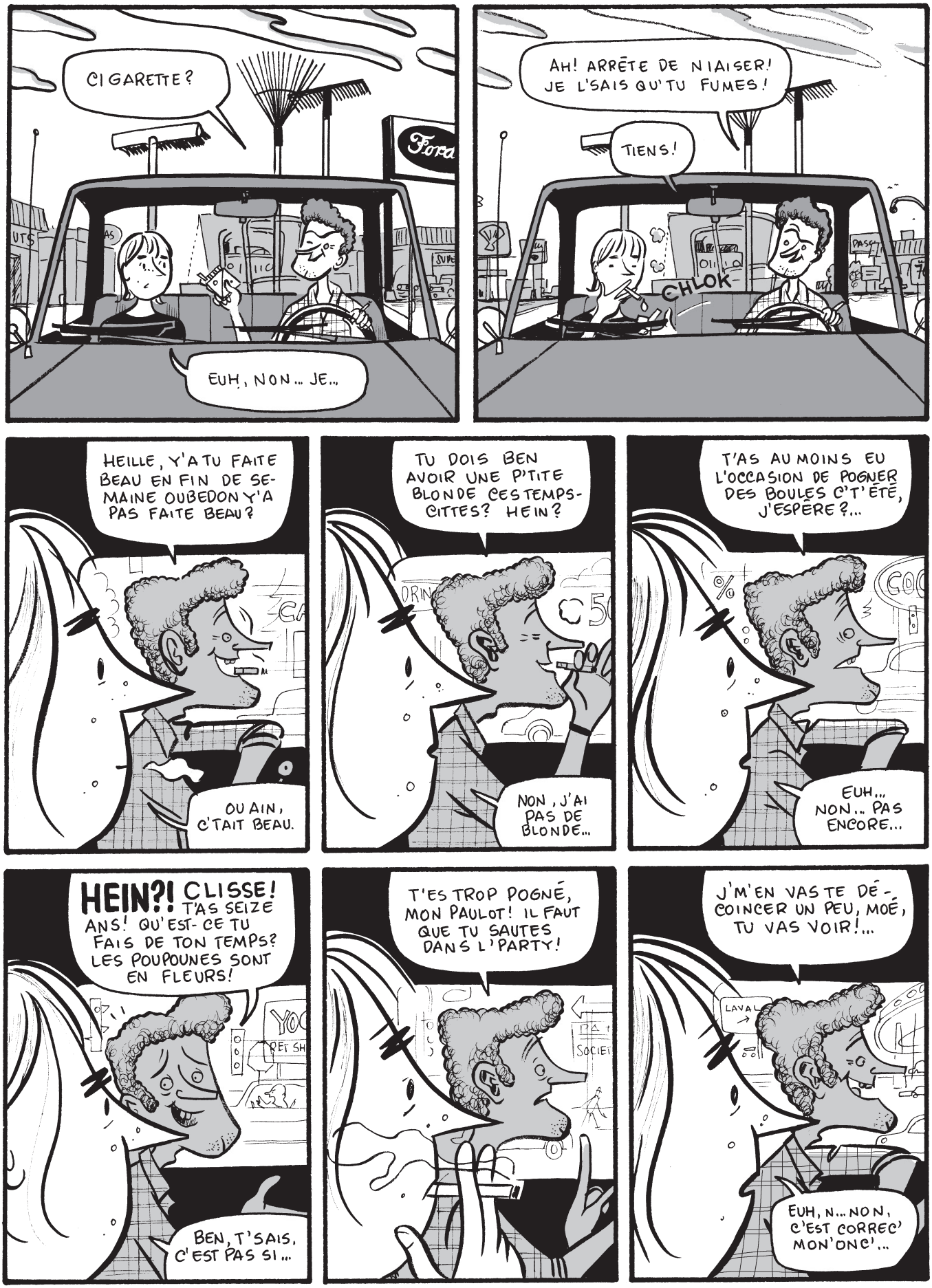
## MICHAEL REDHILL

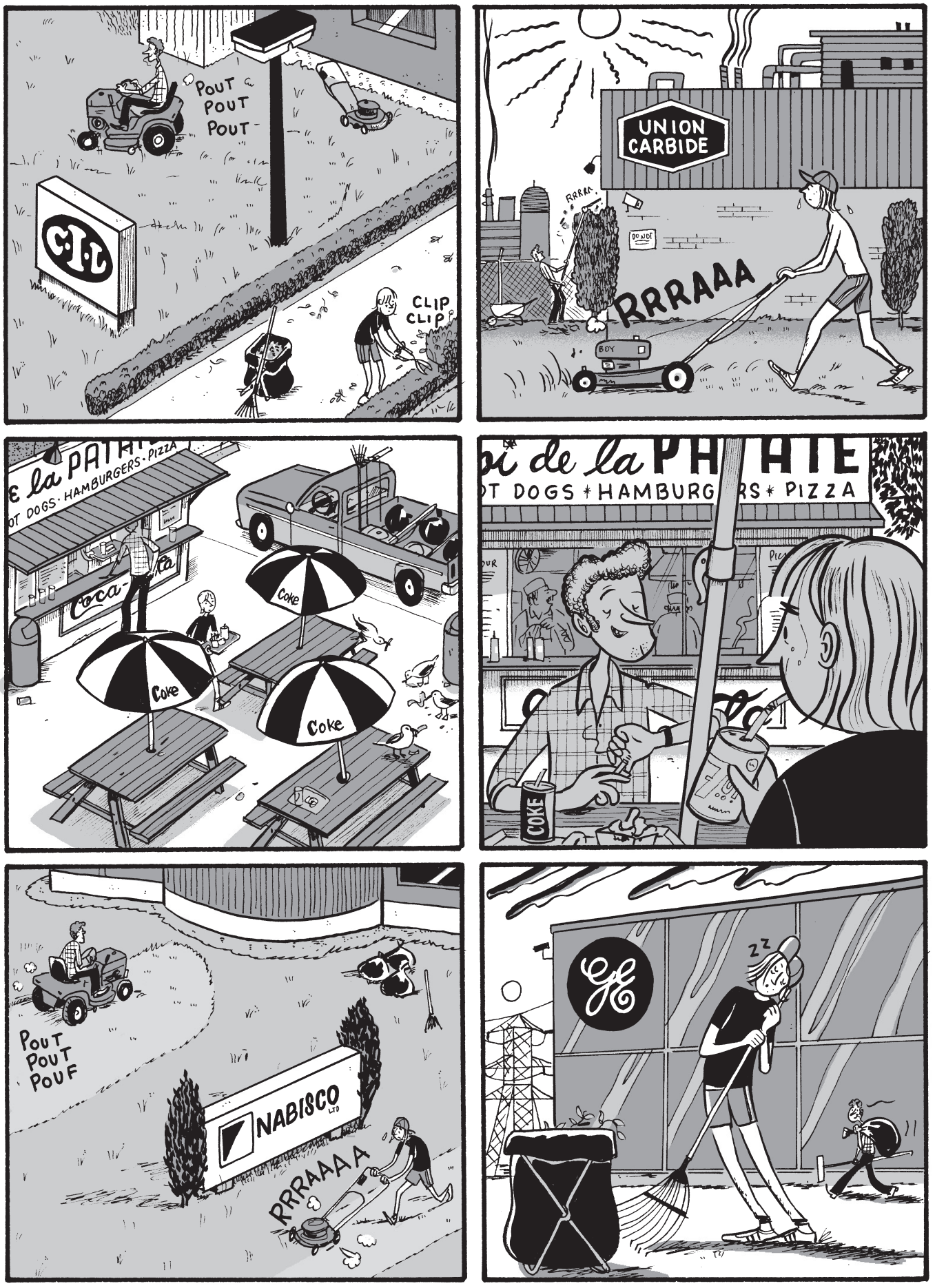
*Writer; born 1966*

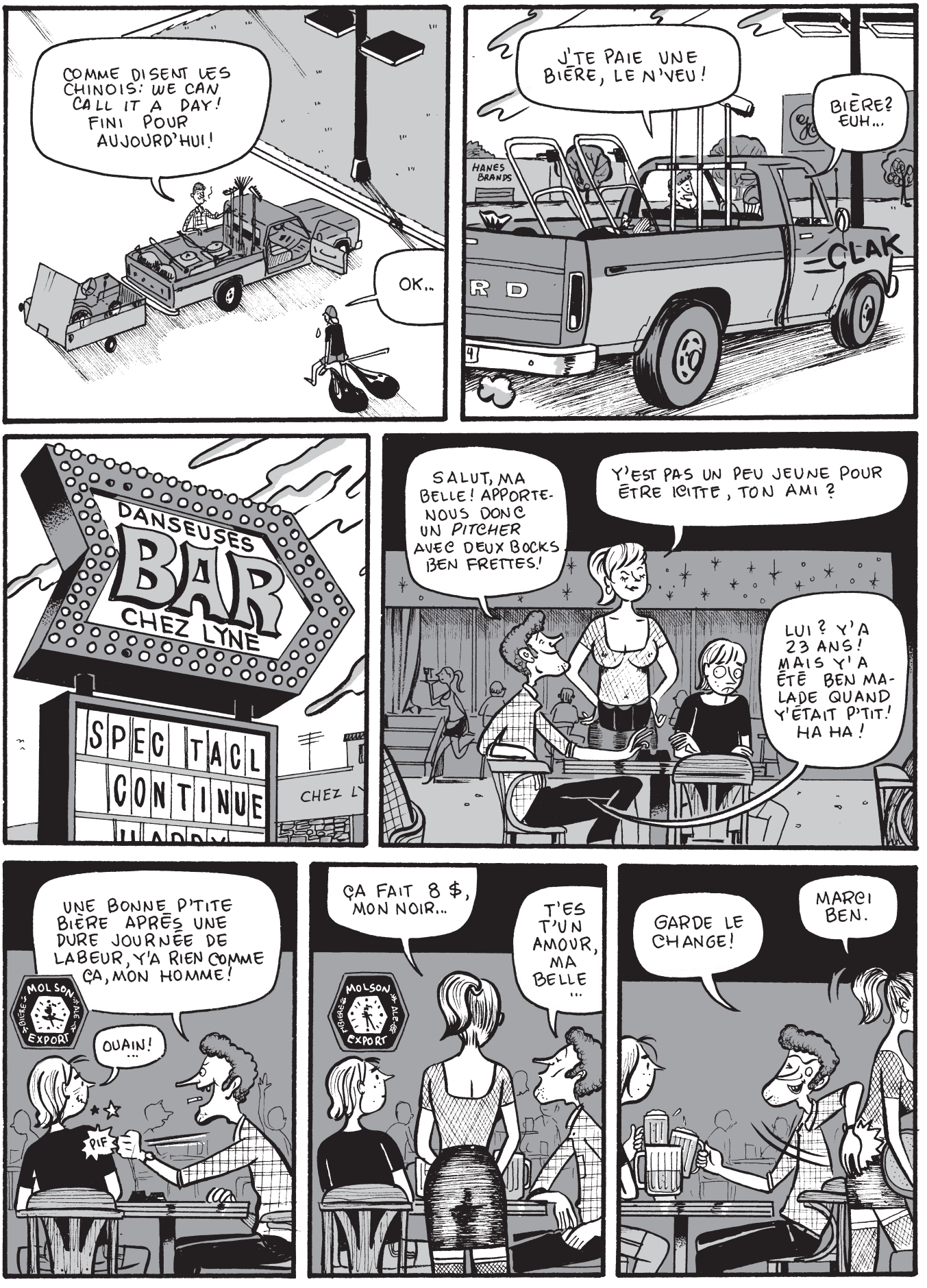
I grew up in Willowdale, at Bayview and Sheppard. By the age of eight or so my brother and I would walk through the side streets and go to a store called the York Miller, which was sort of the ultimate corner store—it just had everything. So we bought our comic books and our sports cards there and our View-Master reels. We didn't even know it sold milk and bread. The only time I tried to shoplift I got caught from that store. I was about ten years old. When you bought View-Master reels, you got three in a pack, but different packages had different reels in them. I wanted to buy one, and what I tried to do is slip the reels out of another package and put them in the one I was buying. But apparently it was pretty clumsy and they caught me and I got in trouble. It was a brilliant plan, but poorly executed. Like most of my plans.

# PAUL DANS LE NORD BY MICHEL RABAGLIATI



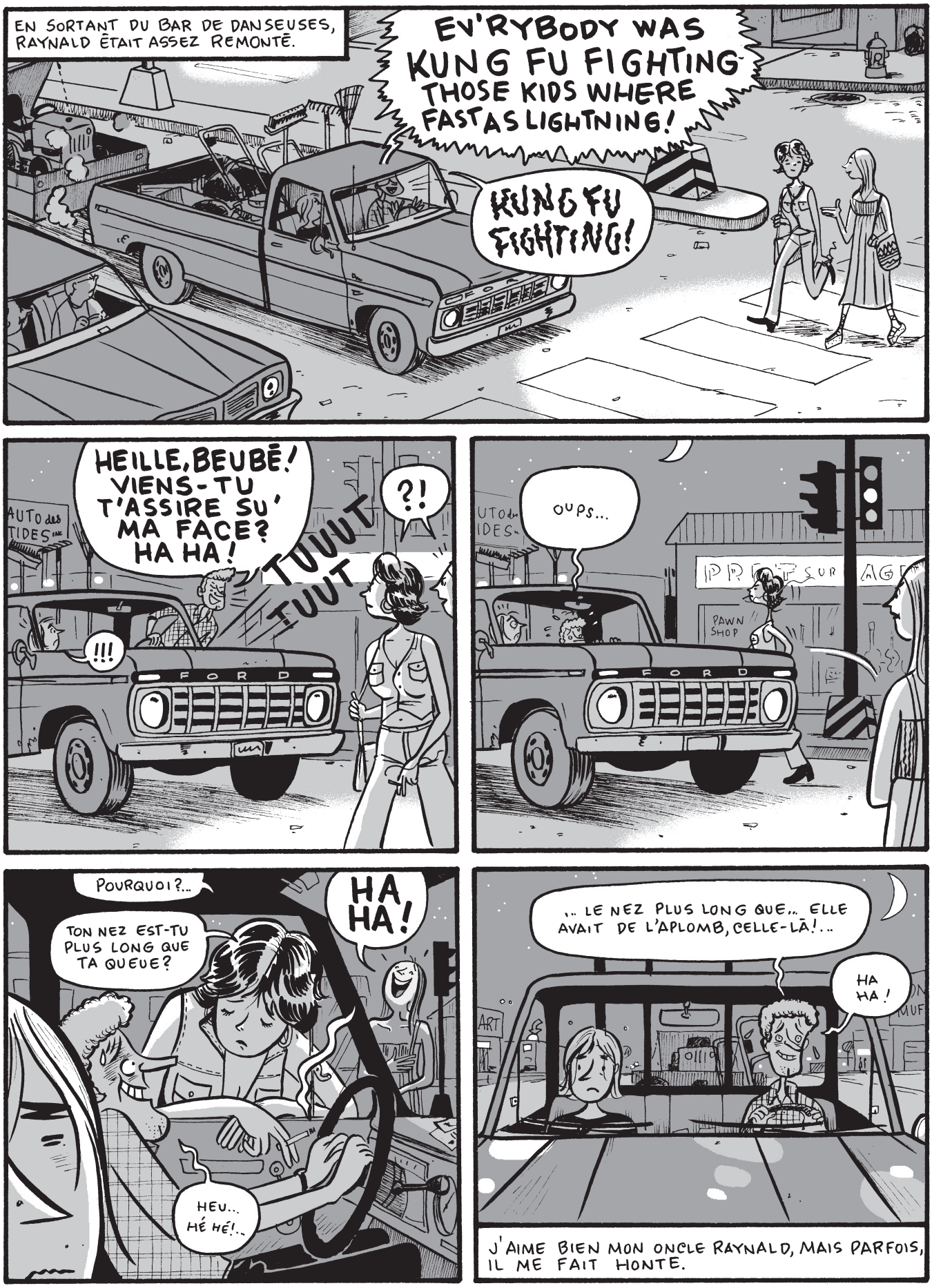

CIGARETTE?
EUH, NON... JE...
AH! ARRÊTE DE NIAISER! JE L'SAIS QU'TU FUMES!
TIENS!
CHLOK
HEILLE, Y'A TU FAITE BEAU EN FIN DE SEMAINE OUBEDON Y'A PAS FAITE BEAU?
OUAIN, C'TAIT BEAU.
TU DOIS BEN AVOIR UNE P'TITE BLONDE CES TEMPS-CITTES? HEIN?
NON, J'AI PAS DE BLONDE...
T'AS AU MOINS EU L'OCCASION DE POGNER DES BOULES C'T'ÉTÉ, J'ESPÈRE?...
EUH... NON... PAS ENCORE...
HEIN?! CLISSE! T'AS SEIZE ANS! QU'EST-CE TU FAIS DE TON TEMPS? LES POUPOUNES SONT EN FLEURS!
BEN, T'SAIS, C'EST PAS SI...
T'ES TROP POGNÉ, MON PAULOT! IL FAUT QUE TU SAUTES DANS L'PARTY!
J'M'EN VAS TE DÉ-COINCER UN PEU, MOÉ, TU VAS VOIR!...
LAVAL
EUH, N... NON, C'EST CORREC' MON'ONC'...


POUT POUT POUT
C·I·L
CLIP CLIP
UNION CARBIDE
RRRAA
RRRAAA
HOT DOGS · HAMBURGERS · PIZZA
Coke
HOT DOGS * HAMBURGERS * PIZZA
COKE
POUT POUT POUF
NABISCO LTD
RRRAAAA
ZZ


COMME DISENT LES CHINOIS: WE CAN CALL IT A DAY! FINI POUR AUJOURD'HUI!
OK..
J'TE PAIE UNE BIÈRE, LE N'VEU!
BIÈRE? EUH...
HANES BRANDS
CLAK
DANSEUSES
BAR
CHEZ LYNE
SPEC TACL
CONTINUE
CHEZ L
SALUT, MA BELLE! APPORTE-NOUS DONC UN PITCHER AVEC DEUX BOCKS BEN FRETTES!
Y'EST PAS UN PEU JEUNE POUR ÊTRE ICITTE, TON AMI?
LUI? Y'A 23 ANS! MAIS Y'A ÉTÉ BEN MALADE QUAND Y'ÉTAIT P'TIT! HA HA!
UNE BONNE P'TITE BIÈRE APRÈS UNE DURE JOURNÉE DE LABEUR, Y'A RIEN COMME ÇA, MON HOMME!
MOLSON EXPORT
OUAIN!...
PIF
ÇA FAIT 8 $, MON NOIR...
T'ES T'UN AMOUR, MA BELLE...
GARDE LE CHANGE!
MARCI BEN.


POUR LE PLAISIR DE VOS YEUX, MESSIEURS, VOICI:
SANDRÂÂÂ!
OLD NO7
Jennessee WHISKEY
DRAMBUIE
CROWN
♫ PUMTSI PUMTSI PUMTSI PUMTSI PUMTSI
WOU HOOOU! DONNES-Y LA CLAQUE, SANDRAAA!
ÇA, C'EST UN MOYEN PÉTARD!!
♫ HEY SISTER, GO SISTER SOUL SISTER, SISTER FLOW..
HE MET MARMELADE DOWN IN OLD NEW ORLEANS ♫
STRUTTIN' HER STUFF ON THE STREET, SHE SAID "HELLO! ♫ HEY JOE, WANNA GIVE IT A GO?"
WOU HOU!
GITCHI GITCHI YAYA TATA GITCHI GITCHI YAYA HERE
CLAP CLAP
MOCHA CHOCA LATA YAYA CREOLE LADY MARMELADE ♫
OH YES, BEUBÉ!
CLAP CLAP
CLAP
CLAP CLAP
VOULEZ-VOUS COUCHER AVEC MOI, CE SOIR? ♫
OOOH OUI!!! JE VEUX COUCHER AVEC TOI CE SOIR!
CLAP CLAP


ON APPLAUDIT TRÈS FORT SANDRÂÂÂ !
SANDRA! WOUHOU!
♫!
CLAP CLAP
SANDRA, MA CHÉRIE! VIENS-TU EN DANSER UNE P'TITE ICI POUR MON AMI?
N... NON, MON'ONC'!
Y EST CUTE TON AMI... C'EST QUOI TON NOM, MON TRÉSOR?
EXIT
P... PAUL!
♫ NEVER, NEVER GONNA GIVE YOU UP, I'M NEVER, EVER GONNA STOP, NOT THE WAY I FEEL ABOUT YOU GIRL I JUST CAN'T..
?
Laboffs
CLOC
FAIS-Y PAS TROP PEUR, LÀ!
HI, HI! INQUIÈTE-TOI PAS!
I KNO
CAUSE
EED IT G
WORLD IS
NEVER
EVER GO
STOP
EVER


EN SORTANT DU BAR DE DANSEUSES, RAYNALD ÉTAIT ASSEZ REMONTÉ.
EV'RYBODY WAS KUNG FU FIGHTING THOSE KIDS WHERE FAST AS LIGHTNING!
KUNG FU FIGHTING!
HEILLE, BEUBÉ! VIENS-TU T'ASSIRE SU' MA FACE? HA HA!
TUUUT TUUT
?!
!!!
OUPS...
POURQUOI?...
TON NEZ EST-TU PLUS LONG QUE TA QUEUE?
HA HA!
HEU... HÉ HÉ!..
.. LE NEZ PLUS LONG QUE.. ELLE AVAIT DE L'APLOMB, CELLE-LÀ!...
HA HA!
J'AIME BIEN MON ONCLE RAYNALD, MAIS PARFOIS, IL ME FAIT HONTE.

THE FICTION

# MOONMAN

BY SARAH MEEHAN SIRK

When the sky turned black, I thought of my father.

But that makes no difference to you now. "Where were you when it happened?" you ask, and I say I was at work, in my cubicle, in the centre of the city. Which is not untrue. Hunched over my keyboard, the computers blinked off with a defeated drone, the lights flickered out, and the silence of a city cut from its power rose up from the ground. A quiet more unnerving than darkness, just like Moonman had whispered.

"How did you get out?" you ask, meaning methods, vehicles, escape routes. You want to hear about the path you assume I took west to the wide roads and stiff stalks of corn, whether I knew about the tunnels in advance, and so on, so you can amend your own plans of now-constant preparedness, mental networks fizzing as they rewire.

I don't tell you that when the black clouds thundered across the sky I didn't go anywhere, and my first thought was of the man least capable of protecting me from the end of the world.

I saw him the way he was, with a mug of red wine and a pack of Player's Light, on the other side of the screen door that led out to our small backyard. He could sit out there for hours on summer evenings, smoke lingering around his head in varying densities like a dirty halo. He sat and smoked, looking out, facing elsewhere, while Mom dried the plates and glasses with a blue dishtowel and went upstairs to put Alice to bed.

I'd sometimes pretend he was out there on the step listening to a Jays' game on the radio, unwinding after work like most dads did. I imagined that if I opened the squeaky screen door he'd shift over to make a spot for me and tell me that there were two out in the top of the fourth, with runners on first and third. We'd sit just listening for a while and, when the game began to drag he'd talk about stats and trades and the players he watched when he was my age, and near the bottom of the seventh, when the score was 11–2, he'd tell me to grab our gloves from the garage so we could throw the ball around until it was time for bed.

Instead though, on most nights after dinner, I was inside lying on the rug in front of the TV, and he was out there alone sitting quietly on the back step, wishing he were somewhere else.

I was ten when he came home on a Saturday afternoon with a used guitar. He ruffled my hair as he walked across the front porch, where I was colouring with Alice, and let the door bang shut behind him. His fingertips left trails on my scalp like swaths cut through a wheat field. I followed him inside and watched from the living-room doorway as he leaned the banged-up guitar case against the couch. He grabbed a glass from the cabinet in the dining room and whistled on his way into the kitchen, where he rummaged through a high cupboard, clinking bottles together until he found the one he was looking for. I'd never heard him whistle. He returned, the glass half-filled with a nectar like dark honey, and stopped when he saw me, his lips still pursed in melody.

"Hey, Simon" he said. "Wanna hear something, little man?"

I nodded and moved closer as he set his glass down on the coffee table with a clink. He pulled the case onto the couch, clacked open its locks, and lifted the lid to reveal a plush red interior cradling a scratched black guitar. He ran his fingers along its strings before pulling it out and nestling it into his torso. For a couple of minutes he tuned the instrument, his eyes closed, head cocked as though listening for some secret. And when he started to strum, a whole different man took the place of my father.

Something dropped to the floor in the upstairs bathroom, and a second later my mother was there on the stairs, her hair pulled back with a kerchief, yellow latex gloves on her hands glistening with water.

It was just before Christmas when he left his job at his uncle's car dealership. My mother wore a hood of silence as she peeled carrots and potatoes over the sink, her dark hair hanging forward like a curtain so none of us could see her face.

"Maggie, you're not even trying to understand," my father said.

He leaned beside her against the counter, with his arms crossed tight over his broad chest, shaking his head and staring down at the tile he kept poking with his big toe. Mom peeled harder and faster until the carrot in her hand looked more like a weapon than a vegetable.

"Babe," he said, "come on. You think it was easy for me to make this decision?"

As though he wasn't there at all, she chopped up the potatoes and carrots, dumped them in a pot of water and set it on the stove. She grabbed plates and cutlery from the shelves and drawers, set the table for three, and opened the oven door to check on the meat.

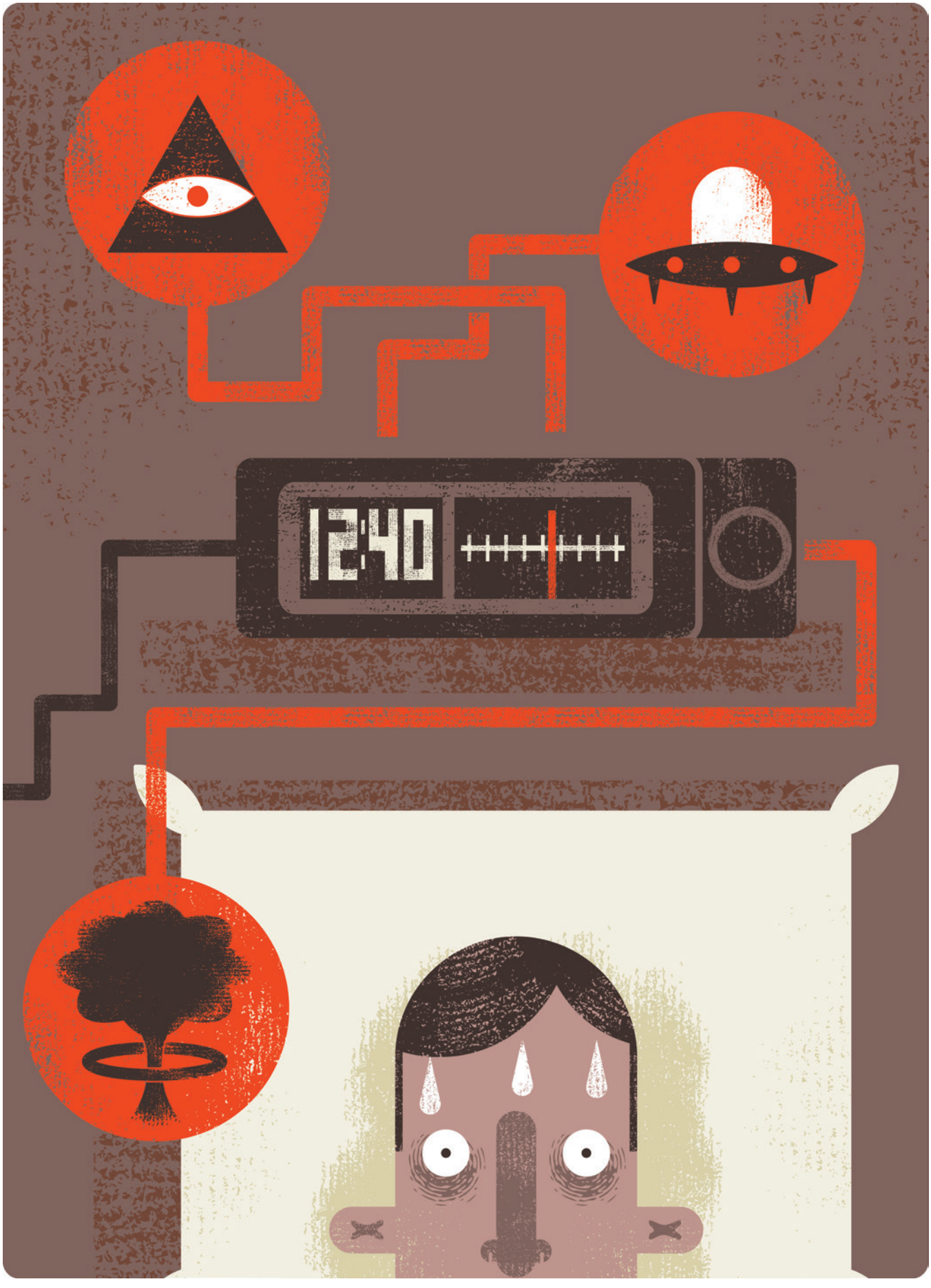
"It's pork," she said, slamming it shut. "Dinner will be ready in an hour."

She wiped her hands on a dishtowel, tossed it onto the counter, and didn't say anything to Alice or me on her way through the living room and up the stairs.

"I'm really getting tired of this martyr shit!" my dad yelled to the ceiling on his way out back, the screen door clapping hard against its frame.

Alice and I sat like statues on the living-room floor in front of *Wheel of Fortune.* I thought that if we didn't move, if we didn't say anything, we might blend into the carpeting. I was relieved when Dad came back in a few minutes later

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTHEW DALEY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and went upstairs.

"Big money! Big money!" Alice called out as she clapped her hands.

I elbowed her in the ribs: "Shh!"

The bedroom door opened and shut above us, and I heard the bass of their voices getting louder and louder until something slammed against the wall, rattling the trinkets in the china cabinet beside me.

Footsteps in the hallway above. Fast but not running, my mother came down the stairs, my father close behind.

"Maggie, wait," he called to her. But she was already out the front door. Because I didn't hear the creak of the porch steps, I knew she hadn't gone far and imagined her leaning over the railing, which, in a way, was just as bad.

That spring I turned eleven and got a bike for my birthday. By then my father was writing music during the day and playing Bowie cover songs in bars a couple nights a week. My mother was working the overnight shift at the radio station, where she was a part-time producer. I'd heard her on the phone with someone not long before she started working nights, saying Alice and I wouldn't even know she was gone, that she'd be around for bedtime and home in time to take us to school in the morning.


"My aunt is going to stay over the nights that both Chris and I are working," she said into the receiver. "I don't know, Fran. It's going to be tough for a while, but I think it's only temporary. I mean, my hours and his . . . *situation.*"

And then she laughed in that conspiratorial way mothers share while talking with one another about their husbands and children. A laugh, it seemed to me, that rarely involved joy.

I couldn't tell her that she'd been wrong. It didn't matter that she was home when we went to bed and when we got up for school in the morning–her nighttime absence echoed through the halls. We always knew when she was gone. I lost the feeling that children are supposed to have when they drift off to sleep: that knowledge that their parents, their mother, is in the house somewhere, her protective warmth flowing from room to room in the dark. Without it, I lay awake for hours listening to every creak, every rustle, and every snore that rose up from Great Aunt Audrey, who slipped into an impenetrable slumber on a chair in front of the television minutes after the front door was pulled shut and the key turned in the lock.

In search of a direct line to my mother I brought the old brown clock radio up from the basement one night, plugged it in by my bed, and tuned it to her station. I knew I wouldn't hear her voice, but it didn't matter. I could see her in the windowless studio I'd visited on a P.D. day, sitting at the control board pressing buttons, adjusting volumes, directing the show in silence. The studio felt as serious as an operating room and everything in it seemed very important, including my mother, without whom I believed the whole thing would fall apart.

I burrowed deep under the covers with the radio and slowly increased the volume.

"They know more than they'll ever let on, while they ply us with television and hamburgers and the Super Bowl, pounding our brains into a doughy pulp. You can't hear them, but they're laughing. Right now. Laughing at us."

The voice stopped. A man's voice, almost whispering. I felt like I'd caught him in the middle of telling a secret. I waited a few seconds before reaching for the tuner, thinking maybe I had the wrong sta–

"Laughing!" he boomed, the radio tumbling from my hands and clunking to the floor. Aunt Audrey's snore broke into fits before returning to its sinusoidal cadence. I picked up the radio and settled back under the blanket.

The voice was whispering again.

"Laughing. At us. And you can bet your last ounce of gold that they'll be laughing harder as they watch us try to peeeeeeel our flabby bodies off the couch when it comes time to fight back."

Pause.

"To fight the new world order."

Pause.

"If, that is, we ever open our eyes to what is happening. To what–really–is happening."

Longer pause.

"I'm Moonman and this is *The Age,* on the Striker Radio Network."

I crawled deeper under the covers where it was hardest to breathe and decided that when Moonman came back from commercial I'd focus on the silence

## DARK RED

Cherries in my grandma's yard,
the trim around her windows,
the cistern cap. Safe house.

The less common trillium:
*Trillium erectum,* wake-robin, stinking Benjamin,
birth root, abortionist.

My preference in lipstick.
Rock lichen. Girls' knees.

The binding of my first bible,
though I wanted black like the men.

The peeling skin on the barn I'd stare at as a child,
thinking, What if nothing at all existed?

Nothing is its own colour, exiled.

The first time I smelled my own blood
and every time since.

Very few gemstones.
A cold and heavy steak before cooking.

The deck paint on the first home I owned.
The wet gore of what I wrote there.

The parrot's tail feathers and how I know
he will flaunt your voice after you die.

The faux-Moroccan lamp's glass panels.
Antarctica's primordial glaciers.

The stains I scrubbed from the floor
after the cops took my mother again.

All of my guilt, wineglass after wineglass.

A moon I imagine looming
over the apprehensive lake.

–Jennifer LoveGrove

between his words. It wasn't hard to do. And I could swear, if I listened hard enough, that I heard my mother in that silence, that I could hear her breathing. She was always there in the soundlessness. Quiet on the board signalling to Moonman to break, quiet in the kitchen packing our lunches for school, quiet with Alice asleep in her arms through the crack of the bedroom door.

I tuned in to Moonman under my blankets every night she was gone. I listened to him talk about the Illuminati, about life in other galaxies, about Area 51 and what really happened in Roswell, New Mexico. I learned about the symbols of the new world order, the secret histories of world leaders, and the imminent "end of the world as we know it." Moonman knew more than anyone I'd ever met, and every night I felt like he was sharing secrets of the universe with me alone.

If I wanted to, I could blame him for what happened. I could say he planted seeds of curiosity about the world at night, that he inspired me to explore the dark, that listening to him made me feel brave and independent and old enough to creep down the stairs past sleeping Aunt Audrey, into the garage and out onto the street with my bicycle.

But, really, I think it was rage that sparked it. Rage or insomnia, or just the plain white terror of being left alone in the dark. Or some of all three.

I rode off into the starless city night, pedalling hard and fast, weaving through neighbourhood streets, toward the main road. Darkness rustled the leaves high overhead and I was breathless with adrenaline and the metallic taste of the night air that in no way resembled that of the day. I knew where my dad was. He'd pointed it out to me one afternoon when he picked me up from school–the pub where he played his music.

I had to blink against the bright street lights when I turned onto the main road, standing up as I pedalled along the wide sidewalk, zipping past people out for a nighttime stroll or huddled in dark doorways smoking cigarettes.

"Hey–kid!" someone yelled. "Little late for a bike ride!"

I slowed down and rode close to the storefronts as I approached the pub, slipping into the shadows of the awnings that lined the way. I heard music. A man's voice singing something familiar. "CHRIS COATES, TONIGHT 9 P.M.," written in pink chalk on a sandwich board outside. I hopped off my bike and leaned it against the window of the shop next door. When I was sure no one had seen me, I crouched down beside the planter box in front of the pub and slowly raised my head to peek into the window.

He was right there, sitting on a stool with his back to the street. His feet were perched on the lowest rung, his heels bouncing up and down, keeping time. A column of sweat soaked through his shirt along his spine. On the small stage floor beside him was a bottle of red wine and a half-empty glass, and everything was hued pink and green by the lights cast from the ceiling above him. My father strummed his guitar while he sang hard and loud into the microphone. Even through the glass I could hear that his guitar sounded brighter and more desperate than it ever had in our living room.

I looked past him into the pub where candles flickered like grimy stars on each table. A group of college kids were making their way to the pool table at the back, the girls stirring candy-coloured drinks with tiny straws. Two older men in plaid shirts drank beer and ate nuts at the bar while they watched hockey on televisions that were hung from the ceiling, and three young women sipped white wine and looked around the room instead of talking to each other. One couple sat facing my dad, a blond woman leaning back into the man she was with, a number of shot glasses and beer bottles scattered on the table beside them. The man seemed to be having a hard time keeping his head from bobbing around. The woman was staring at my father. When the man said something in her ear she swatted at his face with long fingers and didn't take her eyes off the stage. I looked around for others listening the same way but, outside of a few people nodding their heads to the music now and then, no one else seemed to be paying much attention.

When he stopped playing, the blond woman was the first to clap. She sat up straight and pressed her elbows against either side of her chest. A few others turned to applaud as well, but none as vigorously as she did. I heard my dad say something about taking a break and I dropped down again as he slid off his stool.

I peeked one last time and saw him standing in front of the stage pouring more wine into his glass, talking to the woman who smiled with big white teeth and tossed her blond hair over her shoulder when she laughed. The man she'd been sitting with had fallen asleep with his chin on his chest and was being nudged, hard, by a chubby waitress as she cleared the empty bottles left on their table into a black dish tub. Dad walked in the direction of the bar, the woman chatting close beside him. He smiled at her in a way that was moist and young, a smile that bared too many teeth and a hunger I couldn't recognize.

I rode home. Fast. The wind felt colder, like it was scratching my throat with long frigid fingernails. I was suddenly very tired and I wanted my bed. My radio. My blankets. My mother's inaudible breaths in Moonman's pauses. I stood on my pedals and pumped hard, turning from one street to the next in wide arcs. A block from my house, I took a corner too quickly.

I remember headlights. And that is all.

Nauseous in the aluminum lighting.
Thick throbbing in my ears.

Mom and Dad shadows cut out against a white ceiling. Alice's singsong voice at the end of a long, warbling tunnel.

Can't talk. Can't move.

Nurses checking tubes and dials, stroking my forehead when they looked down from far up, into my eyes. In the light, a dull faraway inescapable pain.

Dad somewhere in the room with his guitar once. Or always.

Mom hovering in the quiet spaces between.

I left the hospital near the end of autumn. The surgeon came down to see me on my last day and ruffled my hair and told me to buy a lottery ticket on the way home. When my mother wheeled me through the front door I knew right away the house was not the same–a new emptiness in the hallway, the coat rack gone, the spider plant no longer trickling its spindly leaves from a stand by the stairs.

## KICK THE CAN

Like a ball rolling air
full of ripe openings
and me running fast
from the juice-flying can.

No pain. Just a tin-startled
shock from a path interrupted
and a boy coming forward.
I was fine not feeling a thing.

Just a warm thickening,
as if an egg with the yolk
running red had been cracked.
It was the sauce of me coming out–

metallic lava through
the fork spread of my hands
pulled on and on
by a boy's sticky screams.

–Catherine Graham

I was lifted ("Careful! Careful, everyone, the scar on his back still hasn't healed . . .") to a hospital bed wrapped in *Star Wars* sheets, in the middle of the living room. The television that had been on a stand against the opposite wall was now perched on a stool by my bed between stacks of comic books and bouquets of helium balloons. The couches and chairs were now clustered in the dining room, the big table itself nowhere to be seen. New drapes had been hung on the window overlooking the porch and the street, silky sheaths that let the sunlight in while hiding me from curious neighbours, my experience of the outside world, in turn, reduced to dreamy, shimmery snatches of ordinary life.


There were pictures missing from the hallway. For days I stared at an edge of wallpaper that was lifting near the railing, trying to remember which one had been there.

A steady stream of assistants paraded through the door for a long time, nurses and therapists checking scars, lifting arms, bending legs, taking measurements. ("He's progressing well, Mrs. Coates. Kids have a tendency to bounce back.") I asked for a radio. Mom was always home now, but on wide-awake nights, when everyone was sleeping, I still listened to Moonman in the dark.

Since he was usually somewhere in the stream of nurses and therapists and caregivers, it took a while before I realized that my father didn't live with us anymore. Huddled under a blanket on the porch one afternoon, still feeling achy and watery from an infection, I watched my parents standing by my dad's car parked across the road. Mom stood with her arms crossed, looking past him far down the street. Dad fiddled with his keys. Mom said something and nodded a few times before walking back up to the house.

He opened the car door and was about to get in when he looked up at me. I pretended I couldn't see him. Drugged, groggy, it wasn't hard to stare out at nothing in the distance. My mother came up the steps and with the back of her soft hand touched my forehead, then my cheek, and kissed me before going inside, the door banging shut behind her.

"See ya in a bit, soldier," my father called out.

"Oh," I said, acting like I just realized he was there. I lifted my arm, held up my hand. "O.K."

He slid into the driver's seat, started the car, and unrolled his window. The radio was blaring. He flicked it off and lit a cigarette. For a moment he sat there in the puffs of grey, before driving off with his hand holding the door.

My mother married Stephen when I was fourteen. Their ceremony quiet, silvery, cozy with night. He was a gentle but faraway man, a serious look in his pale eyes behind the small round glasses he was always adjusting. His long thin black hair was tied in a ponytail that curled down his back, grey wisps framing his bony equine face. When he moved in, he brought heavy boxes filled with books, two lamps, a pair of jeans, and three black T-shirts. He bought a globe at a garage sale to show me how countries were drawn in the decades before the First World War. He touched my mother whenever he could.

One evening on the porch when he was writing notes, I asked him if what he talked about on the radio was true. Without looking up, he said he didn't know what truth meant anymore. Sometimes I liked when he responded that way.

"I mean, are those things really happening?" I asked.

"Some of them already have," he said, consulting one of the open books on the table beside him.

"But I mean, the really bad things, like the end-of-the-world kind of stuff."

"It's cyclical, Simon," he said, removing his glasses and rubbing his eyes. His voice bent in the direction of his on-air delivery. "And it's relative. There's a rhythm and a plan. Most is beyond our control."

"But I mean–"

"Simon," he said, lowering his pencil and looking straight at me. "Are you asking if I believe there will be change, even significant change, in our lifetime?"

He held his breath and my gaze as though expecting some deeper understanding to reveal itself in my eyes, some realization I would come to that would prevent him from having to say what he really thought. But I was long accustomed to his pauses by now and thrilled to be his private audience for what felt like a particularly omniscient insight. I leaned forward, blinking.

After a moment, he released a lung full of sour air.

"Yes," he said, returning to his books and jotting down a note. "I do."

You call and tell me how you remember the salespeople and middle managers and secretaries and vice-vice-presidents chatting about weekend plans as they descended the windowless concrete silos of office building stairwells, cellphones in leather holsters, name tags swinging from lanyards around their necks. "All the sheep," you say, but not without pity. You gave them a quick smile of reassurance because that's all you could do as you and everyone else poured out to the sidewalk. The grid of city streets locked with idling cars, drivers leaning out of their windows, squinting at the horizon, nearly decapitated by cackling bicyclists whizzing past. Everyone with phones to their ears, looking east, then south, then west, then north, then at the useless phone in their hand as one network went down, then the next, then the next, and then all we had left were the people in front of us, people slowly being covered in ash and soot that fell from the sky like black snow.


It was so much like how Moonman said it would be. He'd warned us. He hoped we'd fight back in time enough to prevent it from happening, that we'd "wake up and see through the lies," the attempts to tranquillize us. But his was only a voice in the night. And half the time, when you were tuned in, listening under the covers, it was impossible to tell if you were just dreaming.

On spring and summer weekends, Stephen rose early and drew a map of the garage sales in the neighbourhood that had been advertised by handmade signs taped to lampposts, charting the most efficient course from one to the next and home again. He rarely came home with anything. He said to me once that buried treasure was hard to find.

On winter weekends he sat in the worn wingback chair he had pushed to the living room window, flicking the newspaper from page to page, raging under his breath at our collective blindness in the hazy, dusty light.

Now he's on an island with my mother. I think. I like to think. Somewhere where an evening sun glistens orange and gold off the sea as they sit watching it on a mat she wove from palms, her head on his shoulder. Alice in a tree house nearby yelling "Big money! Big money!" at an old TV set that washed up on shore.

My father went back to the car dealership to pay for the portions of my treatment the government wouldn't cover, and moved into an apartment above a drugstore. He set up a bench press by the living room couch, his guitar in its case in the bedroom corner where it remained partially hidden by an Ikea wardrobe. When I went to visit him he'd chain my wheelchair to the bike post out front and carry me up the two long flights to his door, holding my chest close to his. He took each step slowly. We didn't speak as he ascended, so the journey felt long. I once broke the silence by telling him he didn't have to be so careful, that I wasn't made of glass, but still he went slowly. Another time, during my Grade 12 exams, I was exhausted and let my head drop on his shoulder, nearly drifting off as we went up and up and up. I heard his heart beating faster, and sounds of broken breathing. When he sat me down on the plaid chair he said he was going to order a deluxe pizza and went over to the phone on the wall with tears in his eyes.

I'd like to think he's on an island somewhere too, playing Bowie songs to a ragtag commune of tanned and shaggy octogenarians who listen and bob their heads as they sip hooch out of coconuts. But I can't picture it, as much as I want to. He was the first person I thought about when the ash clouds rolled over and I realized what was happening, but I'm still not sure if it was because I wanted him to save me or if it was the other way around.

My producer Cal says the lines are already lit up. He says we're on in two. I glance up at the old digital clock counting down on the wall of the studio then return to highlighting my notes and stacking them in three piles. Hour 1, Hour 2, Hour 3. All twelve lines on the phone are blinking in front of me.

Cal stands at the control board with his left hand on the fader, the fingers of his right hand counting down in silence.

Five. Four. Three.

Two.

One.

The theme song comes up. It's a song my father wrote a long time ago. It's not even that good, but it's been shared millions of times since I started playing it off the top of the show. I let it play for a while then click on my mic.

"It's Wednesday," I say, pausing as the music comes up again. "We're all still here. For now."

You tune in from all over to find out how to survive. You think I've got the answer. You say I'm the only voice you can really trust now, and you whisper it over the line as if I'm the only one who can hear you, as if the quiet dark around you isn't rustling with perked-up ears. You think I'm genetically predisposed to outlive everything, so you buy my duplicate genes by the ounce and inject them into your veins, not even waiting for the zone nurse to come around and help. You press your radio to your ear to hear what I will say next and panic when the signal is lost. You know but do not care that as we rebuild our cities, our countries, our continent, I've built an empire on you.

You do not know that when the sky went black I went nowhere. That the elevators stopped working and I watched everyone cluster to the windows and then file toward the red exit sign leading to the stairwell, looking at me sympathetically as they passed. Someone will be up soon, they said, squeezing my shoulder. You do not know that I was alone in the dark when my phone rang, and it was my mother telling me in a low, quivering voice to go into the washroom and lock the door. She said she had Alice. She said don't worry, just go. Then the network went down and that was that.

I don't tell you that I didn't make it out that day. I don't say that I rolled my chair into the washroom and breathed in recycled air and drank toilet water in the dark for what felt like weeks. I don't tell you that I was rescued by a man in a makeshift haz-mat suit who was pulling the office building apart for wires and copper and wood. I don't tell you I was nearly dead. You don't even know that I can't walk. That is no way for a hero to be.

I've told you elaborately concocted tales that even I believe half the time. I run through them again in my mind before I say, "Let's go to the phones."

Cal says, "Chris is on Line 1."

"Chris," I say, "Welcome to *The Seed.*"

"Simon," he says.

I don't say anything. No one knows my real name.

"Simon," he says. "It's me."

My finger hovers over the Drop button on the phone. I push it. ⊳


# KIDS' COLOURING CONTEST RESULTS

As *Taddle Creek's* staff know all too well, there's no more harsh critic of colouring than the magazine's own Dave Lapp. So for last summer's special kids' issue, *Taddle Creek* asked Dave to create a colouring contest for its new young readers (or, as *Taddle Creek* likes to call them, "the subscribers of tomorrow"). Dave obliged and gave over his usual back-page spot to a fun drawing that kids and their crayons could have their way with. Fresh off his own colouring deadline for this issue, Dave sat down to judge the entries received and settled on the following winners:

Grand prize: Jessica Xiao, age ten
First runner-up: Max Friedman-Cole, age ten
Second runner-up: Rowan Vaillancourt, age eleven
Third runner-up: Luca Russell, age five

Jessica will be rewarded with Dave's original (uncoloured) artwork, and the runners-up will receive a gift pack from *Taddle Creek's* good friends at *Owl, Chickadee,* and *Chirp.* Thanks to all the kids who sent in entries. *Taddle Creek* can't say you're all winners, because it only has four prizes, but everyone did great.

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Small Print Toronto, *Taddle Creek's* favourite promoter of kid lit, held its fifth annual Roald Dahl Day, at the Toronto Reference Library, this October. This event's theme was Dahl's classic book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,* which celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 2014. The centrepiece of Small Print's festivities was a short story contest for kids aged eight to twelve. The theme: a Toronto-based variation of *Charlie,* including lyrics to an original song, to be sung Oompa-Loompa style. The winner of this year's contest was Matteo Mazzotta, a ten-year-old Grade 5 student at St. Raymond and St. Anthony schools, who loves to read, write, draw, swim, and play video games. *Taddle Creek* is pleased to present Matteo's winning story on the facing page.

ROALD DAHL DAY SHORT STORY CONTEST WINNER

# DAISY DUMBLEBELL & THE GOLDEN TICKET

BY MATTEO MAZZOTTA

Daisy Dumblebell's dilemma started the second he was born. His hipster parents, Jennifer and Paul, thought they were having a girl, so they named their baby Daisy . . . until they looked under the pink blanket. Oops! (Jennifer believed in flower power, so she kept his name.)

Growing up, Daisy was teased left and right. Literally–by one neighbour on the left and one on the right. It was hard not to. He had freckles all over his face, and his hair was so red it looked like his head was on fire. He wore a black T-shirt with a skull on the front all the time, because he wanted to scare people away.

On his first day of school, Daisy's teacher called him "Dumbo Daisybell," and the whole class laughed. Something changed in Daisy that day. He became angry. He became *evil.* Now, every time Daisy saw a flower, his eyes practically turned red and steam puffed out of his ears. He ripped up a flower and stomped on it for twenty minutes. If he saw a daisy, it was even worse. Once he even smashed his TV set.

Every time Daisy walked home after school, he passed by the Wonka Chocolate Factory.

"I'd do anything to get a look inside that place," he thought.

Almost every kid in the world wanted a peek inside the massive building filled with candy and chocolate. From his little brick house in Dovercourt Village, Daisy could see the tops of the smokestacks that puffed out multicoloured smoke.

One day Daisy turned on his smashed TV (he could only hear the sound, there was no picture) and heard, "I, Willy Wonka, am finally opening the gates to my chocolate factory! Five lucky children from all over the world will find a Golden Ticket in my brand new candy bar, the Super Duper Chocolate Fudge Marshmallow Supreme, and with these tickets, they will be allowed into my factory for a private tour."

Daisy jumped up and down on the sofa until he broke it.

He grabbed his allowance and raced to the corner store. The lineup was *huge!* It went all the way around the block, but he waited patiently, and closed his eyes when he passed by a floral shop.

"How many bars?" the lady behind the counter asked.

Daisy laid his money out on the counter.

"I'll take five," he said excitedly.

At home, he nervously unwrapped the first chocolate bar. No ticket. He unwrapped the second. No ticket. He ripped open the third, fourth, and fifth. No ticket.

The next day, the news announced that four kids had found a ticket. This got Daisy very angry. He deserved a ticket! He waited in line for two hours and bought five more chocolate bars. Rip, rip, rip, rip, rip. No tickets.

But then, his big sister, Georgina, walked in through the door carrying a Super Duper Chocolate Fudge Marshmallow Supreme! She left it on the counter and went to go listen to the TV. Daisy snuck over, took the bar, and thought to himself, "Maybe this is the one!"

Rip. He saw a triangle of gold paper! Carefully, he tore open the wrapper and there it was! The last Golden Ticket!

Since he'd stolen his sister's bar, he let Georgina accompany him on the big day, along with the other four winners: Isaac Internet, who was always on his laptop; P. J. Tim, who was so lazy he hardly ever got out of bed; Bianca Bossy, a bossy bragger; and Poppy Yuckovich, who picked her nose and popped her pimples.

Willy Wonka walked over to an unbelievable indoor chocolate river. On either side of the river there were big rows of chocolate daisies.

Georgina pointed, "Daisy, look! Chocolate daisies!"

Daisy got so mad he ran up and pushed Georgina into the chocolate river! Then he angrily stomped on the chocolate daisies until the Oompa-Loompas showed up and fished Georgina out.

"Don't step on the daisies!" the Oompa-Loompas warned him.

Too late! Then, something strange happened. Daisy's face started to turn yellow. His hair turned white and began to look a lot like large petals. His T-shirt turned green, and his hands got larger and started to look like leaves. Daisy had turned into a daisy!

Willy Wonka and the Oompa-Loompas shook their heads and started to sing. And this is the song they sang:

Oompa-Loompa, diddle-lee doo,
Boy do we have a song for you.
Oompa-Loompa, diddle-lee dee,
This song's sure to make you pee.

We knew a boy named Daisy Dumblebell.
He was a bully and a brat as well.

You can't believe the things he'd do.
When you weren't looking, he'd sneak up on you.

He pushed his sis into the chocolate stream.
He laughed at her when she started to scream.

What do you get teasing everyone in sight?
Every day and almost every night?

What do you think will come of that,
Behaving like an evil brat?

When P. J. Tim laid down for a nap,
Daisy gave his cheek a slap.

When Poppy started to pick her nose,
Daisy bullied her and stepped on her toes.

If you are wise you'll listen to me,
Kindness, patience is best you'll see.

Why are you hurting people's feelings?
Lying, cheating, and stealing things?

Isaac Internet brought along his laptop.
Daisy shoved him and made it drop.

Bianca Bossy bragged a lot,
So Daisy bullied her and made her stop.

If you are kind, you will spread cheer,
And not turn into the thing you most fear.

Daisy acted like a dumbbell.
So he turned into a daisy–oh well!

Oompa-Loompa, diddle-lee doo,
Boy do we have a song for you.
Oompa-Loompa, diddle-lee die,
Daisy, now it's your turn to cry!

THE FICTION

# ONLY THE BEAR SURVIVED

BY CHRIS KURIATA

Nearly ten thousand visitors assembled along the upper gorge to watch the animals plummet to their deaths, all lured by the hotel owner's ballyhooing posters: THE PIRATE, MICHIGAN, WITH A CARGO OF FEROCIOUS ANIMALS, WILL PASS THE GREAT RAPIDS AND THE FALLS OF NIAGARA, 8TH SEPTEMBER, 1827, AT 3 O'CLOCK.

On the whole, the spectacle did not live up to the poster.

Father stumbled, having taken advantage of the crowds by snatching warm ale from vendors' tables, knowing we were packed too thick for him to be caught and forced to compensate for his foamy, overly watered libations. Wanting a good view from the bluff, he lifted me into the air, pushing my face into the backs of strangers–feathers from fancy hats tickling my nose–shouting, "My daughter can't see! Let us pass through!"

Rumours circulated of the ship being crammed full of wild jungle beasts: lions, tigers, maybe even an elephant. But when the derelict ship entered the river, the promised cargo was substituted with a less exotic crew of goats, foxes, and geese, all confined to cages. The biggest animal was a bear. Also the smartest, he quickly clawed over the side of the ship and dove into the water, escaping beneath the emerald rapids. The rotted *Michigan,* held together with little more than spit and hope, broke up before even reaching the mouth of the falls. The only thing to tumble over the Horseshoe that day was wreckage and caged animals already drowned.

Too stupid to see how they'd all been cheated, the crowd cheered and celebrated. The swift current of bodies separated Father and I, sweeping him to the Pavilion Hotel, where he'd fight his way past dirty elbows for his favourite position beneath the mounted antlers in the tavern. A natural raconteur, Father would make fast friends with the visitors, who would be so entertained with his songs and stories they would call for the boy to keep Father's glass filled. I watched him float away with the other revellers and walked myself home, happy to get out of the chilly mist.

I set myself to work in the kitchen, scraping flour from the table and adding bits of rabbit to the pot over the fire, despite the unlikeliness of Father coming home with much of an appetite. The sun had nearly fully set when the visitor arrived at our door.

One razor sharp claw wedged itself between the door jamb, lifting the latch and bidding entrance to a long snout the colour of wet ash. The flames under our pot danced in the sudden breeze–coming not from the open door but wafting from the bear's open mouth. Most people, like Mrs. Donnelly, down the road, would be thrown into a panic at first sign of an intruder, especially a bestial one, but I remained calm, telling myself, "You will be brave."

While dirt and needles rushed into the front hall, the bear stood on the threshold, one paw lifted, wanting to advance further. But some doubt tricked his mind. His fur dripped with the Niagara River, and the wood of our house must have smelled similar to the ship meant to drive him to his demise earlier in the afternoon.

I could easily have chased the bear off, making myself big by leaping on the table and clanging two iron pots over my head. The racket would have sent him scurrying, never to return. Instead, I lifted the apron of my dress, flapping the steam off the stew pot, hoping the aroma would entice the bear to shrug off his misgivings and come closer.

No doubt, men were scouring the basin of the falls looking for the remains of the bear. Both the Eagle and the Pavilion Tavern had issued a bounty, wanting the bear to mount ferociously on their wall, its mouth stretched open wide enough for any patron who dared to place his head inside. For now, only I knew the bear had not gone over the Horseshoe and been dashed upon the rocks, and I intended to use this advantage to collect my reward. The wafting stew pot drew the bear a few more inches past the door. His claws bit the floor and his swinging hip bumped against the wall, shaking the bones of the house. Once he was all the way inside, I deftly slipped behind, closing the door and locking it. Now he was trapped!

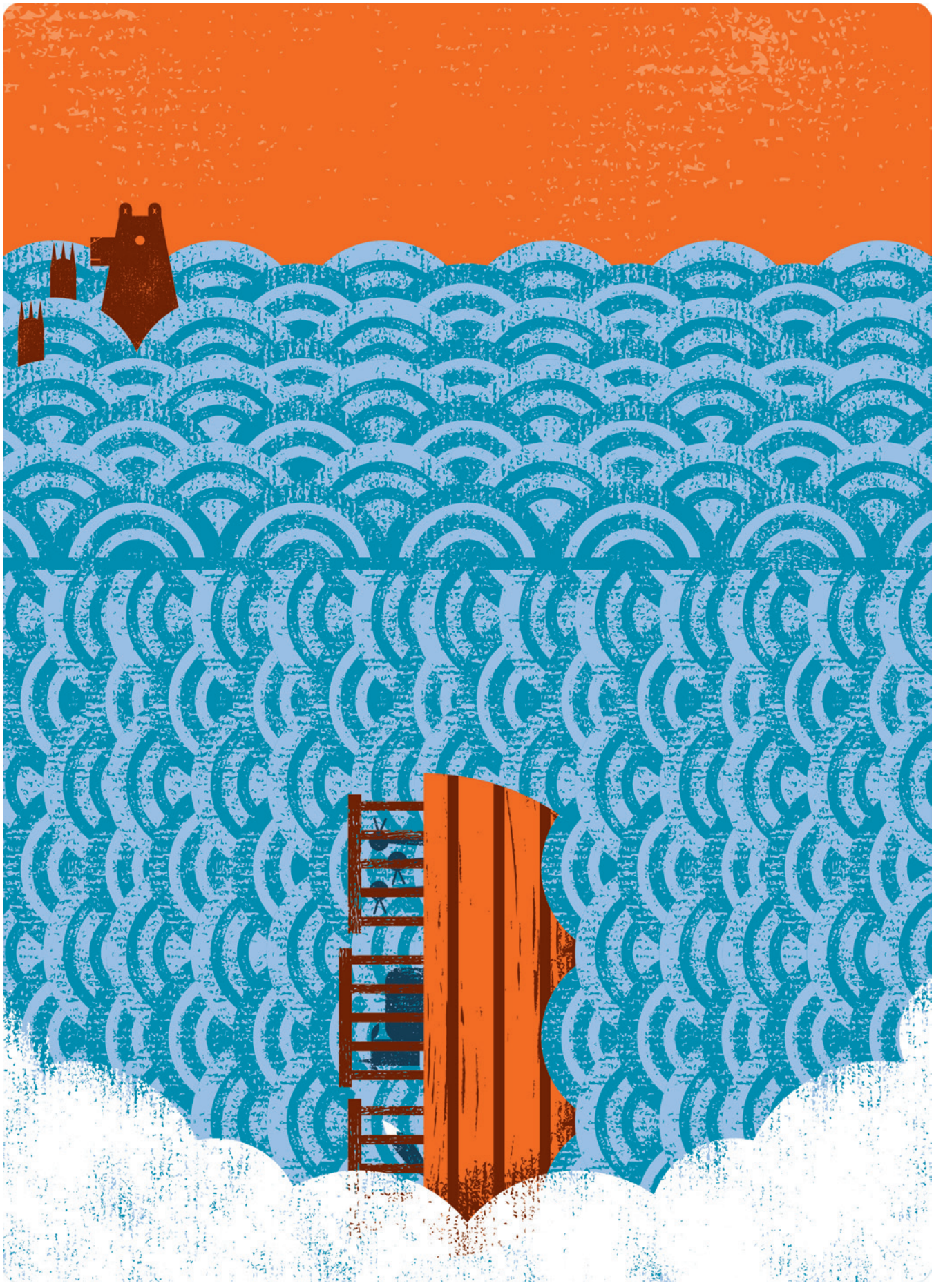
At the sound of the lock rattling the bear turned, looking angry, like it knew I had tricked him. He seemed to offer me a choice, saying, Open the door, little girl, and step aside, and we can forget we ever met. I crossed my arms over my chest. Sorry, but no one invited you in. Now you're staying here till Father comes home.

Feeling as uneasy in our house as he'd been on the boat, the bear stood on his hind legs, showing me his teeth and growling louder than the roar of a hundred Niagara Falls. I remembered Father's musket. He once told me you were best to aim at a bear's shoulders. I'd never before fired a gun and doubted my ability to do so. Surely, I'd spill more shot on the floor than down the barrel and miss the bear by a mile, blasting a hole in the wall and filling the house with bugs by day and cold air by night. Even if the bear hadn't been blocking the way to its retrieval, Father's musket would be useless to me.

The bear snorted, spraying my face with the mist clogging his snout. His eyes searched our home, disinterested in me, judging me inconsequential. He moved into the kitchen, looking for a window, some escape hatch to squeeze through, leaving behind nothing but a shedding of fur and the stony mud from his paws. Abandoning our home as easily as he'd abandoned ship.

I banged the pot. The stew was thin, not enough rabbit in the oats and carrots. The noise more than the aroma captured the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MATTHEW DALEY



bear's attention. If the bear managed to escape, he would be gone forever. Wise now to the danger of ships and houses, the bear would plunge deep into the woods and the tavern's generous bounty would never be claimed. Knowing I had to do whatever I could to keep the bear here until Father came home, I dipped the ladle and began spooning food onto the table.

"Come and eat. Hot stew. So much better than cold fish."

I served up a steaming mound, but despite the wild appetite worked up swimming the rapids, the fussy beast showed little confidence in my skill as a cook. I blew on the bottom of the ladle so it wouldn't scald and dabbed gravy onto the tip of the bear's black snout. He licked it off and decided my cooking was acceptable after all. He sidled up to the table, turning his head sideways to work his long tongue like a frog's and pull the stew into his mouth.

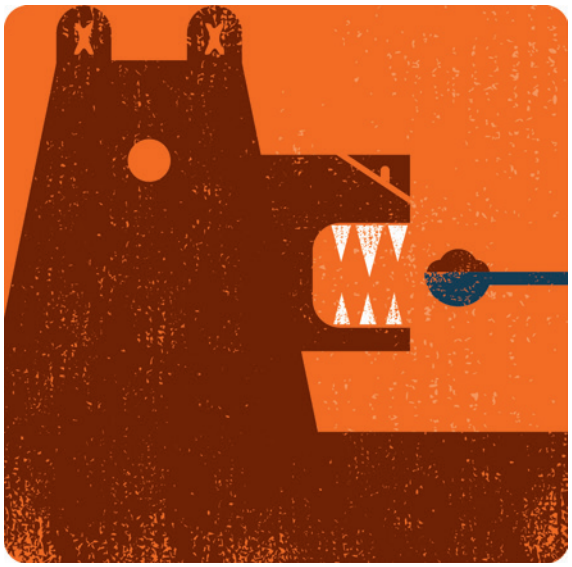
Each time the table was cleaned, I dipped the ladle back into the pot, worried not about my own empty stomach as I gave the bear third and fourth servings. The pot emptied but the bear's appetite remained. He began gnawing on the gravy-stained wood, gouging a basin at the head of the table, one Father could now spoon his soup from, never needing a bowl again. I smacked the bear's backside with the ladle, ordering him to stop. He turned to give me a look that made it clear–despite my generous feeding–that the two of us were not friends. I ran to the shelf of preserves, dumping a mess of blueberry jam onto the table for the bear to lap up. His tongue soon turned purple but he still wanted more. I feared the bear's appetite would outlast our preserves. I opened seventeen jars, everything from tomatoes to eggs. Our depleted food supply mattered little–what the bear ate now he would pay back in spades. Every mouthful he swallowed put more meat on his bones. There would be enough of him to fill the empty pot not seven times but seventy-seven times.

At last, with his appetite sated, the bear looked for a good place to lie down. Too fat to squeeze out any window, I now knew I had him. He was anchored, too tired to go anywhere until Father came home. I caught him looking into the bedroom, at my mattress of clean straw, and I shook my head. I wasn't allowing him to crawl into my bed, not with his wet stinking fur.

The bear penitently bowed his head and stretched, his bones cracking loud as ice on the lake. His paws buried my feet, the wet fur dampening my ankles. It was disgraceful how foul he looked. Pine needles and burrs clung to his side. The fur along his back was tangled. I thought about what a warm blanket his hide would make. I wanted him clean before Father came home, so I piled more logs into the fire and beckoned him closer.

"Come sit beside me. It's nice and warm here."

I could see the flames reflected in his drying fur. I took poor Momma's brush from the secret box Father kept under his bed and began running it through the bear's coat. He luxuriated under the bristles, rolling onto his side, exposing his belly. From between his clenched teeth escaped a gentle ru-rurr-ru-ing that sounded less like a growl than a giggle.



The excitement of the day and the long trek home–exacerbated by my proximity to the fire–made me sleepy. I doubled my efforts stroking the brush, hoping that would keep me awake, but soon my drowsy face settled into the soft, clean fur. I slipped out of my shoes, warming my feet in the fur of the bear's neck. While his heart beat a lullaby, I closed my eyes and made my feet into fists, feeling the soft hairs sifting between my toes.

It made me laugh to imagine Father coming home, mystified by the locked door and peering through the window to see me curled up alongside the missing bear. I imagined him telling the story over and over at the Pavilion Hotel, how his daughter's bravery and quick wits fooled the bear into filling his belly and passing out before the fire. All Father needed to do was tiptoe to his musket and aim for the shoulder.

The helpings of preserves did wonders to improve the bear's breath, so I didn't mind much when his flat tongue began circling my forehead. At first, I thought he was returning the favour of the thorough grooming I gave him, but through his rising and falling stomach, I could hear the greedy rumbling in his belly, crying out for more food. I had nothing left to give him, not even the rabbit skins. Willing to do whatever it took to keep him here, I didn't so much as flinch when his great mouth opened.

I wasn't afraid to tumble into the darkness. The walls of my tiny prison were slick and warm–the texture and consistency of hog liver. A terrible barrage of odours flooded my nostrils. I smelled the mud of the river bank and fish, but I also smelled the stew I had laboured so long over and the preserves; jams and fruit and eggs. My dress was immediately soaked through, but I would never shiver, not under the thick winter coat of meat and fur that now surrounded me.

There was no sense in calling out. Even if someone had been close by, my cries would be drowned out by the heavy sawing of the great bear's own snoring. What a fool he was, falling asleep in front of the fire like he didn't have a care in the world. Little did he know Father would be home soon. I could already hear his bemused voice rousing our uninvited guest, tapping his snout and asking, "Where's my dinner? Where's my daughter?" I would have to be sure to crouch down low, knowing Father would aim his musket at the shoulder. I imagined Father telling the story again and again at the Pavilion Hotel to an enraptured audience, pointing to the bear's head mounted on the wall, its ferocious mouth open wide, explaining how he reached both arms into that razor sharp maw and pulled out his daughter like Jonah from the belly of the great fish, covered head to toe in the sloshing of the bear's stomach, her face dyed purple from blueberry jam.

While the bear snored, I folded my hands behind my head, counting the bounty from the Pavilion, waiting patiently for Father to return.


TOM HICKEN

THE SPOTLIGHT

# SPECIAL DELIVERY

*Owl's Karen Sullivan-Cooke keeps another generation interested in the art of letter-writing.*

BY SHARI KASMAN

Making a personal connection with readers is the norm for magazines in the social media age, but *Owl, Chickadee,* and *Chirp* have encouraged a two-way dialogue with their audiences for decades.

Since 1976, countless Canadian kids have flipped through this trio of magazines, collectively aimed at the three-to-thirteen set, along the way learning to construct U.F.O.s out of pie plates and yogourt containers, and volcanoes out of vinegar and baking soda. They've also submitted thousands of jokes, questions, and drawings for which they receive, in return, a handwritten, personalized postcard–a practice the magazines have continued through the birth of E-mail and the impending end of home postal delivery.

Karen Sullivan-Cooke joined *Owl* and *Chickadee's* reader-response department in 1983, eventually becoming its sole postcard writer, and continues writing and mailing notes to kids today. Her cards acknowledge children's submissions without the disappointment of a form-letter-type rejection slip an adult reader might receive from a magazine such as this one. Decorated with cartoons of kids or outlines of characters to be coloured in, the postcards are thank-yous for jokes about chickens crossing roads, drawings of sailboats, and questions about jealousy among friends or difficulty with pets. (And since submissions are kept on file for a while, future publication is always a possibility.)

Sullivan-Cooke's is a postcard-only position. Editors choose material for publication, leaving her responsible for replying to all letter mail, and varying her replies to avoid repetition–replying to contest entries and electronic submissions isn't in the job description. She responds to scribbles by saying, "Thank you for such a colourful, cheery drawing," keeping things vague when coming across a picture of an apple, in case it's actually a tomato.

Sullivan-Cooke's work has dwindled since the advent of E-mail. At her postcard-writing height, she would send more than a hundred notes per month. Now she's lucky if she writes half that. "Parents write in to say the postcards are a nice touch in today's age, where letter-writing is a dying art," she says. "Kids don't receive mail anymore, aside from the magazine."

I sent work to *Owl* and *Chickadee* as a child, and still have nine postcard replies dated between 1984 and 1989, plus a silver certificate of congratulations offering a "HURRAH" for my first publication–a drawing of a girl in a raincoat holding an umbrella that appeared in the April, 1985, issue of *Chickadee.* Sullivan-Cooke wrote two of the postcards. Seeing them all these years later surprises her, not because of the primary colours and retro design, but because of the postcard's content. "Jeez, I didn't write very much back then!" she says. "I could have said some more things here. That's when I was just starting out."

Sullivan-Cooke calls herself a "children's correspondent," but I call her "the postcard lady," a title she warms up to. "I enjoy it so much. I'll probably be doing this until I die," she tells me. "But I'll keep you in mind to pass on the job to, so you can be the next postcard lady."

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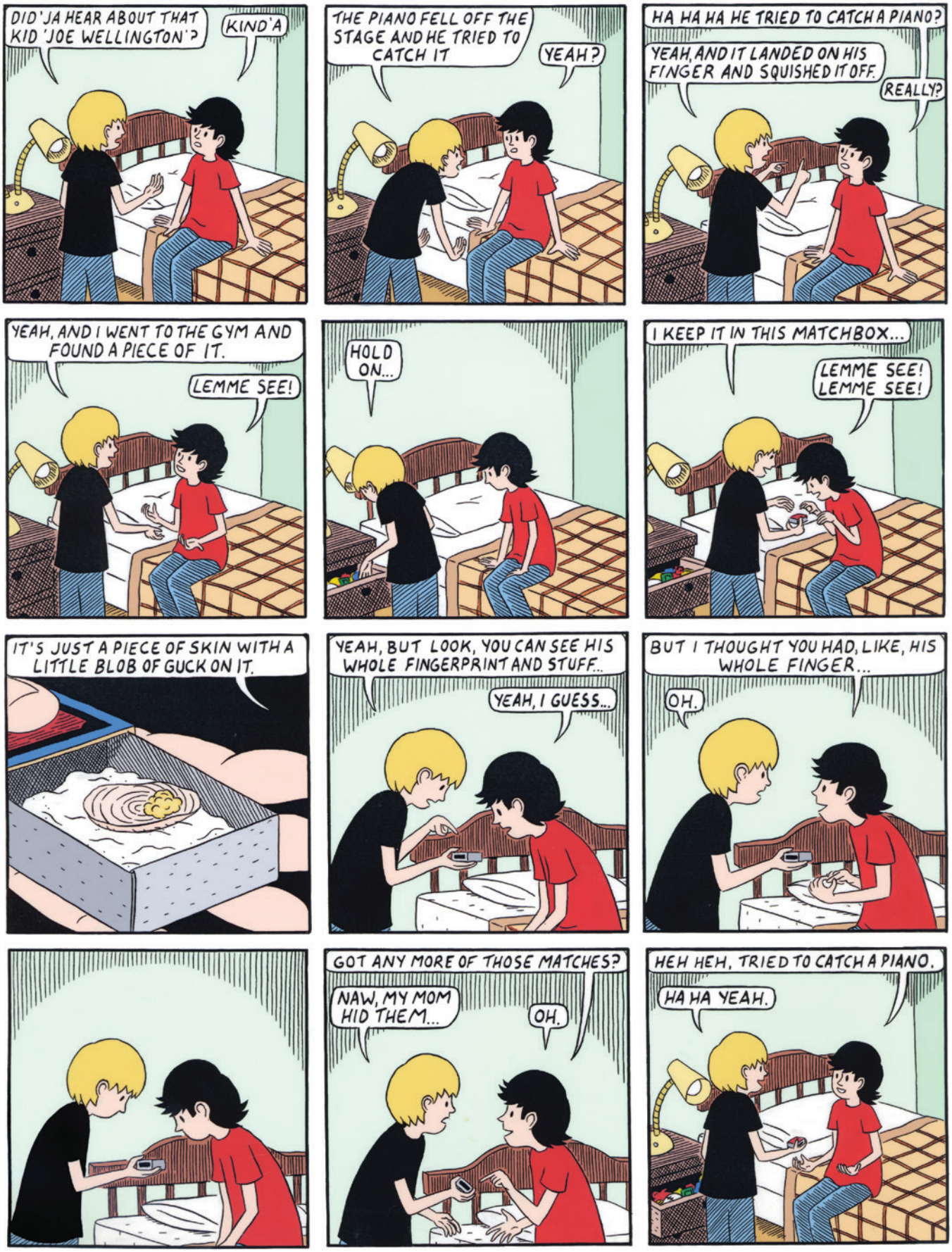

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