

# TADDLE CREEK



SUMMER 2001  
\$3.95



# EVORA

## hair studio

Look to EVORA  
for the right approach!

1504A Yonge Street  
2nd floor, Ste. 200  
(Yonge and St. Clair)  
Toronto, ON M4T 1Z6  
(416) 922-0085





# TADDLE CREEK

VOL. IV

SUMMER 2001

No. 2

## FICTION

- "The Sandra Manoeuvre" ..... Moe Berg 3  
"Sonny" ..... Alexandra Leggat 6  
"U of T: 2020" ..... Jim Munroe 11  
"Thirteen" ..... Mary-Lou Zeitoun 30  
"Despite Last Night's Rain" ..... Jonathan Bennett 36

## ILLUSTRATED FICTION

- "Bughouse" ..... Dave Lapp 18

## INTERVIEW

- Stuart Ross ..... Kerri Huffman 12  
*Author and poet explores his family history and his own emotions in his upcoming collection Razovsky at Peace.*

## ESSAY

- "Plastic Patches and Cat's Eyes" ..... Alfred Holden 20  
*Like most cities, Toronto embraced progress and the motor age. Unlike most, it had doubts.*

## POEMS

- "What I Learned Growing Up in Parkdale" ..... Emily Pohl-Weary 4  
"The Purple Nurple" ..... Paul Vermeersch 9  
"Nothing: A Haiku" ..... George Murray 14  
"Shopping" ..... Margaret Christakos 33  
"There Was Something That We Did in Jackson" ..... Kathleen Olmstead 34  
"Étude for Four Hands" ..... Elana Wolff 39

## COVER STARS

*The children of Haymarket Square, 1945. Photograph by "McK."*

---

## EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor-in-Chief: CONAN TOBIAS

Associate Editor: KERRI HUFFMAN

Photo Editor: PHILLIP SMITH

Copy Editor: REBECCA CALDWELL

Publisher: VITALIS PUBLISHING

Printing: POINTONE GRAPHICS

TADDLE CREEK (ISSN 1480-2481) is published semi-annually in June and December by Vitalis Publishing, P.O. Box 611, Station P, Toronto, Ont. M5S 2Y4, and serves the city of Toronto. Vol. IV, No. 2, Whole Number 5, Summer 2001. Submissions of short fiction and poetry may be sent to the above address, provided author resides in the city of Toronto. Please include address and daytime phone number. Submissions not accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope will not be returned. © 2001 by Vitalis Publishing. All rights reserved. Rights to all individual works published in Taddle Creek remain the property of the authors. No part of this periodical may be reproduced in any form without the consent of Taddle Creek or the individual authors. Annual subscription rates: In Canada, \$7. In U.S., \$7 (U.S. funds). Overseas, \$15 (U.S. funds). To inquire about advertising, circulation, subscriptions, submissions, and single and back issues, write to the above address, telephone (416) 324-9075, e-mail to [editor@taddlecreekmag.com](mailto:editor@taddlecreekmag.com), or visit our web site at [www.taddlecreekmag.com](http://www.taddlecreekmag.com).

# The Humber School for Writers

Humber College, Toronto

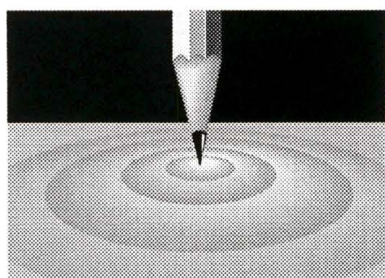
is pleased to announce its faculty list

Wayson Choy  
Roddy Doyle  
Bruce Jay Friedman  
Isabel Huggan  
John Metcalf  
Kim Moritsugu  
Paul Quarrington  
Nino Ricci  
Richard Scrimger  
Olive Senior  
D. M. Thomas

---

THE HUMBER  
SCHOOL FOR  
WRITERS

---



We're celebrating 10 years of success. More than 100 of our students have published books of fiction, poetry and creative non-fiction.

**Summer Workshop**

**July 21 – July 27, 2001**

416-675-5084

 HUMBER COLLEGE

[www.humberc.on.ca/~writers/](http://www.humberc.on.ca/~writers/)





# THE SANDRA MANOEUVRE

FICTION BY MOE BERG

"Can I see you for a minute?" Rob looked up to see Michael walking away. As he rose, Rob's swivel chair farted. He checked to see if anyone had heard. Rita, the receptionist, was fixed on her computer screen. Her outfit looked like she had worn it the night before.

"So, what's up?" Michael asked, pointing at the chair slightly to the left of his desk.

"What do you mean?" Rob said, sitting down gingerly.

"You've gone from being our top salesman to Halverson numbers."

James Halverson was the sort of employee every company had. A bland, average guy who does his job well enough to keep it, but not well enough so you'd notice he was there.

"Yeah, I've had some rough luck. I'll be back."

"You see, I don't think luck has anything to do with it. Is everything all right? Personally?"

"Well . . ."

"Please. You are the best salesman this company has ever had. When someone with your talent . . . well, let's say I'm

concerned. So, please, feel free to say anything. This is not a dressing down."

"Actually, I'm fine. Maybe a case of the winter blahs. But that's all."

Michael studied him. Rob tapped out the passing seconds with his thumbnail on his fingertips. People wondered why he was such a good salesman. It was a matter of being able to talk to people and adjust his personality to theirs. Of being a chameleon.

"Well, maybe it is bad luck or maybe you're tired. Do you need to take some time off? A vacation?"

"No. That won't be necessary."

"Why don't you take the rest of the day off. And tomorrow. Come back Thursday fully rested and we'll talk again."

"Really, it's not necessary . . ."

Michael stood.

"I'm still the boss here. We can get along without you for a day or two. Catch up on your sleep. Do nothing. Get hammered with your buddies." He reached out his hand.

"See you first thing Thursday."

"O.K. Thanks. I'll be fine by then."

Rob hadn't noticed how bad things had become. He thought he'd been doing a good job of coping with Sheila's leaving. Pulling into the underground parking lot of his building, he wondered what he might do with the next few days.

Upstairs, he removed his shoes, jacket, and tie and lay on his bed. Grabbing the remote, he switched on the TV and started flipping. He went once around the horn then scrolled towards *Sports-central*. On his way, something caught his eye and he flipped back. There was a pretty Indian woman interviewing a man in a cheap grey suit on some kind of morning show. Rob wondered why the guy didn't wear a sweater or just a shirt and tie. The suit made what he was saying seem less important.

The Indian woman was breathtaking. She was young with shoulder-length dark hair and large, dark eyes. She wore a pair of black boots that reached almost to her knees. Her legs were crossed Mary Hart style: pressed tightly together, tilted to the left. Whenever she asked a question, she twisted her left ankle and



shifted the weight from her right heel to toe and back. She kept perfectly still while listening, but started her dance as soon as she began to speak.

Rob turned it into a game and watched closely to see that she did it every time, which she did. He checked his watch. Ten-twenty-three.

She turned to face the camera and told Rob and everyone else watching that she'd be back to wrap things up after this break. As she said this, her name appeared, superimposed above her cleavage. Sandra Singh.

After the show, he switched to TSN and fell asleep watching tennis. Later, he had a shower and ordered a takeout curry. Sitting at his kitchen table, listening to *All Things Must Pass* by George Harrison, he scooped some chicken Madras onto a container of basmati rice. While chewing a mouthful, he rocked his foot from heel to toe. He repeated this through the whole meal, taking a forkful and doing the Sandra Manoeuvre, which is what he had named it, as though it were a ballet step or a surgical procedure.

He awoke the next morning at nine, got out of bed, and made a pot of coffee. At ten, Sandra announced that she would be talking to a woman about natural medicine and also someone from Clearnet would be offering information about cellphones. This morning, Sandra wore a black, sleeveless dress and the boots with a bit of dark-skinned thigh and knee. Less makeup on than yesterday.

During a commercial break, Rob ran to get his Dictaphone from the glovebox of his car. He held it up to the TV speaker and recorded her voice. During the next commercial, he rewound and listened. The voice was faint and tinny, but definitely her. During the show's final segment, he tapped his finger against his thigh in time with the Manoeuvre. Reaching over to a pad of paper that sat on his bedside table, he wrote *Polaroid film*.

That night, he went to a bar called Teddy's. A woman named Jennifer worked as a bartender there and, shortly after his breakup with Sheila, she'd told him if he ever needed to talk . . . you know. Rob figured he had a mercy fuck coming. It was the kind of thing he felt he should do to justify the time off.

"Do you have any boots?" he asked, kissing her fake breasts.

"What?" she asked breathlessly.

"Never mind," he said, unzipping her stretchy brown pants.

## WHAT I LEARNED GROWING UP IN PARKDALE

*For Sheena.*

Cars never stop for pedestrians  
Kids buy cigarettes in ones, it's cheaper  
Lake Ontario was once clean enough to swim in  
Cadillacs invariably carry pimps  
You can't find parking on Sundays  
Never trust others  
Pick your nose when a pusher approaches  
If you steal, you'll get beat to a pulp  
The cops only make you bleed worse  
Guardian Angels are worse than cops  
Hookers earn a decent living  
The pimp always gets tired  
Old women live alone  
Boys trick you into giving them blow jobs  
Residents' associations only hassle single women  
The guy who owns the grocery store kicks his workers  
My babysitter turns tricks  
After dark, every car carries one man  
Hide-and-seek is a dangerous game  
People can survive anything

— EMILY POHL-WEARY

He woke up in his own bed. He showered, shaved, and went to set the timer on his VCR. Channel 11 at 9:59 A.M.

The hours flew by like minutes. The confidence in his voice was audible even to himself. He spent the day contacting all of his accounts, shooting the breeze, setting up squash games, turning back on the charm. One of his contacts was an openly gay man named Phillip.

"So, Phil. How are the other four-and-a-half per cent living?" Rob joked. He liked that one.

"We'd be better if a handsome man like yourself joined the team."

"Well, the way my luck's been lately, I might *have* to," he laughed, repulsed at the thought. "I was watching a show yesterday. About transvestites. And I wondered, where do they get the clothes? Some of them were big men."

"What are you in the market for?" Phil laughed. Rob wondered if he should drop it. That might be worse. He said nothing.

"Some guys make their own and some go to big and tall shops. There's one on Yonge Street called Summerville's that gets a lot of trannies, so they won't flinch

when you come in."

"Very funny. How's your stock? I won't bug you for an order, but what say I touch base with you Monday and we can see what I can jam down your throat."

"We both know what you can jam down my throat," he purred. "Call me and let me know how the outfit turns out."

"Gee, you can't ask you cocksuckers anything without being labelled latent."

"Talk to you Monday," Phil laughed.

Rob looked up Summerville's in the phone book.

"I'll be back in about an hour," he told Rita.

The boots weren't quite as nice as the pair Sandra wore. He expected hers were expensive. His were black and they fit. Close enough.

While he rewound the videotape, he pulled them on. They felt snug, squeezing his calves like a massage. Standing, he took a few tentative steps. Then he walked to the mirror. Blue plaid boxers, white undershirt, and black boots.

He tried mimicking her. It took a great deal of effort to cross his legs like she did.

"Now we are going to talk about ways to quit smoking. Dr. James Plaac is here.



Please, doctor. Help us poor, addicted fools!" she giggled.

"What's your most popular brand with women?" he asked the convenience store clerk, a husky Asian teenager.

"They smoke all kinds. A lot like king size."

"Yeah. They're for a friend. But she didn't tell me what kind to get. Long ones are probably right."

"You could get 100s."

"Do they have a white filter?"

The boy took a pack from the shelf.

"These do. And they're menthol. Do you think she smokes menthol?"

"Um, yeah. That sounds right. Girls like that, don't they?"

"Some do. If you're not sure it might be risky."

"No, now that I think of it, I think she does smoke menthol. How much?"

"Four thirty-five."

On his way to work the next morning, he wore the boots. It wasn't as hard to drive in them as he imagined. Resting the heel on the floor, he pressed the accelerator with his toe. He tapped, rhythmically, causing the car to jerk. The pedal felt exquisite under the sole of his boot. He laughed with pure, childlike joy. At a stop sign, he lit one of the menthol cigarettes. He'd had five the night before and was surprised at how easy it was to get used to them. He pulled off the boots before leaving the car.

"Rob," Michael smiled as he passed by his desk a couple of weeks later.

"Great to have you back. I don't know what happened during those days off, but we are back in business."

"Yeah. Thanks. I feel really good."

"Well. My door is always open. O.K.?"

"O.K."

He'd ordered the wig from an on-line store. It was a bit tight and fake looking, but was approximately the right colour and length. The dress he'd bought the week before from Summerville's. The boots clomped noisily on the hardwood floor as he paced, smoking. Sandra's voice squeaked out of the Dictaphone.

"So, where should people look if they want to find out more about your service?"

"Today we are going to learn how to properly grill a fish."

"Ladies, you know there is nothing like a good massage."

"Please, doctor. Help us poor, addicted fools!"

That day, she'd been wearing a dress that looked like a sari. Rob wondered if she ever wore that red dot on her forehead when she was at home or with her family. He wrote *lipstick* on his pad. Who knew what they used? She appeared in a close-up and Rob pointed his Polaroid at the screen.

"Rob, come on in." Michael turned into his office before Rob could respond.

"Here's your sales bonus for this month. In six weeks you've gone from bad to breaking the company sales record—a record you set."

"Well, people have been responding to the product. The company sells itself."

"Bullshit. I don't know who or what turned you around. I don't care if it's legal or not. Just keep on doing it, whatever it is." He rose to signal the end of the meeting.

"You've got it," Rob said awkwardly.

I really should thank her, he thought. The station where she taped the show was in the suburbs. It would take a half-hour or so to drive out there.

"I'll be out all afternoon on calls, Rita. Send everything to my voice mail."

Rita smiled and Rob looked at her, wondering if she'd showered that morning.

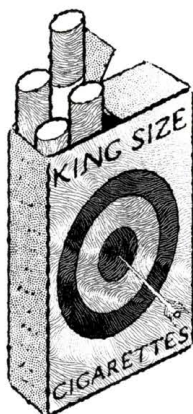
The Channel 11 parking lot was icy. He lit a smoke and thought about going inside. She may have left and then what would be the point of hanging around.

Wait, here she comes. She was wearing a long coat and a black hat. The guy she was with was white. Could be her husband, a boyfriend, or maybe someone merely walking her to her car. Rob got out of his car and walked straight towards them.

"Sandra?"

The two of them turned to see him approaching rapidly. Sandra stopped and twisted so that she was slightly behind her companion. Rob shoved his cold, gloveless hands into his pockets. The man's face tensed.

"I just wanted to tell you..." Rob said, still moving faster than he wanted. *I'm nervous*, he was about to think.



The man put his arm out, brushing Rob gently, but Rob was on a patch of ice and went down. He managed to pull his hands from his pockets in time to catch his fall. Sandra yelped and jerked the man's arm. Rob felt the blood run to his face and pain seep into the balls of his hands.

"Hey, buddy," he said, getting quickly to his feet. "You didn't have to push me. I just wanted to tell her that I like the show. That's all. You didn't have to push." He felt like a child. Now his face was red with injustice.

"Yeah, Basil. Take it easy. Are you O.K.?" Sandra asked.

Rob brushed his suit pants and coat with his hand. There wasn't anything on them. Sandra looked at the man again. He looked at her darkly then turned back to Rob and said, "I'm sorry. It's just that you came out of nowhere. You scared her... us. She's been getting some disturbing calls and e-mails. You know how it is."

"I don't," Rob said, then warmed up when he saw her face—her real face, not dots on a curved screen. Her skin was smooth and makeup free.

"But I can imagine. I guess stars have to watch out for kooks"

She smiled and held out her hand.

"It's nice to meet you. What was your name?"

"Rob. Rob Townes."

"Well, Rob. I'm glad you like the show." She stopped when she caught his gaze and her face lost its smile.

"We really should be going. Are you sure you're O.K.?"

"Yes, I'm fine." Rob tried to hold her eyes, but she looked to her companion.

"Well, sorry again. You shouldn't startle people like that," Basil said walking away with her hand on his arm.

Rob got back into the car. It was still cold, too cold for late March.

"What a great gal," he said aloud. "I knew she would be."

The motor roared and he pulled out a long, thin white cigarette, which he lit with a long, thin silver lighter. He watched himself exhale in the rear-view mirror, a red dot on his forehead.

---

*Moe Berg lives in the Palmerston area. He was a member of the Pursuit of Happiness for eleven years. His first book of short stories, The Green Room, was published in fall, 2000, by Gutter Press.*



# SONNY

FICTION BY ALEXANDRA LEGGAT

It's a small town. Everyone knows Sonny hit the guy. Everyone knows Sonny. He drives through red lights and he isn't colour blind. He ran a red and hit a guy. The police came. Sonny was gone.

He pulls over on the side of the highway to think. Watches the eighteen-wheelers creep across the bridge past customs and motor on. Sonny always wanted to be a truck driver. Thinks the trucks are beautiful. The way they move across the highway at night like monsters. Cabs as big as apartments. He likes the black ones best—the phantoms. Once he tried to hitchhike across the country and only stuck out his thumb when he saw a black one, but the black ones didn't stop.

He contemplates ditching the car, sticking out his thumb—letting a beautiful eighteen-wheeler deliver him from consequence. But he doesn't. He goes home. When Sonny gets home, the keys don't work in the locks. It's late. Puzzled, he walks to the back of the house. The bedroom light is on. He knocks on the window. A thin hand moves the curtain out of the way and a woman presses her face up against the glass. He bangs on the glass where her face is. She screams and jumps back.

"Jesus," he says, "What the hell's going on?" He bangs his fist against the window again and again.

"What do you want?" yells a voice from his room. "What do you want? 'Cause I'm calling the police. I'm on hold, but when I get through I'll get Jim over here. Jim will be over here in a flash and that'll be it for you."

"Well, that's fine, because if you don't get the hell out of my house, I'll call the police and you'll be out on your ass so fast, you won't know what hit you. So, if you're smart lady, you'll get the hell out of my house before Jim gets here."

Sonny picks up a rock and throws it at the window. It bounces off. Sonny isn't afraid of Jim. He's been dealing with Jim for years, for one reason or another. In fact, the last time Jim locked Sonny up, they played poker all night and Sonny whipped his ass. It turned out Sonny

hadn't really broken into the Smiths' house anyway. He just got confused on his way home from the bar and walked into the wrong house and ended up crawling into Amy Smith's bed. And Amy Smith screamed like any teenage girl would if some drunken man crawled into her bed at night. And Bob Smith stuck the tip of his hunting rifle up Sonny's nose and hoisted him out of the bed. Sonny screamed and ran out of the house with Bob Smith chasing him and Jim waiting at the foot of the driveway with his men. Poor Sonny was so disoriented. Jim took him away in the cruiser and locked him up, just to appease Bob Smith really. So Bob Smith wouldn't accuse Jim of not doing his job.

"What do you mean get out of your house?" asks a voice from the dark. Sonny turns around to see where it's coming from. A young woman in a yellow housecoat and yellow slippers approaches Sonny with a carving knife. Her red hair is piled on her head like a turban, her redder lips flapping at him in a way that reminds him of his mother.

"Jesus, lady," he says. "Put that thing away. I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to go to sleep. I've been on the road. I'm tired. I just want to go to bed, but turns out that some dame's already in it. And on any other night that would be the answer to my prayers, but tonight I just wouldn't know what to do with a gift like that, and I will thank whichever one of my friends was kind enough to give me such a thoughtful welcome home gift, but . . ."

Sonny stops. He doesn't have any friends. He looks at the young woman. She looks at him and puts down the knife.

"Would you like to come in?"

Sonny says, "Yeah."

"I'm Amanda."

"I'm Sonny."

"Sonny what?"

"Sonny and warm. Ha, ha."

"That's not funny."

"Oh."

"Really, Sonny who?"

"Sonny James. What difference does it make?"

"Well, I'm not going to invite you into my house if I don't know your last name. I mean what kind of a girl do you think I am? God. You have to be so careful these days. You can't go inviting just anyone into your house. How do I know who you are? How do I know you're not some freak? I've never seen you before. I don't know where you're from. I don't know where you live."

"I live here."

Amanda stops on the porch and looks at him.

"This is my house, Amanda."

Amanda sits down on the porch. Sonny does too. She sighs, gets up, and takes a deep breath.

"Maybe you'd better go," she says.

"Where?"

"Look, it's late. We can't do anything about this tonight. Let's talk in the morning."

Amanda goes inside. Sonny stands on the porch, watches her walk into his house, close the door, lock it, and turn out the porch light. He turns and looks out at the street. Watches the neighbour's cat cross the road and disappear into the backyard. Watches his breath.

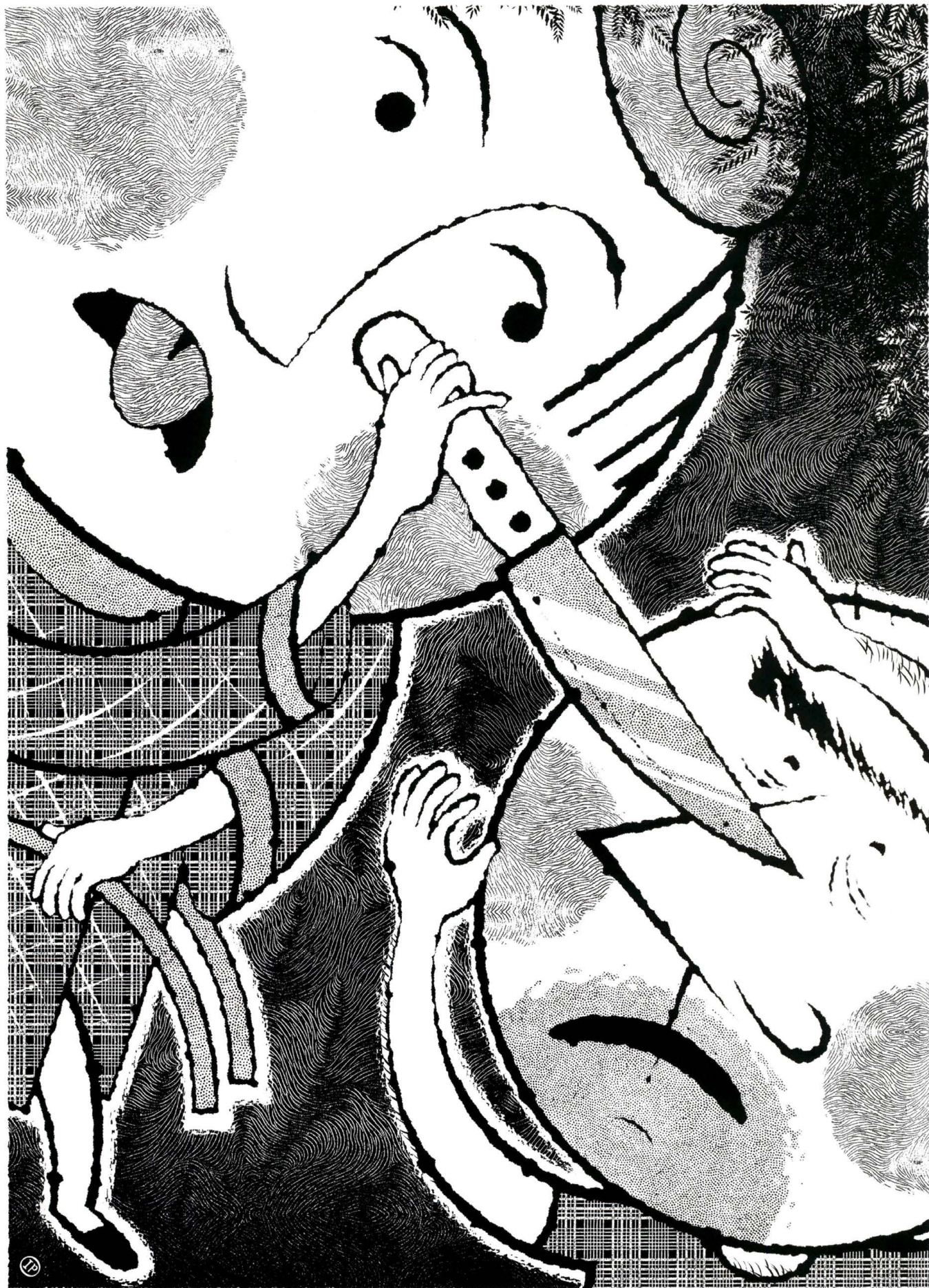
"Jesus," he says.

He sits back down on the step. Feels his heart sink into his stomach. Feels an emptiness come over him he hadn't felt since his mother shoved him out of the car onto the side of the highway one afternoon and left him there, alone, in the heat. He was twelve. After a few hours, another car came by. An old white Chevy. He remembers because he thought it was sent from heaven. A heaven sending, he told the other kids. His legs were getting weak, his lips dryer than chalk, his eyes rolling into the back of his head, and he saw a light—the light. Through that light came a glimmering white automobile, in slow motion. Angelic voices singing in harmony amidst the cloud of dust. It pulled up to Sonny and stopped. The door slowly opened and he smelled something like home-baked bread and chocolate chip cookies and he was sure he was saved.

Mrs. Nickels tells a different story. She was driving home from church. She

IAN PHILLIPS







**literately independent**

**If you're crazy about books...**



**...you'll love the U of T Bookstore.**

**Fiction, Mystery and Science Fiction**

.....

**Poetry, Drama, Literary Criticism and Essays**



**For unusual or  
hard-to-find books  
call on our fabulous  
Special Orders Department.**

**As long as it's in print  
they'll twist themselves into knots to get it to you.**



**University of Toronto Bookstore**

**214 College St., Toronto  
(416) 978-7907 • 1-800-387-4420  
sorders@utpress.utoronto.ca**

**and online: [www.uoftbookstore.com](http://www.uoftbookstore.com)**

decided to go and visit her mother's grave and somehow got lost and ended up on Dragnet Highway, which is what all the young punks call it. They race cars there because nobody really drives on it. It has too much gravel and dust and it doesn't really lead to anywhere worthwhile. One of those mistakes a town makes attempting to improve things. Mrs. Nickels kept on driving when she thought she saw the silhouette of a child. At this point she thought she was just hallucinating from the heat, but the closer she got the clearer it became that there was a young boy standing on the side of the highway. She slowed down and as she got closer she could see that it was Sonny James. She slammed her foot on the brake and tried to turn around. It was too late. He'd already spotted her. She opened the door. He got in and closed the door.

"What are you doing out here, Sonny?"

"Waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

"My mom."

"Is she supposed to pick you up? Should I take you back? What were you doing out there? There doesn't look like there's too much to do out there."

Sonny stared out the windscreen.

"I didn't see your mom in church."

"Hmm."

"Was she supposed to pick you up after church?"

Sonny looked out the passenger seat window at the dead cow carcasses on the side of the road, the dormant tumbleweed—the dry earth.

"You'll be a little sunburnt tonight."

Mrs. Nickels turned off the highway into town. Sonny felt his stomach turn and empty as she drove down his street. Felt his heart drop into his stomach when he saw his house—the empty driveway. He looked at Mrs. Nickels.

"Oh, my. I'll feel so bad if your mom's out there on that highway looking for you. I should have left you there."

Sonny grew increasingly angry. Wondered how Mrs. Nickels could be so thick. It was understandable that he would take a little longer to get it. That it wouldn't be obvious to him right away that his own mother would kick him out of the car and leave him on an abandoned highway in mid-August at midday in the sweltering heat. Just leave him there to die, to burn, to dry up like the dead cows on the side of the road—to stop tumbling like the tumbleweeds. Why would



# THE PURPLE NURPLE

*A.K.A.: The Titty Twister.*

There is nothing else in nature so effective,  
a tornado of seizures bound  
in a knuckle. It's easy:

Simply pinch the nipple  
between the thumb and pointy finger  
and wrench it around  
four hundred degrees or so.

Yes, child, the flesh *is* weak. See,  
on skin so loose the bruising takes  
the shapes of little sunbursts.

The nipple is where the nerves have built  
little balconies into the world  
from which to expose themselves.

Ask a nipple if it knows  
the feel of gravel  
embedded in the skin.  
Now ask your knees.

Primate behaviour has  
unaccounted for variations.  
For instance: young male  
chimpanzees will  
wrestle and fight and punch and  
bite to establish dominance,

much in the way of adolescent boys,  
but for some reason  
our cousins the apes have not included  
the purple nurple in their rituals—

perhaps they're not evolved enough.

Ask Calvin Little, age thirteen,  
breathless on his knees  
in the gravel, crying uncle,  
if he doesn't believe it takes a certain  
amount of logic and reason  
to conceive of torture.

— PAUL VERMEERSCH

he think that? Why would a mother do that? But Mrs. Nickels should be suspicious. She should know better.

"Well then, Sonny, you'll be safer here anyway. You're better off waiting here for her to come home."

"She's not coming home, Mrs. Nickels," said Sonny as he got out of the car.

Jim pulls around the corner with his high beams on. No flashing lights or sirens. Sonny takes a deep breath and walks down to the curb to meet him.

Jim rolls down his window and says, "Sonny James. Well, I never would have guessed you'd show your face in this town again."

"Jesus, Jim, you'd think I hit that guy on purpose or something. Dumb bastard had it coming to him."

"Let's go, kid."

Sonny looks at Jim, looks at his house. Jim puts the cruiser in reverse. Sonny gets in. They drive for a bit in silence.

"There's someone in my house, Jim."

"Look, kid, I got a call up on the hill, I'll let you off here, we'll talk later." Jim drops Sonny off at the bar. Just leaves him standing there staring at the cruiser with his mouth half open, speechless. Jim throws him a few bucks and the key to his room at the motel. Jim has his own room at the motel. Says it's for police business. Sonny's too tired, too confused, to question it. He just wants a beer, some sleep, and morning.

He sits at the bar, eats peanuts, and sucks on a cold bottle of beer. Keeps his head down. He orders another beer and looks around the bar. He doesn't recognize anyone. He thought he knew everyone in this town. The man a couple of seats down reading the paper munches on peanuts and chuckles away to himself.

"What's so funny?" Sonny asks.

"The news," says the man.

"It's funny?"

The man looks at Sonny and laughs. Sonny watches him. Watches and feels himself start to laugh. Feels his stomach tightening in that way a stomach tightens when you try and prevent it from laughing. Sonny can't stop it anymore and the two men are laughing their guts out at the bar. Slapping their knees, holding their stomachs, wiping their eyes—the whole thing.

"Oh, God," says the man. "God, I haven't laughed like that in years."

"Yeah," says Sonny. "I've never laughed like that."

The man laughs a little more.

"What's so funny?" asks Sonny

"Oh," says the man. "The news."

"Oh, yeah, the news. Hmm. Hmmm."

Sonny looks down at the bar. Looks at his hands. Looks at his hands and feels tears welling up in his eyes. Not laughing tears, not the funny kind. Real tears. The bar is silent, as if everyone tiptoed out when he wasn't looking. Are tiptoeing out now while they think he's not noticing, but he can feel them leaving. Can feel them vacating behind his back. He doesn't turn around.

"Do you want another beer, kid?"

The man moves closer to Sonny. Slides



his beer along the bar with him and motions to the bartender to get them another one.

"You know, you look familiar, kid. I don't know why. I just get that feeling. You know that feeling you get about people."

"No, I don't know," says Sonny.

"Oh, come on, kid, you know."

Sonny looks at the guy. "No, I don't know."

"Funny, I had a friend once, swore we had been related in a past life. He was adamant. He'd tell people we used to be brothers. People'd get so confused. 'Used to be? Used to be?' they'd say. And we'd laugh. How can you not be someone's brother anymore? Oh, they'd get so flustered."

Sonny stares at him.

"So, you from around here?" the man asks.

"Yeah."

"You live in the neighbourhood?"

"Sort of."

"Wife trouble?" He laughs.

"No."

"Oh, lucky. Man, have I got wife trouble."

"Look, mister, it was fun laughing with you, but I'm tired."

"Hey, it's O.K. I understand." The man leans closer to Sonny and whispers, "I can help you."

"What?"

"I've been reading about it in the papers. I can help you. It's O.K. I understand. I could read it in your face. Could tell the second I saw you. I'll help. I'll do it."

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, come on, don't play dumb with me. Look at you. You're pale, sweaty. Look at your hands. They haven't stopped shaking. Look at all the napkins you're destroying. You're a wreck. Look at you."

"I'm fine. There's nothing wrong with me. I'm tired. I come home and someone else is living in my house. I just need a good night's sleep. I just need to get my house back, my clothes, my TV. I just need to be home. I need my home. That's all, mister."

"It's O.K. I know we all think we can look after things on our own. That reaching out for help isn't very manly. But it's O.K. I understand. I cry. Man, if I told my wife. But I cry. I do and you know what? It's O.K."

The man pats Sonny on the back. Sonny stands up, knocks over the stool. Picks up his empty beer bottle.

"Easy there, kid. Look, I'm just trying to help you. I offered to help you. I've been reading about all those assisted suicide doc-

tors and people like that and I understand. I understand that it's not so easy to put a gun in your own mouth or jump off a bridge, you know. You need someone there to pull the trigger, to push you. Think how much easier that would be—less pressure, faster."

"What are you talking about? I don't want to die. I don't want to kill myself. I don't want you to kill me. I don't even know you."

"What's going on here, Sonny?" says Jim as he enters the bar. "Can't I leave you alone for a second without you causing some kind of trouble?"

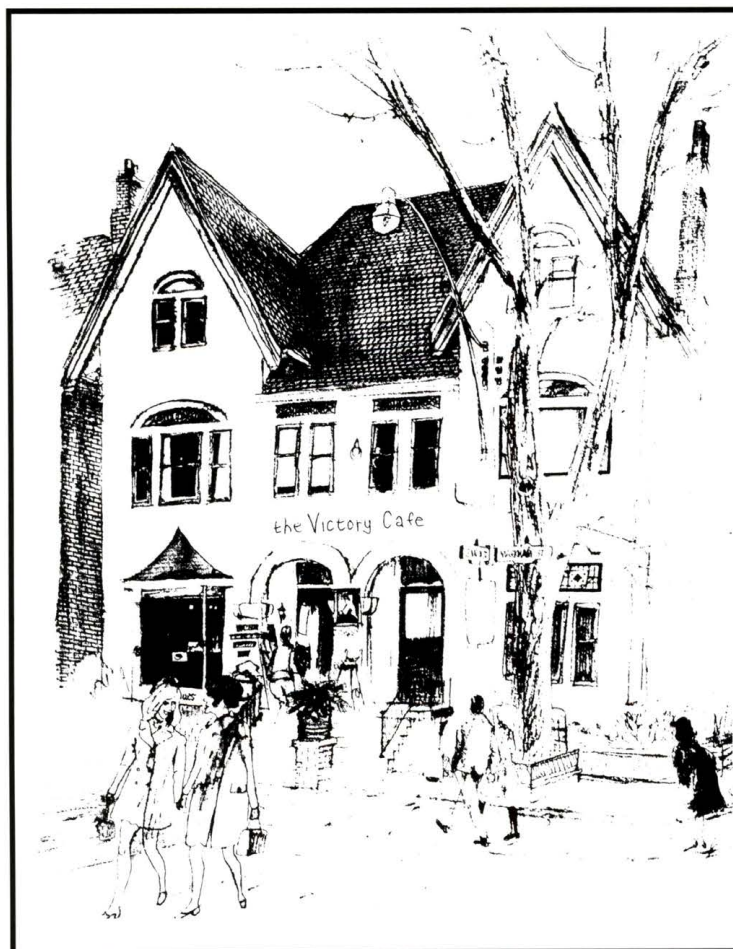
"Officer." The man nods at Jim, sits back down on his stool, spins around and starts reading his paper, sips his beer.

Jim puts a set of handcuffs around Sonny's wrists and escorts him out of the bar toward a waiting ambulance.

"What's going on here, Jim? I'm not sick. I'm not sick."

"Oh, yes you are, Sonny."

*Alexandra Leggat lives in the Beach. Her first short story collection, Pull Gently, Tear Here, was published in fall, 2000, by Insomniac and was short-listed for the Danuta Gleed Literary Award. Her next book of poetry will be published this fall by Mansfield Press.*



**Every week at the Vic:**

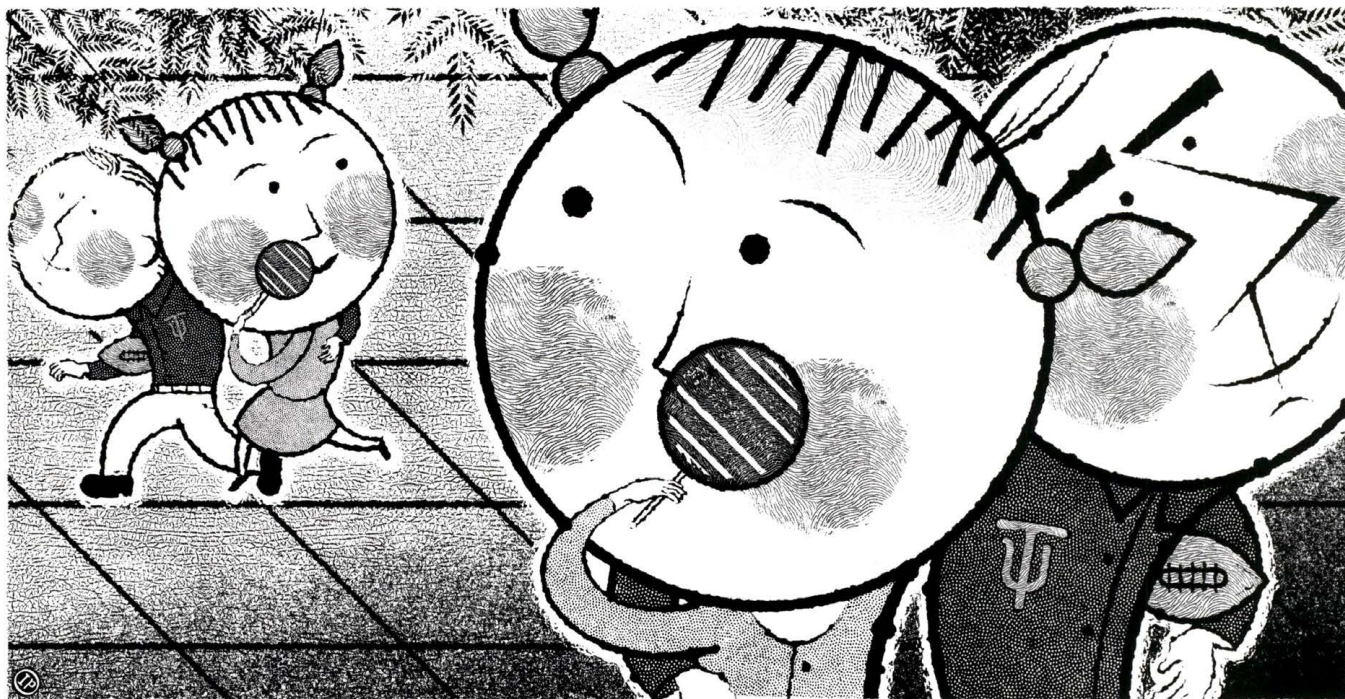
**Art Bar Reading Series  
Wednesdays at 8**

**Celtic Music Free Jam  
Thursdays at 9**

**Comedy (sketch, improv)  
Fridays at 9**

**581 MARKHAM STREET  
SOUTH END, MIRVISH VILLAGE**





## U OF T: 2020

FICTION BY JIM MUNROE

Elizabeth took a slurp of the oversized lollipop, willing the sedative coating into her bloodstream. She wanted to be numb before she got into the lecture hall.

"... I mean, what'd ya want? To go back to the old style of schooling, all on hypotheticals?" Bill was looking at her for an answer, but she knew he'd be happy to provide one of his own. "I sure don't. What's the point of getting a degree without a corporate backer? They need people who are up to speed on company history, ready to hit the ground running."

"I know," Elizabeth said. Bill put his arm on her shoulder. Elizabeth looked at the arm of his U of T jacket for a second—the Microsoft logo below the year he was supposed to graduate—and dully wished he wouldn't touch her. But then where would she be? She looked at the students passing by, seeing a girl like her similarly attired with pigtails and skirt and boyfriend. She was also eating a lollipop, but, because she was blond, hers was lemon. Elizabeth sighed, wishing they had red lollipops in flavours other than cherry. She was sick of it.

Bill was annoyed that his pep talk

hadn't worked, but covered it up with a pretty good likeness of sympathy. "You're just pissed 'cause you have to do that demographic assignment again."

She shrugged, batting her eyes at him and sucking prettily around a smile. He smiled smugly and yanked one of her pigtails.

Of course he was wrong. When was he not? She had done that assignment "properly" in an hour flat. How many eighteen-to-thirty-fours her company would attract with extreme-level shoe ads versus how many thirty-fives-to-fifties it would repel was insultingly easy; Elizabeth had originally factored in the greater consumer loyalty of the older demographic. We're covering short term this week, the prof had said, adjusting his Nike sweatband like he always did when he was annoyed.

No, it was last night that was bothering her. Seeing Simon jamming his clothing into a backpack, chattering about Mexico like it was a good thing that he was going there, that he didn't mind having to move every few months to the next ghetto as the rent climbed beyond his means. "We're not economically dis-

placed, we're the new gypsies!" he had said, and she had fought the stinging in her nose. Could she have saved him if she had fought harder with him about applying for a corporate backer? He had given her a bracelet he had made of latex and string, and shouldered on his backpack. Their goodbye hug had squeezed tears out of her.

Elizabeth started crunching her lolly. Bill fished out his card, slid it through the Coke-can-shaped reader, and disappeared into the building with a wave. As soon as he had lifted his leather-swathed arm from her shoulders she felt light, a giddy and frightening feeling that she attributed to the sedatives. She continued towards the lecture hall, her tummy a balloon, wondering if she could float away to Mexico on it.

*Jim Munroe lives in Baldwin Village. He is the author of Angry Young Spaceman (No Media Kings, 2000) and Flyboy Action Figure Comes with Gasmask (HarperCollins, 1999). He also worked as a managing editor for Adbusters. He recently completed an on-line game and a movie which can be viewed at [www.nomediakings.org](http://www.nomediakings.org).*



# POETRY WITH A TWIST

Stuart Ross explores his family history and his own emotions in his upcoming collection *Razovsky at Peace*.

INTERVIEW BY KERRI HUFFMAN

The day I meet Stuart Ross for our interview, it is late April and one of the first nice days of spring. He is all apologies, seeing that the pub we were to meet at is closed. We wander along Bloor and Ossington, both of us at somewhat of a loss as to where to go. I wonder how focused either of us will be, given the onslaught of sun that has finally arrived. However, once we sit down, we begin talking about poetry, writing, language, adolescence, and family, and soon neither of us cares what's happening outside.

Ross is well-known around Toronto for his lively readings, his occasionally bizarre and comedic books of poetry and short stories, and his involvement in the small-press community. In 1987, he and friend Nick Power co-founded the Toronto Small Press Book Fair. The event grew out of a monthly quasi-reading series, called Meet the Presses, held on Sunday nights at the Scadding Court Community Centre. Small presses and self-publishers would set up tables displaying their work, while a few authors would read. Though the fair continues today on an annual basis (without Ross's direct involvement, though he continues to attend), Ross notes with some disdain that "there was a lot more excitement about small-press publications then."

Aside from being an organizer of readings and publishing events, Ross has self-published more than thirty chapbooks since 1978, of which he sold approximately seven thousand copies simply by hawking them on Toronto street corners throughout the nineteen-eighties. While he admits this wasn't entirely a financially feasible enterprise, Ross's motivation lay elsewhere. "I think it's a real commitment to writing to publish your own stuff. People look down on self-publishing, but I think it means you really believe in your work, and you're standing behind your work, and you're putting a little bit of money on the line that you're not going to get back," he says. "I think it's the effect of capitalism. People aren't politicized in the way they used to be. Poets aren't raving socialists and anar-

chists as much as they used to be. And people have been brainwashed by the capitalist system that a book goes in a store. They see a chapbook only as a stepping stone. It's a kind of careerist ambition that I see—people racing to get 'the big book.' I think there's something much more organic about a chapbook. It's much more democratic and collectivist. I insist on having a long list of [self-published] chapbooks, sometimes even leaflets, at the front of my books, because I think a book is a book whether it's eight pages long or eighty pages long."

Ross's chapbooks and pamphlets range from tiny photocopied flyers to professionally printed novellas, often with a playful take on the form. His 1997 chapbook, *Cigarettes*, for example, consists of one prose story with line drawings on each page. The sense of control over both layout and content keeps Ross drawn to chapbooks and self-publishing. Ross also appreciates the length of a chapbook. He feels that the ideal length for a book of poetry is about twenty-four pages, but bemoans that the publishing industry doesn't produce twenty-four page books because stores won't stock them. "You get to have a book that is exactly the way the writer wants it to be," he says. "A [big] publisher could never publish anything like *Cigarettes*."

Though he remains firmly entrenched in the self-publishing world, Ross occasionally deviates into the world of "big" books, as is the case with his upcoming collection of poetry, *Razovsky at Peace*, to be published this September by ECW Press. Considering the usual light-heartedness Ross lends to the titles of his published works (*The Inspiration Cha-Cha*, *When Electrical Sockets Walked Like Men*, *Mr. Style*, *That's Me*), the title of his new collection is unusually serious and somber. For Ross, the title reflects the weightier and more emotionally intense perspective of his latest works. While the book still contains a few strange and silly poems ("Regrets Only" is five lines on Ross's fictional

engagement to actress Winona Ryder), others deal with family history, the progress of life and death, and the pains of growing up.

*Razovsky at Peace* was born out of a failed attempt to write a novel, which is what ECW had originally contracted Ross to produce. He worked away at it for a year, but the weighty pressure kept him awake at night only to find himself writing poems in subconscious protest. Though he did have to hand back the fifteen-hundred-dollar advance for the novel, Ross managed to write a book of poems he is very pleased with.

The poems in *Razovsky at Peace* mark new territory for Ross. Several are obviously autobiographical, a form Ross has avoided in the past. "There have been some weird turns in my writing in the past few years. I don't know if it's an issue of age or of my family shrinking, but I'm doing more overtly autobiographical things. The autobiography in my writing used to go through weird, warped mirrors and come out a little surreal at the other end. I would think a piece was very autobiographical, but no one could recognize anything that was happening in it because it had gone through so many strange permutations. Perhaps as a challenge to myself, I've been doing things that are more overtly autobiographical. They're still a little strangified in some ways."

Ross feels he has been more able to let himself explore his own emotions in his writing recently and not censor himself as much as he has done in the past. "I began to publish some stories that were more emotionally revealing and that I felt made myself more vulnerable. It was sort of frightening and sort of exciting—sort of riskier—and I felt like I was pushing myself in a good direction," he says. "I wouldn't want to write something that was straight autobiography, because it would be completely boring, but I do want the element of risk, of revealing things, of revealing vulnerabilities and difficulties."

Poems such as "We Got Punched" best illustrate Ross's new approach. The poem

PHILLIP SMITH







## NOTHING: A HAIKU

You look like a mirror  
with a crack in it—  
your mouth at two levels.

Like dusk, like an eclipse,  
like drunken blinks—  
darkness passes you over.

Night comes between us  
at different speeds—  
but always leaves without scars.

They say nothing's perfect—  
but that's all I've ever been  
good at anyway.

— GEORGE MURRAY

is the story of two teenaged boys walking downtown to a concert who get punched by a passerby on the street. Though Ross admits the poem is straight autobiography, there is still a classic Ross-style twist at the end:

(I wrote a really bad poem about this in 1981, called

"Witness to the Execution," and for this I ask your forgiveness. And for this poem, too, I ask your forgiveness. I am old now, and feeble, and have lost my powers of imagination.)

When confronted about these lines, Ross laughs and admits he lied in print. "I don't really apologize for that poem. That's a bit of deliberate self-deprecation, just so people know it's a poem by me. I had written a poem in a chapbook in 1981 and it wasn't a very good poem and somehow I think I wanted to make a link between myself at age twenty writing about that incident and myself at age forty-one writing about that incident . . . in a completely different way now, and in a much more honest way, perhaps. The whole issue of adolescence and youth is something on my mind a lot more, perhaps with the death of my mother about five years ago, and my father just died recently. Maybe I'm supposed to wait another twenty years before I do this kind of thing. Maybe I'm starting early."

Part of this exploration led to a series

of poems named after the book's title subject. "Razovsky" is the Ross family's original name, which his grandfather changed during the nineteen-fifties. The poems "Razovsky at Peace," "Razovsky at Night," and "Razovsky on Foot" explore Ross's family background, as well as his own experiences. The Razovsky poems encapsulate parts of his own experiences, the immigration of his forefathers from Poland and Russia, and the story of his parents' courtship (his mother claims she first saw his father while waiting at a streetcar stop).

For awhile, Ross considered changing his name back to Razovsky, but decided against it, one of the reasons being that he had published so much under his anglicized name. Instead, he decided to put his family's name on the cover of a book as the title, and created a Razovsky character. "I began toying with the idea of who this Razovsky character would be. He's me a lot, he's my grandfather, he's my dad. I think the specific things that happen are really about me and my cumulative history, forefathers and responsibility, and it ends with me in a sense. I look at the book now, the way the manuscript is set up, and they do feel like these three anchors through the book. They are really important. My father died on March 2nd, and he hadn't seen any of the poems. I'd been a little hesitant to show them to him, especially 'Razovsky at Peace,' because I realized that, al-



though it was really about a guy communing with nature, becoming part of the world, it was also a bit like death, because he lies down and becomes part of the ground. My dad never asked to see the poem. He ended up being delighted that there was this book. He thought it was hilarious that I would put Razovsky in the title of a book."

Originally scheduled to be published in spring, 2002, Ross pressed ECW to release the book sooner, though he did not tell his publisher his father was gravely ill and that he hoped for him to have the chance to see the book in print. "My dad died a lot sooner than he or I thought, but he did get to know about it. In a sense, that's given the Razovsky poems a lot more power for me, because they are an homage to my father. I was hoping I would be able to squeeze out a few more Razovsky poems, but they're almost too hard for me to write right now. It's almost too much responsibility. But I'm really pleased with the three that are in there and to me they are the centrepieces of the book."

Several of the poems in Ross's new work include descriptions of nature and references to animals. In "Razovsky at Peace," Razovsky ends up staring down a squirrel. Animals in general pop up in Ross's poetry with an alarming frequency—something he noticed recently while giving a reading that included four poems featuring poodles. Dogs, squirrels, even lobsters, are thrown into the mix. It's a motif that even the author struggles to explain. "It's true, I have many dogs in my poems. I had dogs when I was a kid, but I don't have a yearning to have any animals or dogs now. I don't think of dogs as a big part of my life, but they are an absolute recurring motif in my writing," he says. "Dogs are somewhat similar to the kind of humans who appear in my short stories. Dogs are naive and sort of stupid, but well-meaning. The charac-

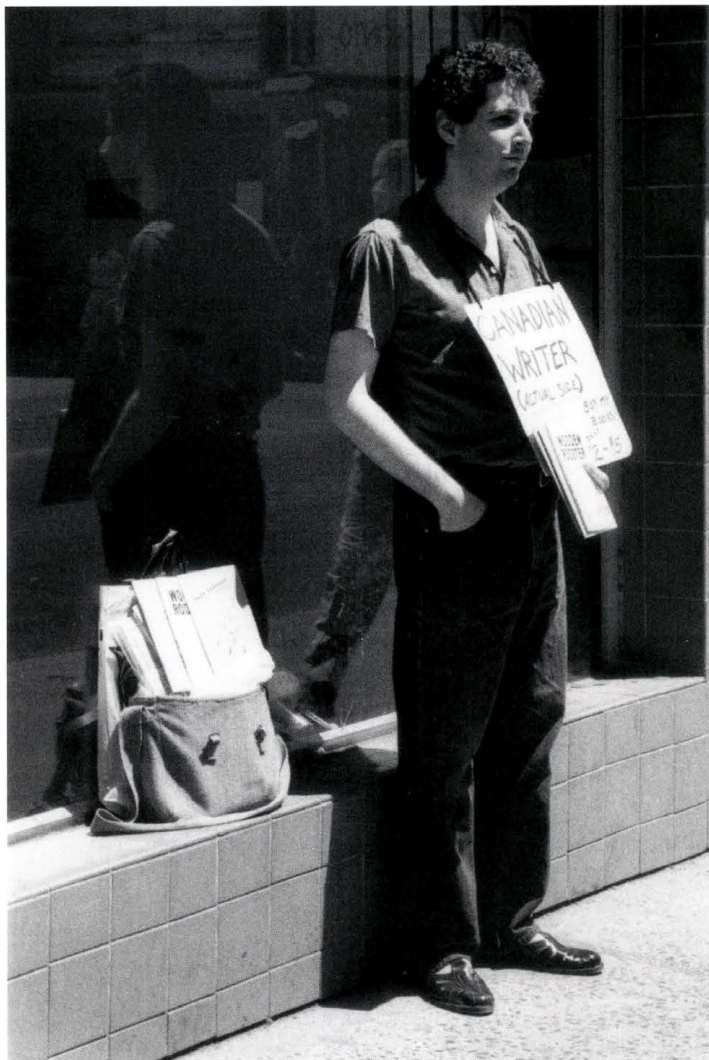
ters who appear in my writing are naive people who wander around and are really well meaning, but they don't really understand things, they don't know how to communicate with people, they just have very visceral reactions to things. My Grade 10 English teacher wrote on one of my stories, 'Why are all of your charac-

thing because I don't know a thing about meter and I can't do those formal things. I don't give them a lot of thought and perhaps I'm sort of making fun of myself at times. I put deliberate grammatical errors into a lot of my work and put things like 'um' into poems. The um is an admission that I'm really just too lazy to come up with the right adjective."

While Ross's comments may seem a bit flippant, there is an egalitarian commitment to the use of language that informs his writing. "I like the idea of taking this art form that people see as being serious and academic and intimidating intellectually, and subverting it with goofiness by putting words like 'um' and 'poodley' and 'whoops' and 'oops' and 'yikes' in a poem. I think it makes it more human and more accessible. I'm really glad of the alliteration thing. It's really exciting when you find out that you're doing something that you're not conscious of and people are picking up on it," he says. "On some level I must have known I was doing that, so maybe I'm not an imposter after all. I have been putting a bit more rhyming into my poems, internal rhymes, and even the occasional couplet. I think it can be really effective. It stands out so much it seems odd to be there. I did play around with form

a bit more here—I arbitrarily inflicted stanzas on a few of the poems. Usually everything is just lined up down the left and there are no stanza breaks, so I'm trying a little more to fool around with what happens when you isolate certain sections. Tons of people have done it, I just never fooled around with it before, so it's becoming a bit more of an interest to me."

This disruption of language and vernacular brought some tense moments for Ross when he was informed that one of his poems—one that contained a purposeful grammatical error—was going

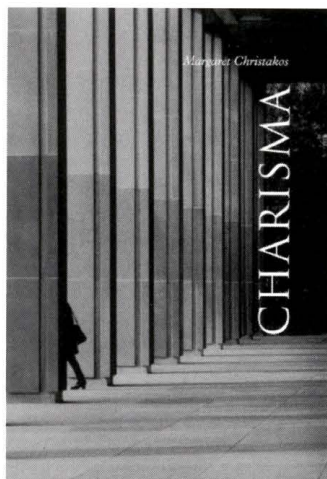


*Ross selling his wares on the streets of Toronto in the mid-nineteen-eighties.*

ters imbeciles?' But I totally relate to all of my characters. There's a naïveté that I like, a sense of wonder, a sense of yearning to not be corrupt and part of the evil world and the evil system, perhaps."

And dogs do crop up in the new book, most notably in "Poodles on Pedestals." The title alone is packed with alliteration, but the poem itself contains a concern for language and use of craft that somewhat surprises Ross when brought to his notice. "I don't pay a lot of attention to craft. I feel a bit like an imposter—maybe all of us do on some level. I feel like I'm getting away with some-





PEDLAR PRESS  
congratulates

MARGARET  
CHRISTAKOS



a finalist for the 2001  
Trillium Book Award  
for her debut novel

CHARISMA

*P*  
PEDLAR  
PRESS

416.534.2011

"Charisma is about the bewildered  
or buried self under the big-city  
social whirl. It's about discovery  
and belated acceptance, licks  
and pricks of joy."

—JIM BARTLEY, THE GLOBE & MAIL

Available at fine bookstores

to be used for the Toronto Transit Commission's Poetry on the Way subway poster series. Ross says his initial reaction was, "Why would they want to have that up in the subway—I mean, I sort of like it, but it's really, really an ephemeral thing. It all hinges on a grammatical error, and I don't know why it hinges on that, but for me it does. I was so scared that they were going to correct it, but I was finally in the subway and was so relieved that they didn't."

Ross's stories and poems are frequently peppered with surreal situations: acts that seem all the more bizarre during his readings when he glosses over events such as a boy turning into a shopping mall as if it were an everyday occurrence. On the other hand, many stories and poems feature people experiencing strange reactions to everyday situations, such as in the short story "Henry Kafka," where the main character is overjoyed that he was able to answer a question someone had put to him. Ross admits that the day-to-day events in life are strange and uncomfortable to him. "Going to a party and trying to be a normal person, saying, 'Hi, I'm Stuart. How do you know so-and-so?' That's so alien to me to be able to do social things. I find them really awkward. They're really simple, banal things, but they are strange and alien to me, but they are also comforting when I can pull it off."

In opposition to the strange reactions to the everyday are poems where characters react nonchalantly to bizarre events, such as in "A Park, Ottawa, A Briefcase, Autumn," in which a man's nose and briefcase trade places. Ross sees these as transformation poems rather than surreal set-ups. "Maybe it's about being uncomfortable about being in one's own form or not feeling in control of oneself. I can't explain everything in my poems and I'm almost relieved that I can't."

## CORRECTIONS

The subject of Greg Holman's photograph on the top of page 43 in the Christmas 2000 issue of the magazine was misidentified. The subject's name is unknown.







The cover star of the Christmas 1998 issue of the magazine was misidentified. The subject's name is unknown.

The cover photo of the Christmas 1997 issue of the magazine was dated incorrectly. It should have been dated *circa* 1953.







We sincerely regret these errors.

# PAS DE CHANCE

Small Press and Artist Book Emporium

"A fetish house for people who still find the printed word and its casings a lovely thing to behold." — R.M. Vaughan, *THIS* magazine

Visit us and shop online [www.interlog.com/~ian](http://www.interlog.com/~ian)  
Write for a catalogue: PDC, Box 6704, Station "A", Toronto Ontario M5W 1X5

For more info e-mail [pasdechance@hotmail.com](mailto:pasdechance@hotmail.com)





(top) Ross, age eight, with Rufus, an early inspiration. (bottom) Ross, centre, in 1975, with friends Steven Feldman and Mark Laba with whom he co-authored his first poetry collection at age 16.

I wouldn't want there to be a right way to read it. I like the idea that people might react to poetry the way that they might react to an abstract painting or any painting. People are getting absolutely different things."

Many people may have many different reactions to Ross's writing, but whether reading his books or listening to him read, it is often hard not to laugh. His writing is filled with odd juxtapositions and silly lines or titles. Readers often tell him they see him as a comic writer, something he finds a bit surpris-

ing. "When my editor, Michael Holmes, was looking at my first manuscript, he said I was a comedic genius and I was so disappointed that that was what my poetry evoked from him. I think of it as serious and a lot if it is really heartfelt and it's about poor little ol' me. I admit a lot of things are overtly deliberately humorous and it is the thing people respond to most at readings. If you do something serious they don't usually go 'ooh.' But if something is funny, they'll laugh, or sometimes they're laughing because something is unsettling or they're laugh-

ing at odd juxtapositions. There are pieces like 'Home Shopping' that I think are really incredibly sad poems. I read it publicly and it was very difficult. I find it overwhelmingly sad, but it does have all these really goofy things in it. I was talking with someone after reading it in Ottawa once and I asked, 'Why do people laugh so much at that poem?' and he said, "Look at it—the 'Arnold Palmer Hair Restoration Kit,' the 'Toilet Splatter Shield.'"

Ross explains that one of the reasons he purposely uses goofy titles for most of his books is to make poetry more accessible, but also to be a bit disruptive. For him, one of the most bizarre and surreal moments was being in attendance at the Trillium Book Awards and having Helen Johns, the Tory culture minister, read the title of his poetry collection *Father Gloomy's New Hybrid* as one of the nominees. He also admits that he is charmed by the reaction to the comedic elements in his work. "It's dangerous, because I get a lot of laughter at my readings and I've gone through phases where I've played up that kind of thing, to the point where it was almost becoming stand-up comedy schtick. I would come up with little bits between my poems like phoning home and listening to my messages."

At one reading, Ross went so far as to call up an old friend who had once been a poet, but had given it up to serve as a crown attorney. Ross left a message on his answering machine congratulating him on his success in working for the Ontario Tories and then had the audience cheer. "It's hard to resist playing up the laughs, because the laughs are the thing you can hear," Ross says. "And they make people happy and people come up after a reading and say, 'Oh, your reading was so funny.' And that's the overwhelming thing they remember, but there are also moments during the reading when they feel the seriousness or the weight or the sadness of other things. I think people should be surprised when they go to a reading, and I think you should be challenging your readers all the time. And for people who see me read a lot, I would like to do something serious, morose, and dirge-like. Dare them to laugh—but I have neither the skill nor the guts to do that yet."

*Razovsky at Peace* will be published this September by ECW. Kerri Huffman is associate editor of *Taddle Creek*.

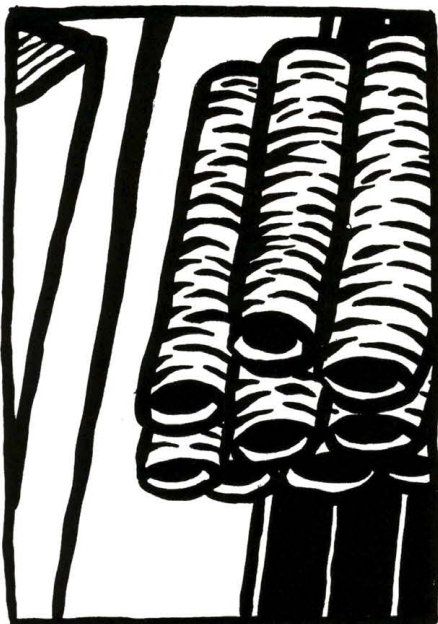




# b u g h o u s e



·Lapp'oi·



I am at the bughouse. I am here to paint. I am distracted. In the corner, by the door are the cylindrical homes of the mud-dauber wasp. It is like some mud pan flute.



On this cold day a paper wasp stumbles about in the green leaves. I hope that he won't decide to sting me as things warm up!



A cold mud dauber wobbling poses little threat in the morning...



I feel compelled to touch one of the mud dauber cylinders above the door. I'm surprised at how fragile it is! Bug carcasses and a small spider spill from the hole I've made.



Upstairs, I bang my paint brush against a window frame and dozens of flies come pouring out of a hole, tumbling, buzzing, spinning!



At the other side of the house paper wasps slither from their hole... they seem sleepy and are easily shooed out the window.





# bughouse



After painting this window frame, the lady bugs show up and promptly get stuck in the fresh white paint!



My boss works in another room killing wasps. I assist in the carnage until I feel something hot on the bottom of my foot...



She has no problem mashing these bloated yellow jackets. She leaves them with burst abdomens, squirming, sliding down the window pane.



I hate to see the things squirm, so I pick up a knife and cut off their heads with a 'crunch'!



Though separate, head and body continue to writhe for many minutes...



We have killed many today, and I show mercy by setting one small yellow jacket free.



# PLASTIC PATCHES AND CAT'S EYES

*Like most cities, Toronto embraced progress and the motor age. Unlike most, it had doubts.*

ESSAY BY ALFRED HOLDEN

Sam Cass surely smarted. "STREETCARS ARE STAYING," read a short headline in the *Toronto Daily Star* on June 9, 1971. It identified a small news item, just four paragraphs long, at the bottom of the page. But, for those who could read the signs—and Samuel Cass was pretty good at it after almost twenty years as Metro Toronto's traffic commissioner—the notice would have been, at this tender date, explicit, prophetic, stinging.

A few days before, on June 3rd, the Ontario cabinet had cancelled the Spadina Expressway, and Spadina was Cass's Yellow Brick Road. Throughout most of his career, with his help, Spadina had been edging its way toward Oz—the towers of downtown Toronto. Its journey had begun on paper in the nineteen-fifties, gaining steady momentum until, by the early nineteen-sixties, land was duly expropriated, houses demolished, and a large trench dug from Highway 401, deep in the Toronto suburbs, to Eglinton Avenue near the borders of the city proper.

"Lack of money. If we had enough, Metro would be a motorist's dream," Cass had declared many years earlier in a guest column that ran in the *Star* under the heading "MY BIGGEST HEADACHE." When it was published, on December 13, 1957, Spadina was still a paper route, and Cass had been traffic engineer for Metropolitan Toronto, a county-like, upper-tier level of municipal government, since its founding four years earlier. In that time, he had worked out the new conglomeration's ideal road network down to the smallest detail. "Two things come to mind immediately for improving pavement markings, but both are very costly—plastic patches and cat's eyes," Cass declared. "Plastic lane markings glued to the pavement are being used in Buffalo and work well, but they cost at least four times as much as paint. Cat's eye markers make an excellent centre line and are particularly good for fog and rain. They are reflectors buried in the pavement, which catch the headlights of oncoming cars. . . . However, to install them on all Metro roads would cost three times the present Metro roads budget of \$600,000."

Next to such pavement deluxe, streetcars, not unlike mass transit itself, must have seemed to Sam Cass so nineteenth-century: clanging, creaky, communal, car-blocking. Virtually everywhere else but Toronto, trolleys were gone, shuffled off to railway museums, the tracks torn up in their wake so they were safely, permanently beached, out of the way of the era of individual mobility in which Cass so deeply believed.

"No one has found a way to get the motorist out of his car," Cass would declare during the construction of the Bloor-Danforth subway in the mid-nineteen-sixties, after construction on Spadina had begun, but when it seemed to the traffic czar that Toronto was committing inordinate sums of money to public transit infrastructure. "He cited critically loaded local streets as evidence more expressways must replace subways," a reporter noted Cass saying. "Continued emphasis on subways in Metro's budget plans—\$136 million for the next five years—is 'building ourselves into a box.'" And the traffic commissioner frequently singled out the city's existing streetcar network as an impediment. "Cass said he would like to introduce a one-way street system in downtown Toronto, but is hampered by the TTC's trolley system. He indicated he would like to see Toronto emulate Detroit, with widely distributed bus lines and no street cars or subways."

So why did a roadblock fall in the path of the Spadina Expressway on June 3, 1971? Cass himself blamed, for a time, flower power, "a tremendous change in the attitude of some people generally which has resulted in protests by primarily youth, but not necessarily, against almost every social and physical institution that has been accepted in the past." Flower power, and other things "left," was surely visible in a button protesters commonly wore—it was union-made (by Allied Printing), white with a red octagonal stop sign in the middle and the words "THE SPADINA EXPRESSWAY" in capital letters around the edge.

Flower power, too, may have been demonstrated by youthful alderman William Kilbourn. Cass's name, said Kilbourn, "was synonymous with pollution, the destruction of communities, bad planning and putting cars ahead of people."

Not so flowery was *The Bad Trip*, the slim, slick 1970 volume by midtown resident David Nowlan, a University of Toronto economics professor, and his wife Nadine, later a Toronto city councillor. *The Bad Trip*, in considerable detail, and with persuasive sobriety, argued for a "pause in the headlong rush to pave and pollute." Was a five-minute-fifty-three-second time-saving for commuters—an average estimate, if traffic was moving well—worth the trouble and expense of building Spadina? Said media thinker Marshall McLuhan, after reading the book, "Citizens of Toronto, reach for your Cass-masks. Get ready for the world's most supercolossal car-sophagus—right here on old Bloor St. Toronto will commit suicide if it plunges the Spadina Expressway into its heart." Rather ahead of his time, he added, "In an age of software Metro planners treat people like hardware."

And it *was* protests that stopped Spadina—protests whose message questioning the wisdom and utility of superhighways became compelling, by 1971, even to Ontario's Conservative ruling establishment. "The almost cruel social cost in terms of disruption of established communities seemed to engender growing opposition and resentment," declared none other than Joseph Aloysius Kennedy, chairman of the province-appointed Ontario Municipal Board, an appeal body with the power to overturn municipal decisions. On this occasion, it didn't. Kennedy's remarks were a dissenting statement in a split 2-1 ruling approving the partly built road—the last official sanction it got before Premier Bill Davis pulled the plug.

June 3, 1971, is remembered as a seminal moment in Toronto's history, when "the people who stopped Spadina danced on Yonge St.," as the *Star's* David

JACK MITCHELL PHOTOGRAPHY





*The ill-fated Spadina Expressway tears through a neighbourhood south of Lawrence Avenue in 1967.*



Lewis Stein put it in 1992, and hindsight has made it clear that "[t]hey not only stopped Spadina, they killed the whole grid of expressways Metro had planned." What Torontonians hardly remembered in 1971 was that, in the bigger picture, Spadina was only the cut-off point—and not assuredly a permanent one—in a long evolution in which the pressures of motor traffic had vastly, and not prettily, changed the city and the way it worked. Some of these events were as atomic and immediate in their effect as Spadina would have been, and more widespread, but, in the climate of their particular time, passed with limited notice.

Most dramatic of these earlier events was the widening of city streets, which began in the nineteen-twenties and accelerated rapidly after the Second World War. Indeed, with other improvements it amounted to a one hundred million dollar public works project, which by 1950 spanned the city. Motorists could now speed along the newly widened Dufferin, Beverley, River, Sherbourne and Wellesley streets, Lansdowne and Ossington avenues, and the now jog-free crosstown route following Annette-

Royce-Dupont. Approvals took place in an atmosphere of crisis, even panic, which was not caused by any sense of loss or fear of damage to the city, but by fear of what would happen if this damage were *not* done. "CLAIM TRAFFIC CONGESTION CUTTING DOWNTOWN VALUES," read a headline in the *Star* on July 7, 1948. A *Star* reporter later posed the question, "Is Toronto approaching the day of the last traffic jam, when cars, buses, street cars and trucks will become so congested they will stand still in the streets?" Declared the Toronto and York planning board, "We should not have to watch established central business districts die . . . because traffic congestion had choked communications, blocked accessibility, and smothered usefulness in the economic process."

Grave rhetoric was an important fuel in pumping up support for road expansion, because, without it, the broader public might have realized that those "improvements" would serve a relatively small minority, at everyone's expense. As late as 1951, "[e]ighty-eight out of every hundred people who work downtown in Toronto go home by T.T.C.

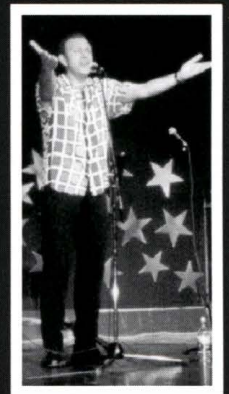
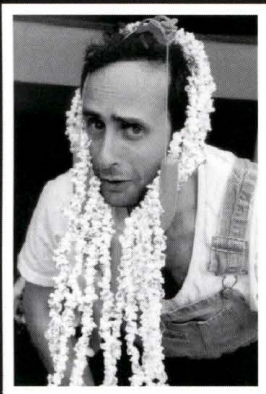
street cars," the *Star* reported. So it seems incredible that the city of Toronto, even in the nineteen-forties, stood poised to adopt a one-way street system that would have smoothed the way for automobiles, while handicapping the city's most important transit lines. The King and Queen streetcars, for instance, both operated east-west services. If those streets were made one-way, one eastbound and the other westbound, their combined capacity would be halved. It didn't happen, but there were recurring demands to remove streetcars altogether from main streets, and some succeeded. This was achieved on Avenue Road, a heavily-used transit route, but also the favoured road of wealthy, motor-minded North Torontonians into the downtown core.

Yonge Street was the most congested street in the city, its transit lines considered the highest-capacity streetcar operation in the world. Even to motorists, the benefits of a subway may have been apparent; in a landmark plebiscite, the Yonge subway's construction was approved.

A strange tangent that emerged from

# BloorJCC

**CORNERSTONE OF THE ANNEX FOR CULTURAL  
ACTIVITIES, THE ARTS, ATHLETICS & RECREATION**



bloorjcc.on.ca • bloorjcc@echo-on.net • Tel: 416.924.6211 • Fax: 416.924.0442

750 Spadina Avenue (at the corner of Bloor & Spadina)



*The Place To Be*



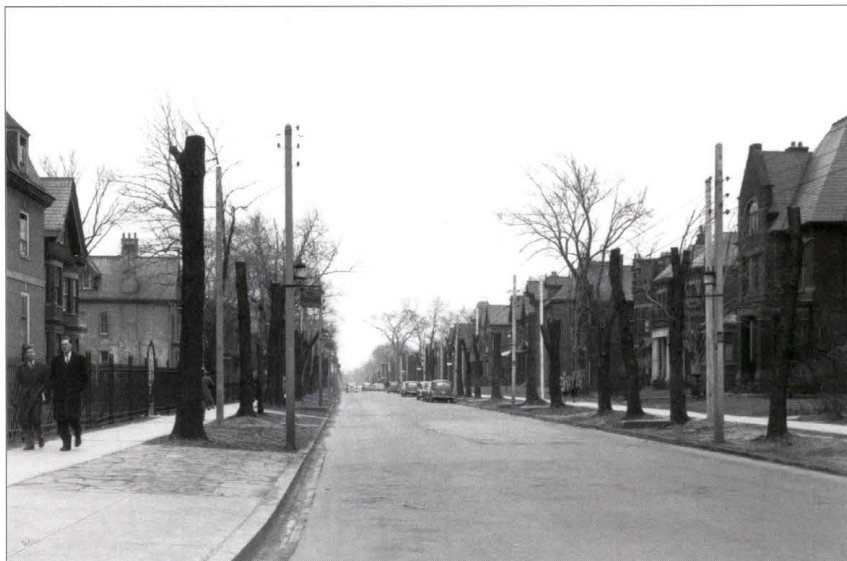


the hand wringing was the scolding of past generations. Toronto “has inherited the narrow streets planned by a generation which had not yet dreamed of the motor car,” the *Mail and Empire’s* Guy Morton wrote in an investigative series, published in the winter of 1929. Morton blamed the problem squarely on the city’s gridiron street arrangement, laid out in the nineteenth century. “That [city plan] was unfortunate, for the lack of dreams on the part of our forefather city builders was largely responsible for the situation to-day.”

Just how gridlocked Toronto was in 1929, 1948, or 1971 is not so easy to ascertain. Those generations’ angst cannot have been imagined. Yet the size of Toronto, and levels of car ownership and use may have been presumed to be higher in 2001 by manifold, and the city still moved. Many solutions had been proposed, some applied, but the result always seemed to be more congestion, followed by a period of settling down in which the congestion was either tolerated or, quite possibly, a maximum level of toleration was reached, after which transit use picked up the slack. In A Transportation Plan for Metropolitan Toronto, a 1948 report to the Toronto and suburban planning board, consulting engineer Norman Wilson walked a tightrope between expanded transit and expanded roads. He recommended improvements to both, while sounding a cautionary note about one side of his equation: “Increased roadway and parking facilities will attract traffic to the full extent of the increased facilities.” In other words, new or bigger roads would soon fill up.

Newer, bigger roads were being built. The University Avenue Extension Act, passed by the Ontario legislature, gave Toronto power to expropriate for widening the street, which was done—one of the few things actually realized from a grandiose 1928 plan to cut wide boulevards and create great traffic circles in downtown Toronto. In the nineteen-for-

ties, several so-called “speedways” were opened up. They included an extension of Mount Pleasant Road in North Toronto to Jarvis Street downtown by a fast route through one of the ravines bisecting the ritzy Rosedale neighbourhood. Conceived by the end of the Second World War was the larger-scaled “parkway” through the hitherto unspoiled Don Valley. (The concept, emphasizing roads as journeys through parklands, pulled the right levers in most people, but, in the end, the D.V.P., as it is called today, was never very park-like.) Also planned, and finally built, were the freeway along the city’s waterfront and the superhighway bypass



*Beheaded elms on St. George Street, looking south from Harbord, 1948.*

across the top of Toronto, known today as the 401.

The extent of the damage these highways brought to the city has been long debated and from time to time acknowledged and acted upon. In 2000, demolition began on a segment of the by-then crumbling elevated waterfront highway known since the nineteen-sixties as the Frederick G. Gardiner Expressway, after the Metropolitan Toronto chairman who, among other things, pushed the Spadina Expressway’s approval through Metro council at an all-night session. But before the big roads, there were the small ones, for which the city had big plans.

There are pictures in the Toronto archives of St. George Street, showing the old American elm trees that lined both sides of the road, occupying a strip of grass between curb and sidewalk. Early in the twentieth century, their

shade had gained favour among University of Toronto students, who lounged under the famous “cathedral effect” that the elms’ high crowns and filtered light brought to city streets. These elms never had a chance to succumb to Dutch elm disease. Sometime in 1948, they were chopped down, and the strip of grass they occupied added to the width of St. George. Another archival photo, looking south, shows them in partial dismemberment, their crowns gone, but their dead trunks standing in two rows of giant sticks. On the left, two men in overcoats, and, on the right, two women in light jackets walk north on the sidewalks, seemingly oblivious to the decapitation. “At first you say, ‘Oh, that’s progress,’ and then after awhile, ‘Oh, no trees,’” Rosie Schwartz, who grew up at Spadina Avenue and Baldwin Street in the nineteen-thirties and forties, said in 2000.

That word, “progress,” innocuous today, had a lot of meaning in the mid-twentieth century. As commonly used, the word embraced the future, without hugging it. “That’s progress” was code for the resignation people felt in the face of a change that seemed distasteful, but was thought necessary—the price to pay for moving forward.

It was to record progress that the city of Toronto’s public works department sent a photographer to the corner of Bedford and Davenport roads twice in 1948 to shoot before-and-after pictures, similar to the images of St. George Street, looking south down Bedford Road in the east Annex. When he got there the first time, mature trees hid the houses in deep shade. Their crowns met overhead so the street appeared, from the photographer’s vantage point, as a tunnel with misty light at the end. It was a romanticized view of city life recorded that day, and it was for real in the Toronto of 1948, the commonplace residential streetscape.

After the street was widened, the photographer went back and recorded an image that, except for the pair of



streetcar tracks with cobblestone pavers between the rails and a manhole cover in exactly the same position, was a view of another planet: a wide swath of pavement now opening up where Bedford meets Davenport. Parked cars had multiplied at the curb, and the fronts of houses, formerly hidden by foliage, emerge into full view. They are fine homes, it seems, but suddenly seeing them on these pictures, above their newly truncated yards, is like catching the stare of a sheepdog after trimming it a bit too much around the eyes.

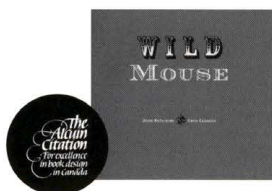
That year on Spadina Avenue, the same busy central street that Spadina, the expressway, would later threaten to obliterate, "scores of ancient shade trees were felled so that the pavement could be widened." The reference was to the boulevard of elms that ran down the centre of the street, on either side of the streetcar tracks. The "improvement"—as such widenings were called—cost three million dollars, which was a fantastic sum in 1948, the equivalent of twenty-five million dollars in 2001. At Bloor and Spadina, one of the city's infamous "jogs" (Toronto parlance for sec-

tions of a street that skips a bit up or down a cross street before continuing) was removed.

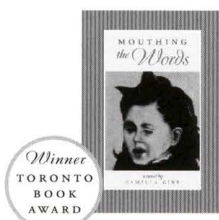
Such jogs were the legacy of the city's grid of streets, whose pattern was not as tidy up close as it looked on the map. Beginning in the nineteenth century, as large square chunks of land were opened up for development, the streets serving them were not aligned with those of the abutting, previously developed areas. As a result, many streets met cross streets but did not go through. "If there was ever a city not built for the automobile, this was it," transportation writer Greg Gormick said in 2001. "That is why it costs so much to widen a Toronto street or carve a new artery," wrote reporter Ross Harkness in a story on the street widenings that appeared in the *Star Weekly* on February 5, 1949. "It's not a simple matter of slicing six feet off a lot of people's front lawns. Houses, even business blocks, have to be bought and torn down." Harkness estimated that of one hundred sixty-six streets meeting Yonge Street, which divided the city's east and west sides, only twenty-three went across.

Some bizarre events were connected with the street widenings of the nineteen-forties—such as the slicing off of the front steps of whole blocks of buildings on University Avenue, the same road that had already been widened in 1929. Newspaper archives suggest the biggest year for the widening program was 1948, when sleepy residential avenues like Bedford Road became busy arterials in the space of a kid's summer vacation. People must have felt it was progress, because protests were few and far between; occasionally press reports refer to "narrow interests," which seems to mean individual residents. People in the Beach made it known that an eastbound freeway hugging the waterfront, which was then being planned (and would later be partially built, and torn down in 2001), might ruin their parks and beaches (no mention was made of homes).

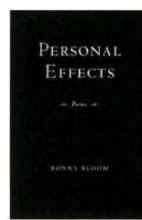
One old man spoke up. He was G. Howard Ferguson, a former premier of Ontario, who lived, as Harkness described his circumstances in his *Star Weekly* piece, with his wife Ella Jane in "a beautiful old tree-shaded house on Avenue Rd." The



**WILD MOUSE**  
*short fiction & a suite of five poems*  
by DEREK MCCORMACK &  
CHRIS CHAMBERS  
ISBN 0-9681884-4-3  
48 pages (illustrated) \$15.50



**MOUTHING THE WORDS**  
*a novel* by CAMILLA GIBB  
ISBN 0-9681884-5-1  
192 pages \$21.95



**PERSONAL EFFECTS**  
*poems* by RONNA BLOOM  
ISBN 0-9686522-0-4  
96 pages \$18.95

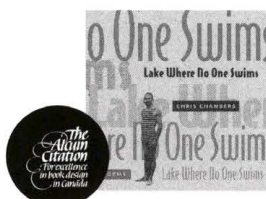


**ROCKET SCIENCE**  
*a novel* by JULIA GAUNCE  
ISBN 0-9686522-1-2  
176 pages \$21.95

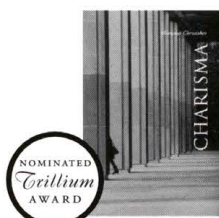


BETH FOLLETT *Publisher*

P.O. BOX 26, STATION P  
TORONTO M5S 2S6  
(416) 534-2011



**LAKE WHERE NO ONE SWIMS**  
*poems* by CHRIS CHAMBERS  
ISBN 0-9681884-7-8  
96 pages \$18.50



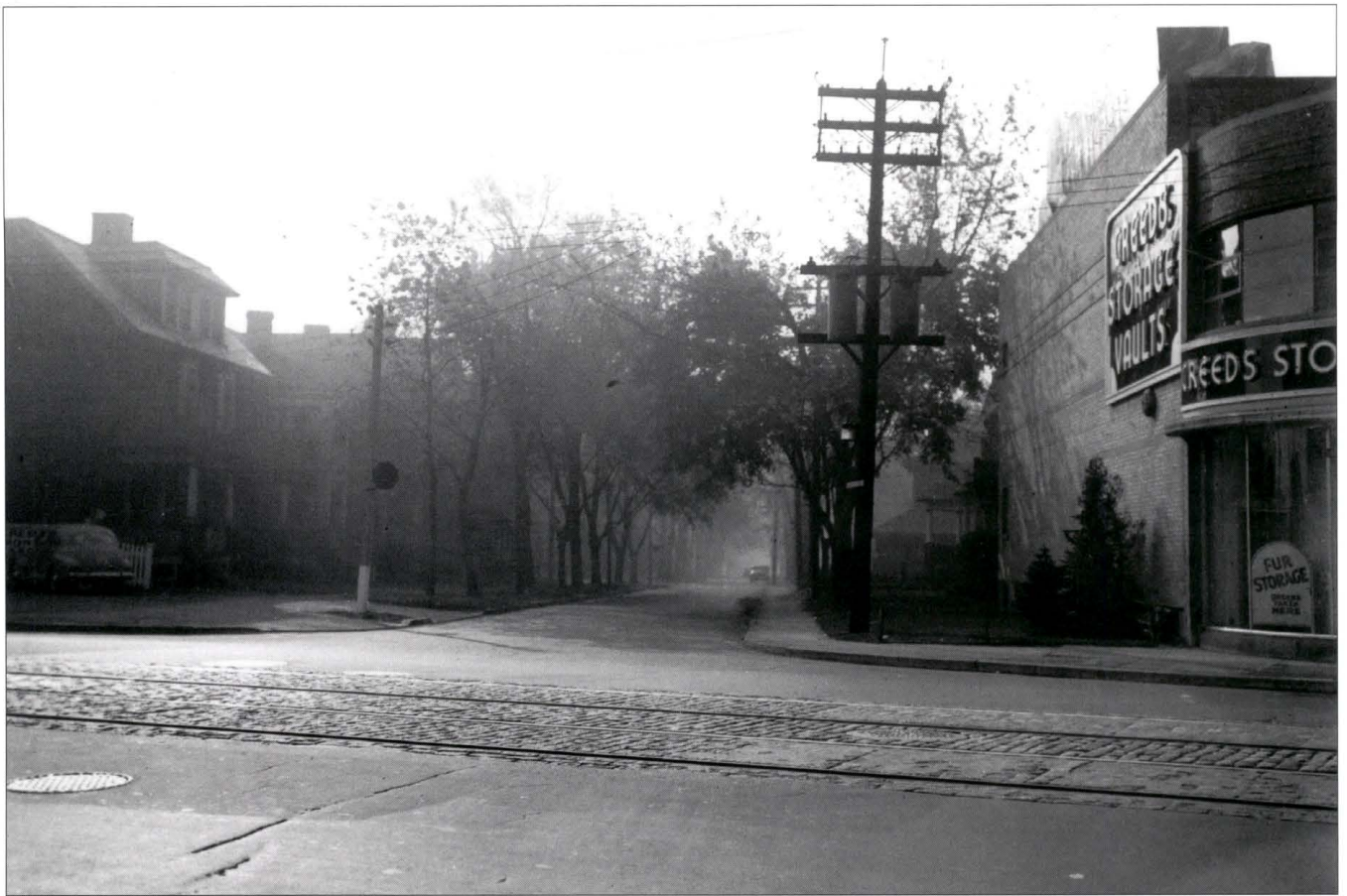
**CHARISMA**  
*a novel* by  
MARGARET CHRISTAKOS  
ISBN 0-9681884-9-4  
160 pages \$20.95



**ANIMAL LIFE IN BUCHAREST**  
*poems* by JOHN DEGEN  
ISBN 0-9681884-8-6  
64 pages \$14.95

represented in Canada by McARTHUR & COMPANY for sales information (416) 408-4007 distributed by HARPERCOLLINS 1-800-387-0117





*Before and after the widening of Bedford Road, looking south from Davenport, 1948.*



# TADDLE CREEK

the e-issue

24 pages of all-new fiction and poetry

available free  
in PDF, OEB, and  
Microsoft Reader formats  
only at

[www.taddlecreekmag.com](http://www.taddlecreekmag.com)

September 13, 2001



road was long slated for widening, with attendant tree removal, but Ferguson, a Conservative who held office from 1923 to 1930, deployed his Tory and, perhaps, business connections (he was big—president of Crown Life Insurance, chancellor of the University of Western Ontario, and a member of the University of Toronto's board of governors), and blocked the project for years. The ex-premier must have seemed way behind the times, though he was way ahead. He “feared the beauty of one of Toronto's finest streets would be destroyed,”

Harkness wrote.

Ferguson's considerable clout expired the day he died of a heart attack, at home, on February 21, 1946. He was seventy-six. Within a year, the widening of Avenue Road north of St. Clair Avenue got a green light, with “40 splendid 60-year-old shade trees being cut down in the process,” Harkness tapped out on his Underwood in February, 1948. Of course, no judgement was implied. Without even pausing for a new paragraph, he continued, “Upper Canada College gave the city a slice off its east side.” This was progress. It came at a cost.

The idea of saving the city by destroying it was the dominant theme of city building in the twentieth century. In 1961, Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* exposed the destructiveness of urban expressway building. By the late nineteen-sixties, journalist Robert Caro was at work on his Pulitzer Prize-winning exposé biography of Robert Moses, the New York public works mogul whose expressway-building obsession destroyed dozens of neighbourhoods and displaced thousands of people. (Compared to Moses, Sam Cass was a boy in a sandbox.) Caro wrote of Moses in *The Power Broker*, “His highways and bridges and tunnels were awesome—taken as a whole the most awesome urban improvements in the

history of mankind—but no aspect of those highways and bridges and tunnels was as awesome as the congestion on them.” Urban renewal projects, often linked to slum clearance and urban highway-building, had failed to renew. Even in the late nineteen-sixties, rationales were still being sought and found to build superhighways through cities.

“Maintaining mobility in a growing economy clearly requires the continued growth of highway transportation,”

tant social goals—such as the preservation of historic sites?”

Paradoxically, it was just this—alluring design and fancy public relations—that sold North Americans on freeways and, arguably, set in stone the automotive course the continent then took. The critical moment was probably the 1939 New York World's Fair, where millions of people toured automakers' pavilions, finding an alluring, memorable World of Tomorrow where city and countryside alike were reorganized around frictionless, limited-access highways.

“The outstanding feature of the Ford Building is an elevated highway more than a half-mile long—The Road of Tomorrow—rising upon a series of spiral ramps,” the U.S. Federal Writers' Project reported in its 1940 volume, *New York City Guide*. “On this road, with its forecast of the elevated highways that are expected to solve the traffic problem of future cities, visitors may ride in Ford V-8's and Lincoln-Zephyrs.”

But General Motors stole the show with its now-famous Futurama exhibit. “[Y]ou were put into a moving chair; and a voice began to speak with calm certainty,” actor Jason Robards recalled, narrating a documentary about the fair, *The World of Tomorrow*, which was shown on U.S. public television in the nineteen-eighties. “And before you opened . . . a wonderland, three thousand square miles in scale; a plane ride over an America from which the past . . . had vanished seemingly without a trace.” You rode along in your armchair, looking at the projected world of 1960, created by designer Norman Bel Geddes, the foremost futurist of the day. It was an amazing, orderly landscape of futuristic skyscrapers and teardrop-shaped buses and cars, which were moving swiftly on “limited way” roadways. The voice opined, “Here is

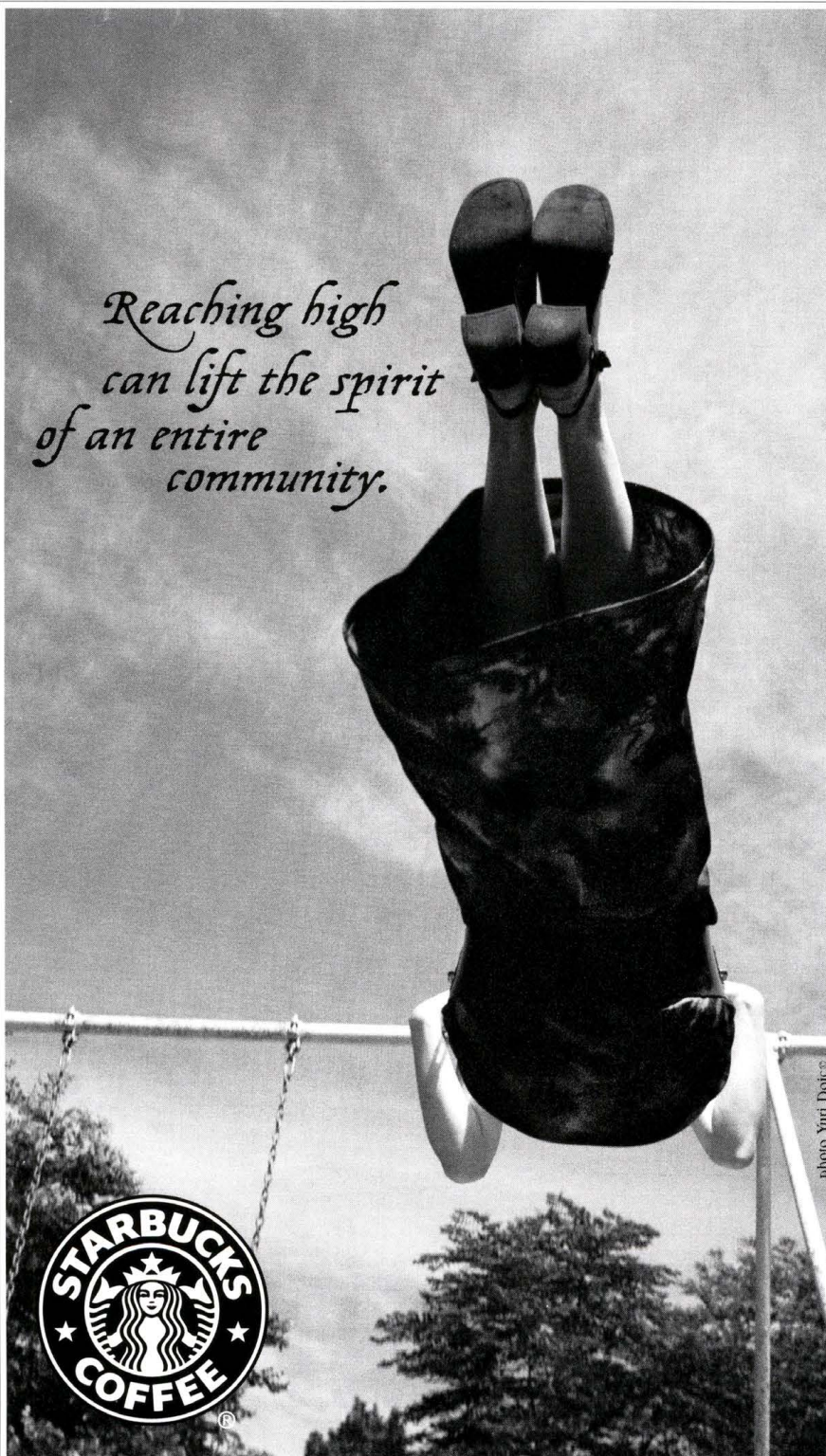


*The Ferguson home (right) and lawn, before the widening of Avenue Road (seen far left).*

wrote Lowell Bridwell, the U.S. federal highway administrator, in his forward to *The Freeway in the City*, a 1968 brief to Alan Boyd, President Lyndon B. Johnson's secretary of transportation. “On the other hand, highway transportation cannot be allowed to function apart from or in conflict with its environment.” So there was a problem, the couched language acknowledged, and the brief's mission was to solve it through mitigation by providing, for instance, guidelines for better-looking, more neighbourhood-compatible freeways, to be sold to doubting communities with a warmer, fuzzier approach. “The question is not, for example, whether to preserve an historic site or to build a highway,” Bridwell wrote. “Rather, the question is, ‘How do we provide needed mobility and, in the same process, contribute to the other impor-



*Reaching high  
can lift the spirit  
of an entire  
community.*



Something magical happens when people work together to reach for a dream. What begins as something small can blossom into the efforts of an entire community. Over the past 4 years, you've helped Starbucks All Books for Children Book Drive raise over 30,000 books to make our children's futures brighter. You've joined our efforts to raise funding for Jacob's Ladder and

a cure for neurodegenerative disease. And you've supported all of our work towards environmental initiatives and the arts. We couldn't have done it without you. Nor would we have wanted to. Because not only has Starbucks become a part of Toronto, but somehow, quite magically, Toronto has also become a part of Starbucks.

an American city replanned around a highly developed, modern traffic system. On all express city thoroughfares, the rights-of-way have been so routed as to displace outmoded business sections and undesirable slum areas whenever possible."

"I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE," said the button visitors were given when they left the General Motors building. They had seen future policy, anyway, sold skilfully to the public and in the U.S. embraced almost to the letter—at public expense and to General Motors' benefit—in the nation-defining public work that became the interstate highway system, which is now, in the twenty-first century, the backbone of the U.S. transportation system.

But at the New York World's Fair, Americans—and no doubt quite a few Canadians—had seen a showroom of the future, not exactly what would be delivered. "Now traffic is a monstrous force," a writer for *Fortune*, the business magazine, cautioned in a look at "modern motor traffic," published in the August, 1936, number. "Some look upon it as a wasting force that has weakened our sense of security with its smashups and killing, our sense of freedom with the humiliation and hindrances of traffic jams, and has blighted the land with a cheap architecture that Walter Prichard Eaton calls 'motor slums.'" These were, in 1936, prescient observations, anticipating upset over traffic deaths, angst over congestion, and unhappiness with sprawl that would not be shown at Futurama, or understood by the well-meaning folks—businessmen, politicians, engineers—who pushed more mundane street-widenings and one-way streets.

The reality, it turned out, was that roads and traffic shaped communities in ways quite different from futurists' models, or the old Main Street model. The "cheap architecture" the *Fortune* writer referred to sounds a lot like today's sprawl. And he and others had doubts that the smoother, faster roads—promising so much—were delivering. "They thought that the cure-all for the congestion and deaths was more and still more hard roads," he wrote. "And now that the killing is livelier and the congestion thicker than ever, it is dawning upon them that what they built were too often deathtraps and bottlenecks."



Design might solve some of these problems, it was suggested, but, over all, a large question remained—whether highways, soon filled and so hard to make safe, were the only way to go. *Fortune* thus reported, “The same friction factors that make for brutality on the highway make for the congestion that of itself has caused people to ponder whether the huge investment in highways and motorcars is socially and economically ruinous.”

“So, Mr. McCallum believes that before Toronto can go in for any Norman Bel Geddes dream highways, other levels of government will have to relinquish their grasp on some of the taxes raised in Toronto,” the *Globe and Mail* reported on January 1, 1949. The newspaper was referring to Hiram E. McCallum, the city’s mayor, who had learned something else about “those super expressways”—they didn’t cost just a bit more than other “improvements,” but vastly more; in built-up areas, almost impossibly more. “The dash of cold water comes with cost estimates,” *Fortune* had also found, in 1936, reporting that one stretch in New Jersey cost (U.S.) six million dollars per mile (a fantastic seventy-two million dollars today). In such light, the mayor of Toronto said in 1949: “[T]here are other, and equally urgent, demands on the city’s tax rate. The board of education, for instance, wants some new schools.”

It was hesitancy, that’s what it was. In the short run it would not prevent the construction of the waterfront Gardiner Expressway, or the Don Valley Parkway. But Toronto would hedge, hedge, hedge its bets. It would let Scottish-born Toronto Transit Commission managers squeeze every mile of use they could from the old streetcar network, which, unlike those of virtually every other North American city, would never be dismantled. It would build, apart from those expressways, the Yonge Street subway line, then the Bloor-Danforth, even as Sam Cass dutifully pleaded the case for the likes of the Spadina, for the Cross Town, for the Christie-Grace, for the Toronto Hamilton—expressways all.

And a strange thing happened after these expressways were cut short. The city’s traffic doomsday never arrived. The cars did not go away, but, incrementally, a different sort of region emerged, moulded by different forces of movement,



*Sam Cass with one of his beloved speedways in the nineteen-seventies.*

in new balance. For the old city—the widened gridiron of the nineteenth-century streets—the road not taken led to riches: soaring real-estate values in preserved neighbourhoods, condominiums sprouting like topsy, the rise of ever higher transit-dependent office towers in the core, and Canada’s most intensive retail shopping, where great nineteenth-century-style department stores covering whole city blocks survived alongside twenty-first-century big-box bookstores and push-carts selling hot dogs on the sidewalks. In the face of motor-age thinking that withdrew financial support, the public transit system paid a vastly higher proportion of its costs than any road ever built in the province.

What of the new city—the ever-vaster regional suburbs more or less beyond the reach of transit, and which had followed the World’s Fair model of accommodating the car, with vast road networks and, except for commuter trains into downtown Toronto, virtually no public transit? They had almost everything the city had, but only one way to get there—by car. “GRIDLOCK INCHING UP PRIORITY LIST,” read a headline in the *Globe and Mail* on February 19, 2001. “For the [Mike] Harris government, the tie-ups on Toronto area highways are of growing political concern because the complaints increasingly come from constituents in Toronto-area suburbs—the major support base for the Conservatives.” Where would it lead? “ROAD MONEY WHEELED OUT BY PROVINCE,” a headline in the *Star* had declared on August 22, 2000. It was re-

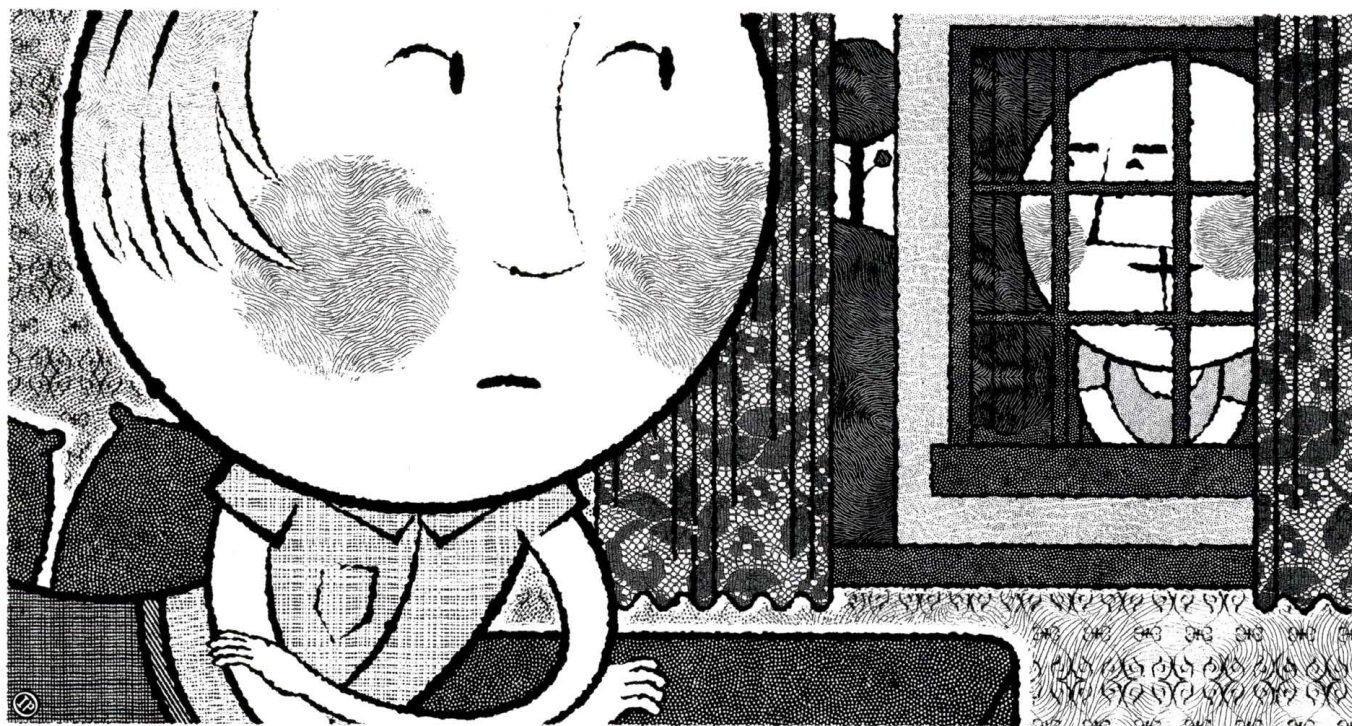
ported on February 24, 2001, “Premier Mike Harris says a major expansion of Ontario’s highway system is in the works.” Like plastic patches and cat’s eyes, it must have seemed like a good solution. It wasn’t.

*Alfred Holden is assistant financial editor of the Toronto Star, “City Building” columnist for the Annex Gleaner, and a regular contributor to Taddle Creek.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The written record, stored in libraries and retrieved by librarians, provided the bulk of materials for this research essay. The author is grateful to people and organizations who provided assistance and materials, including the *Toronto Star*, for use of its vast clippings files, microfilm, and photo collection. Photos and materials were also provided by the City of Toronto Archives, municipal libraries, and the Toronto Reference Library. During March, 2001, and April, 2000, interviews were conducted with Greg Gormick and Rosie Schwartz, respectively. Alec Keefer and Percy Berry also provided valuable insights and recollections. In addition to the above, the following sources were used extensively: *Toronto Star* (2/21/46, 7/7/48, 7/21/48, 2/2/49, 12/13/57, 12/13/66, 1/17/70, 7/17/71, 5/22/92, 8/22/00); *Globe and Mail* (1/1/49, 1/19/01, 2/24/01); *Mail and Empire* (2/12/29); *Fortune* (08/36); *The Power Broker*, by Robert Caro; *Liberal Dreams and Nature’s Limits*, by James Lemon; *The Bad Trip*, by Nadine and David Nowlan; *A New York Panorama and New York City Guide*, by the U.S. Federal Writers’ Project; *The Shape of the City*, by John Sewell; *The World on Wheels*, edited by R. S. Baker and P. L. Van Osdol; *Toronto*, by Jacob Spelt; *Spadina Avenue*, by Rosemary Donegan; *The Changing City*, by the City of Toronto Planning Board; and *Study of the Reurbanisation of Metropolitan Toronto*, by Berridge Lewinberg Greenberg Ltd. The PBS television program *The World of Tomorrow* (1984) and the currently ongoing City of Toronto Archives exhibit *After the Sprawl*, developed by Michael McMahon and Jim Miller, were also used as reference.





# THIRTEEN

FICTION BY MARY-LOU ZEITOUN

When I was thirteen, I lived in my room and I hated everything. I hated my room. I hated my suburb of Green Vista. I hated my mother. I hated my ugly white brick school. But, most of all, I hated my media studies teacher, stupid Mr. Carter, who lived behind us in an ugly bungalow. I could see his room through a crack in my curtains from where I'd lie on my bed. He never closed his curtains, so I always had to have mine closed. I wasn't missing anything. My window looked out on a dumb view anyhow—nothing to see but other people's swimming pools and petunia borders. "Marnie, don't be so negative," my mother always said. Mom would get mad at Anne Frank for being scared of the Nazis. She would think Anne Frank was being "negative."

I was already disgusted with adults smiling their funny tight smiles whenever they got embarrassed. They hated it whenever anyone got mad. That embarrassed them too, and I embarrassed them all the time. When I embarrassed them they got this fake smile, but, underneath, I could tell they were freaking out. You could be dying in my house, but,

if it would be embarrassing to save you, they wouldn't save you. So, when they really should have listened to me, they just sent me to my room and smiled that little Catholic smile.

When adults looked at me their faces closed up and they'd smile a little and they'd think I couldn't see them shake their heads. Except our neighbour, Mrs. Martini.

Mrs. Martini told Mom once that I was going to be a knockout when I grew up. My mom looked surprised and smiled that little smile. My mom doesn't really like Mrs. Martini. My mom would think it was rude to be a knockout. There's a rumour that Mrs. Martini was once a stripper. You could hear my mom thinking, *Marnie is not good looking. She is not petite.* I pictured myself as a knockout. I'd be on TV with shiny, bouncy hair. Would I ever be mean to the men. Only the most brilliant men could have me. It would be just like Gram's romance novels, which I read when I went to her place. She died when I was twelve, but we both used to stay up late reading the gothic romances together, even though they are so stupid and the heroine always fights

with the hero at first and she's always, like, a total knockout with "eyes too wide for beauty" or a "reed-slim figure," but they pretend she's really plain. If I was a knockout, I would be so skinny that I would borrow little boys' clothes when I fell into the river or something. All the men would fight over me and I would choose the one who impressed me most. Then that one would turn out to be mean and tie me up and hit me and then the real one I should have loved, the one I argued with at first, would save me, just like in the books. But I wasn't a knockout. I was size fourteen with greasy, straight brown hair and brown eyes. Boring, boring, boring. I didn't even have a waist, so maybe Mrs. Martini was just trying to be nice.

I liked Mrs. Martini; she made good maple fudge even though she wanted Freddy, the German shepherd across the street, put down because he jumped on her when she was holding the baby. I liked Freddy because he'd follow me to school and I'd have to take him home and miss class. Finally, he was sent away though. He killed the Boulders' cat in the driveway.

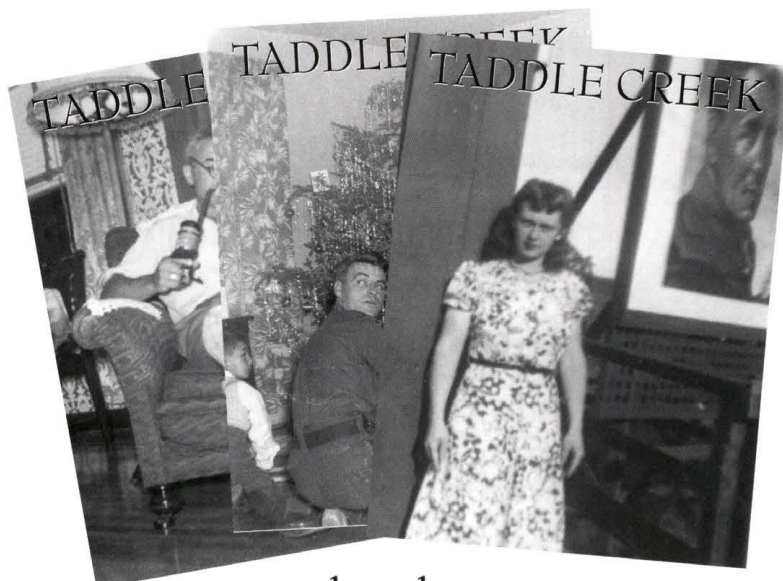


When it was happening, all the adults stood around the cat, afraid of Freddy because he was big. He used to always only pay attention to me because I love animals and he could tell. I was maybe gonna be a vet or an album cover designer like Klaus Voorman who did the *Revolver* album for the Beatles. But Freddy didn't even see me that day. He didn't pay attention when I called him or anybody called him. He kept smiling and jumping onto the old cat. It was just a furry, bloody lump on the concrete, but somehow the cat would hiss and scratch in Freddy's mouth when Freddy grabbed it again and again.

The trashy teenager from two doors down, big Linda, with her tight jeans and tank tops, started swearing. "Somebody get the dog the fuck away from it!" The adults looked more scared that Linda was swearing than that Freddy was killing the cat. Nobody ever swore on our street. Every time Freddy grabbed the cat, my stomach opened up in a huge hole that went right to my eyes. Mr. and Mrs. Boulder looked so upset, but nobody could get near Freddy. I hated the adults for just standing there. The next time he let go of the cat, I ran to him and grabbed his collar and dragged him away. "Here Freddy, here Freddy," I said. I was scared. He looked like he was going to bite me. There was blood on his grin. They scooped up the cat and took him away to be put down.

I let go of Freddy when the cat was safe and stood around for a few minutes watching the adults shake their heads and talk to each other. Nobody thanked me. I went to my room even though I wanted to scream and run around. I didn't even really like my room, but it was the only place I could go.

After I tried to kill Mr. Carter, I was lying on my bed in my room looking at the John Lennon collage I was pasting on the wall and the adults were downstairs in the living room "discussing" me. This time the adults were Mr. Carter, my mom, and my dad. Dad, a civil servant, was probably being all reasonable and dependable and useless, I'm sure. I could hear my name pop up every once in awhile in all their muttering and I could picture them sitting—Mr. Carter alone on the couch against the fake bay window and Mom and Dad sitting side by side on the fake velvet couch against



subscribe to  
**TADDLE CREEK**

Two issues: \$7  
Four issues: \$14

P.O. Box 611, Stn. P Toronto, Ont. M5S 2Y4  
make payment to Vitalis Publishing or, even better, send cash

**want coffee?**



**why fuck around?**

**jet fuel coffee shop 519 parliament street**

**JET FUEL**





the wall—drinking coffee with saucers they don't even need, on coasters of Paris scenes protecting ugly little tables.

I hated that living room. Mom likes powder blue and rust. She likes the names of colours. She says "ashes of roses" for a horrible, pinky grey, and "rust" for an ugly, tacky orange, and "powder blue" for this colour that looks like the fluoride treatments they give us at the dentist. Our walls are "champagne" (dingy yellow), the indoor-outdoor rug in my room is "goldenrod" (muddy orange), and the fridge is "avocado" (shitty green). "And it doesn't show the dirt" was how Mom described our new kitchen floor, which was putty grey and orange and brown in big squares with diamonds in it. "Great," I said, staring down at it. "I can puke on it and you won't be able to tell." My brother Jerome sneered at me. He hated it when I spoke at all, let alone bugged Mom. Of course, Jerome was a boy, so he was Mom's little darling. Mom's happy little face got trembly and fierce. "You. Are. *Miserable*," she said. "Miserable" as well as "negative" were her two favourite words to describe me. "Just *miserable*! You can go to *hang*!"

"Go to hang" were the worst swear words she used. "Hell," I said.

"That's *it*!" yelled my dad, who was normally a little slow and dense, but got mad really fast sometimes and had a really loud voice. I ran to my room.

So Mom and Dad and Mr. Carter were in the powder blue and goldenrod living room talking to each other, pretending, I'm sure, they didn't know what I had tried to do. In my room, I could always hear everything in this stupid house.

*Hockey Night in Canada* from two floors away, especially in the sickening new dark nights of winter, and I couldn't watch a movie on TV because my brother wanted to watch hockey, so I'd stay in my room that I hate with goldenrod, indoor-outdoor doesn't-show-the-dirt carpeting that nothing looks good with.

Jerome just grunted and played sports and smelled bad. I don't think we've actually ever had a conversation once. I wished we were like those twelve kids in that old book, *Cheaper By the Dozen*, where their dad was always teaching them typing or taking them on trips or making them put on plays in "the drawing room."

Once, I took Jerome's table hockey game and ripped off all the little plastic guys and drew beautiful little ballerinas in tutus on cardboard and cut them out and then taped them to the little metal rods. Then I could have a ballet. Even if they couldn't jump, they twirled pretty well.

I used to take ballet, but I stopped when I was twelve because I wanted to sleep in instead. The best feeling in my life was sleeping in. I could just lie there and anything I thought would come true in my head and the room would be all grey. My brother trashed the cardboard ballet. He didn't touch me though. He never touched me. Nobody ever touched me. Even at school where I hung out with the retards and brains and dogs, no one ever, once, tried to hit me. Even when I walked Caroline "the retard" home so the cool guys couldn't throw rocks at her and yell, brilliantly, "Retard," they never went for me. I wished they would some-

times so I could kill them. I used to dream about beating them up all the time. I wanted to catch them torturing a kitten or a bird with their stupid BBs and shoot them with their own guns. I was thirteen when I realized that it wasn't fair that guys got everything. I mean, they're so stupid. Like, *so* stupid. How did it happen that men ruled the world?

Now that I was in Grade 7, girls were getting even dumber and boys were ruling everything. Suddenly, me and Edna, my best friend, and even Caroline, went from being normal kids who played with everyone else at recess to "dogs." Except, I have to admit, Caroline was always a retard—well, slow. She could keep up with her age level just barely, but she had a good imagination, which is what I liked about her. I just wished her mom would not make her wear knee socks and ugly black shoes. That would make anyone look like a retard. At least even I got to wear cords and a T-shirt. Edna, who had frizzy blonde hair and braces, still dressed like she was twelve in matching little pantsuits.

In the cafeteria at school once, I overheard Billy Joe MacPherson, who used to be nice, but smokes, saying he was going to have a party. I was sitting at the table over from them, reading. Billy Joe said, "I'm going to invite one of the dogs to the party." "Who?" asked Patrick. "Edna, Caroline, or Marnie?" I liked Patrick. Sometimes we ended up walking home together by accident. We were always put together in grade school because we always finished our work first. We'd compare our grades as we walked.

# Word

toronto's literary calendar

Word is a monthly literary calendar that lists all reading series, performances, book launches, open stages, slams, benefits, poetry performances and schmooze-fests happening in the Toronto-area literary scene.

Subscribe to Word. Get 12 issues for \$10.

**Fill out this form, make your cheque payable to Insomniac Press, and mail it to:**

**Word, 192 Spadina Ave., Suite 403, Toronto, ON, M6J 2X4**

Yes, I want a year's subscription to Word  
the literary calendar.

My payment of \$10 is enclosed.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City/Province: \_\_\_\_\_  
Postal code: \_\_\_\_\_



# SHOPPING

She goes from store to store  
wanting to spend money on herself  
to forget him, his belligerent asshole idiot self.

She gets fresh cash from the ATM.

Money is beautiful.

The days when bills slide out obediently  
the sort of day she wants to meet someone new.

I want to fuck that bitch like nobody's bizness;  
he had said this with his chin lifted, a commendable politics  
worth signing a petition  
worth losing something over.

Women pushing babies. Starbucks sleepwalkers.  
Blank light, indiscriminate shadows.  
Glad for her wooden heels clicking

to the mall maybe. New clothes, some makeup.  
Magazines. She has perfect fingers,  
so fuck him. Fuck his wanderlust.  
She picks up something to buy.

Paper-crisp twenties.  
The two fives blue as delphinium.

— MARGARET CHRISTAKOS

O.K., it only happened once.

"Marnie," said Billy Joe.

At first I was freaked that I was a dog, but, after all, Billy Joe did invite me, and I felt good about it. I went to the party even though Edna and Caroline were mad: "You're just like them now." A part of me I was ashamed of hoped it was true. I had already huddled out of the wind in the grey-concrete back doorway of the school, smoking with the cool kids, hungry and dizzy and trying not to look shocked when one of them dragged out a joint. I missed the bus home and walked through the scraggly fields and by the brown apartment buildings in the dead light of the suburbs, feeling dangerous and lonely. Caroline and Edna were at home drawing paper Barbie dresses and eating cookies. One of the cool girls, Connie, who looked like Chrissie Hynde, said "See ya" before I left, just like I was normal. Even though Caroline and Edna said Connie was conceited, Connie was

funny and had a big mouth. Especially to guys. Gram's romance books would say she was "feisty."

Dad dropped me off at the party, which was near the school. It felt weird to drive by the closed school at night. I could picture myself in my class, bored and doodling, looking out the window and wishing the teacher would just die, or wishing I could jump out the window and run away because I had super powers. Maybe the ghost of my daytime self was in the class right now, looking at me driving by thinking about myself. That would be cool.

"Call and we'll pick you up," said Dad, as he dropped me off at Billy Joe's little brown house. I went in and Billy Joe's mom sent me downstairs. Everyone was sitting cross-legged on the floor and smoking. I sat beside Connie and said "Hey." She was wearing too much mascara and blush, and looked like she thought she

was Linda Rondstat. Supertramp, who I hate, with their stupid high voices, trying to be scary, was playing. Figures.

We played spin the bottle, except the guys just pointed at who they wanted and ignored the bottle. I was sure I was going to do something stupid and embarrass myself and nobody would pick me. The other kids kept looking at me out of the sides of their eyes. Nobody was even laughing or joking. They were so cool, you'd think they'd played spin the bottle since they were two years old. Patrick pointed to me and I went to the furnace room with him. I could see Connie. She was squirming all over Tommy Schneider. No way I would ever do that. I put my face up to Patrick's and let him drool all over me basically. It was gross. I felt idiotic. Right afterwards I snuck upstairs without anyone noticing and went to the kitchen. Billy Joe's mom was there and she gave me a cigarette. She was nice. "What a great shirt," she said. I couldn't believe she noticed. I only wore baggy pants and men's shirts, but I always collected the best patterns and colours for the shirts. Dad always laughs when he see me in one of his shirts. He never gets mad. I think we have the same taste. Anyway, Billy Joe's mom, who had a blonde perm and stretchy blue shorts, talked to me like I was a grown-up, and she even said I had nice hair. I left before anyone downstairs came up, and walked home across the field that separated Billy Joe's rent-income neighbourhood from my house.

Whenever Mom says "rent-income," it's in quotation marks and she gets a look on her face. She doesn't like Caroline because Caroline's from the rent-income district. Also, Caroline has really big breasts and Mom probably thinks she does it on purpose, just to be tacky. Anyway, when I got home, I went to my room and lay on my bed in the dark. I was so relieved to be away from the cool group and their gross necking. Edna and Caroline were right. I never should have gone there to begin with, and now I wondered what they were doing. I swore I'd never talk to Patrick again. The memory of his slippery mouth made me want to scream. I lay on the bed and listened to the eleven o'clock news through the floors and the whoosh of the buses going by a street away. I stared at the patterns on my wallpaper until they changed shape.

The wallpaper was from when I was



# THERE WAS SOMETHING THAT WE DID IN JACKSON

Something about the town itself.

(Its size maybe? The bend in the road?)

A game that your father taught us

(Perhaps I've filed it away with his familiar jokes  
and tips for identifying changes in weather)

to, at best, find good luck or, at least, avoid bad.

We treated our faith in superstition  
much as we did Catholicism.

It was best to play along, to not risk  
missing the wish or the blessing.

It required more than simple ritual, though.

(You were especially fond of elaborate scavenger hunts  
involving me dressing as an orphan and asking strangers  
for pens.)

about eight years old and I refused to have those Holly Hobbies all over my wall. I did not want typical girl wallpaper. I was more into animals than Cabbage Patches. Maybe horses, I thought, because I was an animal lover. Mom didn't want horses, so we ended up getting a rust velvet flocked wallpaper. The design is strips of ovals with curlicues in them, and the area over my pillow was quickly stained darker with my head leaning on it. Gross. The wallpaper is called "colonial." When I'm sick, I stare at the curlicues in the ovals and they transform into little shapes like butterflies, ladies in old-fashioned dresses, and dogs howling.

I stared at the wallpaper and listened at Mr. Carter's stupid fake laugh downstairs.

"It's a very difficult time . . . puberty . . . so many changes." My mother. I hate the way she says puberty. It always makes me think of pubic hair. And since Mom can't even say the word "pregnant" without whispering, it's gross whenever she says anything about sex. When I got my period when I was eleven, she looked like she had a toothache for days and turned red when she looked at me.

"Perhaps not getting enough of a challenge," I heard Mr. Carter say.

Mr. Carter paid extra attention to Caroline and Edna and me because we were in the media club after school. I was just in it to hang out with my friends. I didn't really care about cutting clippings from newspapers.

Mr. Carter was a total creep. He had long thin hair, all sticky, and was mostly bald and had these big, watery black eyes that always looked sad, and grey skin. You can always tell the pervs because they have grey skin. I used to babysit his two suck kids, Jennifer and Tod, sometimes. Once, when Jennifer and I watched *Grease* on TV, she jumped on me and grabbed my tits. She was only seven. What a weirdo. You should have seen Edna when she got to babysit for Mr. Carter. She looked all smug and insufferable. She had a crush on him, I think, but how could you have a crush on an old grey guy? Edna was getting really gross. Her bra strap was beginning to show all the time and she was getting this cross-eyed look on her face when she talked to boys—any boys, even the sucks we hung out with. It was stupid because she looked so dumb, with her frizzy blonde

hair in pigtails and still wearing the clothes she wore when she was eight. Once I saw Mr. Carter and Edna alone in the media room. He was standing behind her with his grey sausage hands on her shoulders. I went in and sat down and he moved over to me. "I don't want a massage," I said.

"What's the matter? Don't you like to be massaged?" he asked.

"No!" I said as mean as I could. Edna and Mr. Carter looked at each other and gave that little smile my mom does. They made me feel like a big baby.

Another time in the media room, Caroline was pasting a newspaper clipping of a kitten with a bowler hat on its head in her media scrapbook.

"Fraid of heights?" asked Caroline, a huge grin on her face.

"What?" I said.

"Your fly is!" yelled Caroline, and whooped. It was her favourite joke. I did up my fly and sat down.

I knew I was turning totally red and my armpits were soaked. Mr. Carter noticed.

"You shouldn't be ashamed of your body," he said as he walked to his desk. I instantly felt awful. I didn't like him talk-

ing about my body. Mom would say I have "a nice figure" in a strained way, like she read somewhere you had to bolster your teen's self-esteem, but I thought my body was really ugly and she had to say that because she's my mom. Anyway, I didn't want a nice figure, I wanted to be skinny. Even when I changed in my room, I hid myself so no one could see how fat I was through the window. That's why I wore baggy pants and my dad's shirts. I wouldn't be ashamed of my body if it was skinny.

"Are you ashamed of your body, Caroline?" he asked.

Caroline stretched her thick lips into another grin. She had teeth, but it always looked like she didn't. "I have a beautiful body," she said.

When we were walking home, Caroline said again, "I have a beautiful body."

"Yeah, don't say that, Caroline. People will take it weird," I said.

Caroline got her stubborn look. Just because people are stupid doesn't mean they can't have personalities. Caroline got really angry and stubborn at the weird-est things.

"I do." She opened her arms. She stank.



It called for trust in the sleight of hand.  
We filled each day with twists, obstacles  
only the other could overcome.  
Thoughts we finished out of turn.

A high-pitched giggle, the snort, my hand on your arm while  
doubled over. We stop whenever the laughter demands.  
You remind me to take deep breaths.

(If you close your eyes, no one can see you.)

Are you passing on these secrets to your children?  
Sharing the language that I've misplaced.

When did I stop limping through malls, speaking  
in pig latin, believing in life after death?  
Thumb on car window, feet off the floor

make a wish as we cross the railway tracks.

If we spoke today, would it all come back?  
Would I be up to the challenge?

To see who could hold their breath the longest  
as we pass through Jackson.

— KATHLEEN OLMSTEAD

Someone was going to have to tell her about deodorant. "I have a beautiful body. Mr. Carter says so."

The day I tried to kill Mr. Carter, it was hot, the second week of September. I was waiting for Caroline. She was late and the schoolyard was empty, not even any rent-income kids waiting to bug Caroline. Just me and the hot pavement, the yellow field by the school, and the birds with their late-afternoon chirps. I heard a sound like a car starting in the distance. Then, coming from the bushes, a loud moan like a science-fiction monster dying. The bushes were where the cool kids went to smoke cigarettes and even neck. They said a Grade Thirteen hanged himself there five years before because he was a drug addict. The moan definitely turned into crying, so I started to walk towards the bush. When I was almost there, and I was scared to go down the path, Caroline came in sight. She had her face all twisted and she was making this weird sound. There were leaves in her hair and her shirt was ripped open. I could see the ugly fat blobs of her boobs falling out of her grey bra.

There was a big thorn in her leg with a long stream of blood coming down. "What happened?" I asked. No answer.

"Come on, Caroline, I'll take you home," I said, but she didn't even see me. I grabbed her arm and she shook me off. She kept walking, like Frankenstein, across the field to go home, making that sound. I followed her, really nervous that someone would see her boobs. We got to her house and her mother sent me home right away without even giving me a drink. It was a long walk home. I was dying of thirst. I wished we had a pool.

That was the theme of my life, listening to other people swim on a hot day.

E dna has a pool, but it's totally wasted. Her gross little albino brother, Peter, never went in their swimming pool, but whined "I want to swim. I want to swim," his skinny little white bones knocking together, but he wouldn't even go in the water. He didn't do anything about it and would just look scared. Mrs. Winchester, who is fat with a big red face, wouldn't even get mad. She'd just say, "I know, honey." I wanted to push Peter in so bad and tell him to just shut up, but

Mrs. Winchester was a psychiatrist, so she'd think it was all traumatic if I pushed him, and I hardly ever got invited to swim in their pool, anyway.

The Carters have a swimming pool. We never got to swim in it. There's also a swimming pool next door at the Neumans' and behind us too. In summer, I have to hear other kids swimming all the time. No one ever invites us. We don't have a pool. We rent a cottage for three weeks every year. It's like our street, but on a lake. Two rows of five little cottage houses lined up on a lake with a wide street between them. It was only fun last summer because the Deacon boys from America were there and they took us water-skiing and we played cards with them and at night they smoked on the beach. Sometimes they were kind of creepy though, they kept asking me if I was eighteen and laughing at each other. I can see their faces half-lit by the bonfire. "Er yew eighteen?" "Why?" I'd ask. "Is it illegal to smoke?" and they'd look away and down and laugh even sneakier. I later figured out that it meant they could have sex with me without it being statutory rape if I was eighteen, which apparently is a big thing in America. They're always statutory raping each other. I guess Canadians just don't. I'm eighteen now.

So, when we were not at the cottage in the summers, the story of my life was just lying in my hot room and reading and listening to the buses wheeze and whoosh by a block away, and to the neighbour kids scream and splash. I'd listen to the hollow rubber bouncing sound of the diving board on its springs. Wet feet land, "boi-oi-oing," scream and splash. And then the bus would go by on the dry road behind us. Exhaust. I get bus sick on buses.

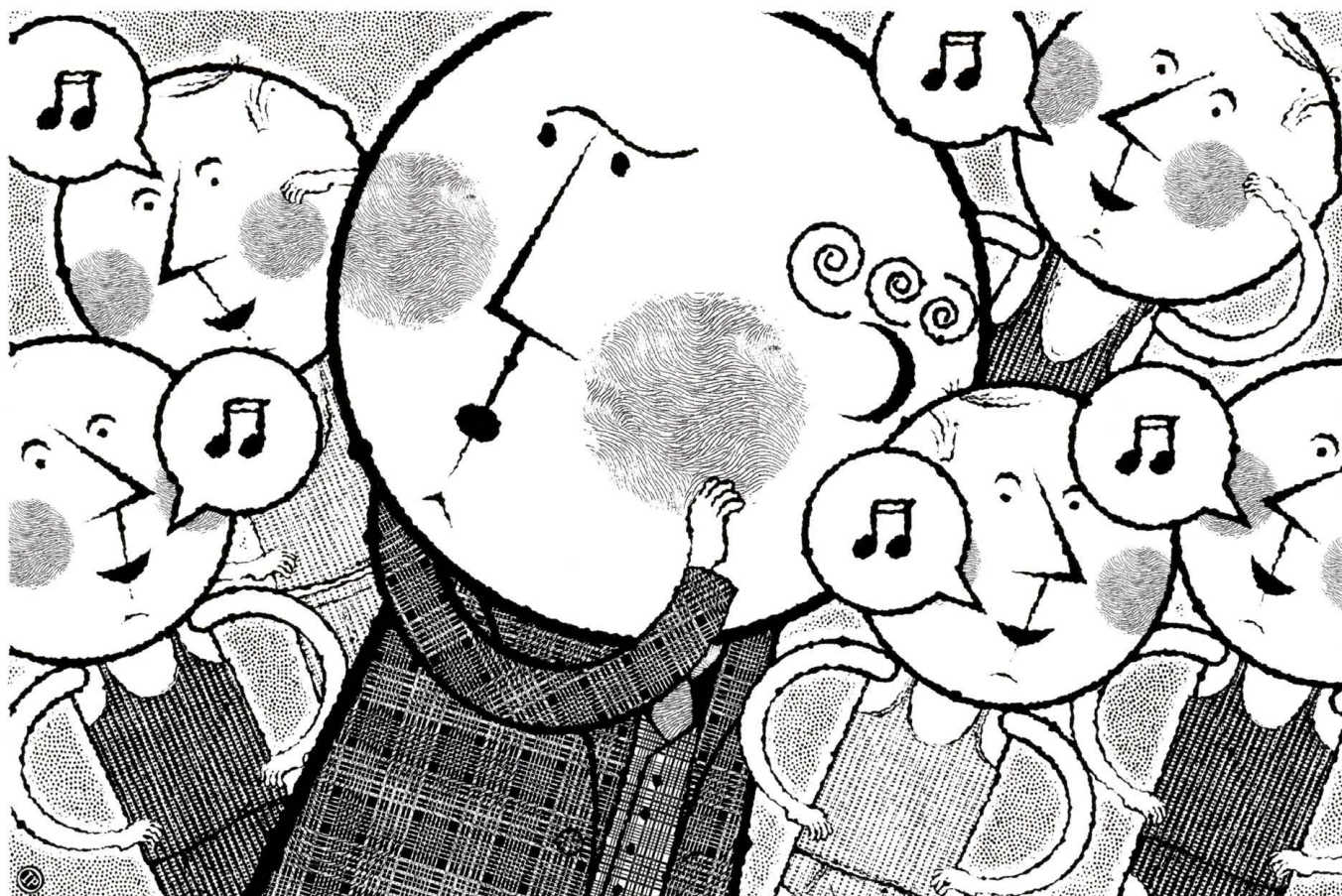
The adults were downstairs that day because I went to the Carters' backyard after supper. I opened their side gate and saw Mr. Carter in the pool, listening to the radio. I went up to him and watched him swim. He had hair on his back. Black hair. Squooshy shoulders. "Marnie," he said. "Come for a swim?"

I threw his radio in the pool. I heard you could kill people that way. I ran away as fast as I could. I went to my room.

---

*Mary-Lou Zeitoun lives in the Danforth area. She freelances for several Toronto weeklies and dailies and is the Canadian correspondent for FilmFestivals.com. Her book, 13, will be published in 2002 by Porcupine's Quill.*





# DESPITE LAST NIGHT'S RAIN

FICTION BY JONATHAN BENNETT

JANUARY 26, 1988  
(AUSTRALIA DAY)  
SOUTH CRONULLA,  
NEW SOUTH WALES

As George and Jane entered the Seabreeze, George inspected the fountain gurgling away to itself in the foyer. Someone's kids had cleaned out the silver coins—leaving only a few greening coppers. George disliked the foyer for its humidity and decor. He'd always felt passing through it was rather like floating in an outmoded public aquarium. It had fish motifs etched into every other tile, themselves coloured in various shades of swimming pool blue. It inevitably reminded George of that cheap holiday in Blackpool years ago. Nothing more than a two-day respite from relatives during their one and only trip back home to England. He tossed a copper wish in the fountain and cursed the day they moved to this block of flats from

their house on the clifftop, further down the esplanade.

Jane took the elevator, but George began to climb the stairs. He didn't like little rooms, and who could trust an old elevator's cables? On the stairs, George reflected on the afternoon's events. They'd been watching the Australian bicentennial celebrations on the television at Emma's, who was Jane's sister. Rodney and Gavin, Emma's boys, had not been home. Off surfing, Emma had mentioned.

Once inside their flat, Jane began the preparations for dinner by getting four sausages out of the freezer. George sat on the balcony and watched the last few surfboard riders catching waves out off Shark Island.

"Is it too dark?" Jane asked through the screen door.

"I'm looking for them. I think I might see Rodney."

"Why don't I call Emma and see if the boys'll come 'round tomorrow for breakfast? Would you like that?"

At dusk from his old house, George had often stared over at the Royal National Park. From his old garden he used to watch the eroding pink and orange sandstone cliffs across the mouth of the Hacking River, crowned with blazing wildflowers, gold and crimson bottlebrush, blue gums, and hardy scrub. Sometimes at dusk, when the light danced off the water into the silvery leaves, George had half expected to see a black man emerge from the bush, hunting, holding a spear, boomerang, and woomera. An ancient aboriginal man, a fugitive, who had somehow managed to stay hidden and preserved for these two hundred years. George had considered his old view to be that authentic, that Australian. All that was visible from his balcony here at the Seabreeze were the stacks from the



Kurnell oil refinery smoking in the distance over behind Wanda Beach.

George could hear Jane talking on the phone to Emma. None of the surfers out this late appeared to be Gavin or Rodney. There was a time, he thought, he might have wanted sons. But thirty years ago Dr. Northcliffe had said plain and simple, "George, mate, I reckon your wife's barren."

So that had always been that.

George unlaced his brogues, took off his socks, and rubbed his old feet. Boys of his own, he thought. And although he couldn't quite place it, what he sensed in the night air were the beginnings of rain. As he drifted off to sleep, the last surfboard rider paddled in to shore and clouds gathered along the horizon. George dreamed himself holding Emma, at his old house with his view, and her two sons by their side. They all stood in the garden, bare toes in the dry soil, holding on to the wire fence. Like a family, they looked over the cliff's edge to the rock shelf below, down to where Jane lay dead. She'd take her courage with her.

## DECEMBER 19, 1977 (CHRISTMAS SHOPPING) SYDNEY

In Myers department store, the virile young mannequins—with their cocked heads and self-righteous grins—looked down on middle-aged George like he was half the man they were. On the escalator, walls of mirrors fenced him in for his entire ascension. One thousand peripheral versions of himself, in profile, each trying to ignore the existence of the next. He felt his private world being turned inside out—like a punched felt hat—for all the other shoppers to see.

It was a mannequin in men's wear who began the chiding. A youth, frozen in mid-athletic stride, said, *George, this is your life. There's no way out, mate.*

George began to perspire. And then another started, a petrified face, barely old enough to vote. *Pay no attention to him George, but you will be the last man in your family's line. This is the fall of the house of George*, he laughed. Then, in chorus, the whole room full of mannequins chanted:

*The fall of the house of George,  
by George!  
The fall of the house of George.*

"Stop it." George said this aloud without meaning to.

"Stop what?" Jane groped for his hand without taking her eyes off a fresh pile of corduroy slacks. She continued, "George, dear, are you hungry?" He took her hand.

George looked to his feet for stability. His Sunday shoes. Solid black brogues. In order to escape, he tried to think of something real, his house, his view, the half-finished Jane Austen novel beside his bed. But what of his ride on top of the toothy, free-spirited, wooden stair? The mannequins, the mirrors, the escalators? He could trust nothing in this world, not his own individuality, not English novels, not gravity, not even his Sunday shoes. It was, after all, only Saturday.

Since Emma and sons immigrated two years ago, George felt Jane's spirits rise. He welcomed this. He did. But, shopping for children, here in the city? Especially now, after that new surfer husband of Emma's went and got attacked by a shark. *They say he might not make it.*

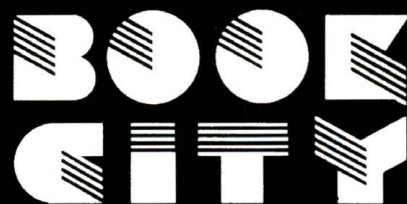
George, who was now outside walking down Martin Place, felt the buildings teetering around him, the clouds moving because the skyscrapers were falling. With every step he confronted a precipice. He looked down and, letting his mind wander, George jettisoned himself from his body, his clothes and brogues, and imagined himself in his garden, cooking fish over the coals. He regarded Jane at her garden, looking over the wire fence to the rocks and sea below. The smell of bream cooking, sea salt, and gum trees all bled together and soothed his mind and mood. The two boys played cricket and Emma stood by his side, her hand inside his. Together they watched the horizon. George's gait widened, his speed increased down Martin Place. He licked his lips.

"Oh, honey, look—lamingtons." Jane released George's hand and ducked into a pastry shop. A little brass bell rang overhead. She approached the glass counter and bowed, studying the cakes, pastries, pies, slices, biscuits, tarts.

"What do you think of those lamingtons there, George?" She placed her index finger on the glass, showing him.

"Excuse me, lovey?" the woman behind the counter asked.

Jane looked up. The elderly woman's accent was English, from the North like her own. Jane took in her questioning face for a second, then followed the woman's gaze back over her own shoulder. Jane had been talking to herself. There



## WE WANT TO KEEP YOU SMILING!

And we know that our low prices are an important part of that goal. So, what the heck. We're lowering them further.

When you carry the **BOOK CITY DISCOUNT CARD**, you'll get **10% off** every book\* in our store. YES, **10% off** all paperbacks, an additional **10% off** the 10% you already receive on hardcovers, and **10% off** on top of our already ridiculously low mark-downs on publishers' overstocks.

This card leads to really big savings.

In fact, since the **BOOK CITY DISCOUNT CARD** is yours for just an annual \$15 fee,\* all you book lovers will quickly realize a giant volume discount on our volumes.

## AND THERE'S MORE!

In addition to all these great savings, we'll also give you "**one point**" for **every dollar you spend** at **BOOK CITY** (exclusive of membership fee & applicable taxes). Save up 200 points, and we'll mail you a \$5.00 gift certificate.

If you're a teacher at an Ontario School Board, your fee is halved to \$7.50. Same goes if you're over 65.

**Hey, we're piling rewards on top of rewards! Ask our friendly staff for details.**

\*Yearly membership fee, plus applicable taxes. Bestsellers discounted at 30% are excluded. Magazines, newspapers and all non-book items also excluded.

**2350 Bloor Street West  
766-9412**

**501 Bloor Street West  
961-4496**

**348 Danforth Avenue  
469-9997**

**1950 Queen Street East  
698-1444**

**1430 Yonge Street  
961-1228**



was no one else in the shop. No George.

George had released his wife's hand without a thought. The fish on the barbecue seared away, the ocean wind swept through his hair, and over the mirrored seascape the sun danced off the tiny wispy brush strokes, the wave crests, the dabs of white paint only characterizing foam, only implying the true nature of things.

It was not until George reached Pitt Street that he returned to the city, his clothes, brogues, and situation. It was a car horn that snapped him out of it. Like a bridge of sound, the horn carried him the sixty kilometres back to himself in an instant, and with a thud.

"Watch it, mate. Bit early for the drink, don't you reckon?" asked a voice. George turned, staggering and falling, but the bloke who said this could have been any one of the grey suits that were now stepping around him.

With his freshly shaven face against the smooth, hot cement, George forgot himself, lost Emma's touch, misplaced his view of the sea. He was alive, yes, he was sure of it. But whose life was he inside of? What if he'd become a local? A man who could not live without overlooking the sea. A Sydneysider who needed the flat horizon, the distant bush, and the wind-battered cliffs simply to feel whole. Was he no longer British? Was he now an Australian?

George considered his new life, sentence by sentence.

Cheek.

Hot.

Then, slowly, awkward clothes arrived, a pair of stiff shoes, some noise. He was becoming himself. He felt foreign again. He felt English.

"George, dear, you've collapsed in the middle of the sidewalk." It was Jane's voice, urgent, but nonetheless reassuring.

Jane had asked the bakery woman with the northern English accent, "My husband didn't come in here with me?" And as the woman shook her head, Jane pressed her lips together in a stiff-mouthed smile and left the store. Outside, the sound of the brass bell tingling over the bakery door drowned abruptly in the sea of street noise. The sandstone buildings climbed into the air surrounding her like cliff faces. A loud car horn sounded. She snapped her head to the right in time to see George lurch first towards the road, then back to the footpath, only to finally collapse onto his

front. She ran through the people towards him.

Back in the pastry shop, they ate curried egg sandwiches in a small booth. George drank a vanilla milkshake. Jane sipped tea. They shared a lamington. It was all the walking. It was the heat. On an empty stomach, indeed. And it was Christmas. Goodness, so much shopping to do. They wouldn't come into Sydney next year. The train fare was too dear, and really they could get the boys' gifts at Walton's in Caringbah. Jane held George's hand. She was doing all the talking. He liked it when she talked. Her voice ran through him and soothed his mind like a scotch and water. Jane had been a nurse when they'd met. She still knew how to diagnose and disinfect.

On the train home, George began to relay his day to Jane. What had happened to him: the mannequins' voices in Myers, the flight home to the sea. But the sight of the George's river running underneath an oncoming bridge reassured him that he would soon be at home; so he stopped shy of telling her of his misplaced love of country, and his near death sentence. During this silence, George regained some strength, found some sense, and made the colours of Pitt Street, the temperature of the day, and the city noise drop away from his mind.

A week after the incident, his recollection of the fall was only partial. Two years later, it was unsalvageable.

SUMMER'S END, 1975  
(BEEFEATER GIN, INDIAN  
TONIC WATER, TWO SISTERS)  
SOUTH CRONULLA,  
NEW SOUTH WALES

"The sea has no passion." Jane hunched over and lit a cigarette. There was wind. "It's barren and that is why, millions of years ago, we all slithered out."

Emma asked, "Then why live so near to it, on a clifftop?"

"Struth, as they say here. It's an island. Water, water everywhere. Why live anywhere in Australia?"

"Because you must have wanted to at first. But why live on a clifftop?"

"Because *he* wanted to." Jane looked out at the bleeding dusk. She smoked. "It's because George is dramatic." She paused. "And a verandah on a clifftop could be rather like a stage I suppose. The whole bloody country full of actors and actresses

performing before the sea." She drew on her cigarette, smiling at her own sharp summation of a theme, a leitmotif that had, until now, been undiscovered by her.

"But Jane. You've got to be dotty to stay here."

"What? Leave? And let the sea be his only audience, let him become an Australian? I shouldn't think so. We moved here because we wanted a place untouched by war, somewhere with a fresh start for our life together."

---

## CONTRIBUTORS

*Emily Pohl-Weary* ("What I Learned Growing Up in Parkdale," p. 4) lives in the Palmerston area. She has co-written a book about science-fiction author Judith Merril to be published in spring, 2002, by *Between the Lines*. She is a freelance writer, co-editor of *Kiss Machine*, and managing editor of *Broken Pencil*.

*Paul Vermeersch* ("The Purple Nurple," p. 9) lives in the Annex. His first collection of poetry, *Burn* (ECW, 2000), is a finalist for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. He is the curator of the IV Lounge Reading Series and has edited *The IV Lounge Reader*, recently released through *Insomniac*, where he is now poetry editor.

*George Murray* ("Nothing: A Haiku," p. 14) recently relocated from Toronto to New York. His poetry has appeared in *Alphabet City*, the *Antigonish Review*, and *Descant*. His latest book, *The Cottage Builder's Letter*, was published this spring by McClelland & Stewart.

*Dave Lapp* ("Bughouse," p. 18) lives in the Palmerston area. He teaches cartooning to children and his comic strip, *Children of the Atom*, is published weekly in Vancouver's *Georgia Strait*.

*Margaret Christakos* ("Shopping," p. 33) lives in Portugal Village. Her works include the poetry collection *Wipe Under a Love* (Mansfield, 2000) and a novel, *Charisma* (Pedlar, 2000), which was short-listed for the 2001 Trillium Book Award.

*Kathleen Olmstead* ("There Was Something That We Did in Jackson," p. 34) is the only resident of Kensington Market to have concurrently held the title in long-distance spitting, Nerf-luge, and pulling chewies on the back forty.

*Elana Wolff* ("Étude for Four Hands," p. 39) lives in Thornhill. Her poems have appeared in the *Antigonish Review*, the *Backwater Review*, and *Descant*. *Guernica Editions* will publish her first collection of poetry this fall.



# ÉTUDE FOR FOUR HANDS

The wicker hen is in fact ceramic. The anatomically faithful  
small-mouthed  
bass is made from a thousand nails, hand-hammered into oak.  
Its tail and fins are copper leaf. Pino, pictured propped in a sled,  
is a female English  
bull terrier  
with an Italian masculine name. (Whoops)  
Now she's old, but when she was spry,  
she dive-bombed me  
from the staircase, took a mouthful out of my glove  
and ran; her teeth never touched my hand.  
None of the ivy climbing the primary-coloured walls  
of the family room (and hung by hooks to the cornice)  
is silk.  
And none of the paintings C. S. painted, prior to '41  
in France,  
hinted at all at her later radical opus.  
The passion flower opens quickly to stay exquisite  
for half a day.  
Its coarse and artless hand-like leaves,  
on the other hand,  
grow rampant.

—ELANA WOLFF

George and Jane had met in London. He was the young schoolmaster on summer holiday. She, the nurse-in-training on leave from Lancashire. He taught Latin, geography, and cricket. She dressed wounds and liked to garden. He had a moustache and a sunburned nose. She had a long birthmark on her stomach. If he looked at it upside down, it was the shape of Italy, and the toe of its boot disappeared under her breast. After a courtship that lasted long enough to sample selected parts of Europe, they motored up to Lancashire and were married in a church that was two hundred years older than Australia. That was 1948. April 3rd. Not long after, they purchased a berth on the P. & O. sailing for Sydney.

"Another?" said Emma, reaching for Jane's glass.

"Yes." They met one another's gaze. Four smacking blue eyes with interlocking flecks of British racing green. The Firth sisters from Colne were together again. "George

loves your boys, Emma. He treats them like his own. Thank you for coming." Emma, mother of two, recent widower, was the younger sister by almost ten years.

"I knew you would never leave him here. I thought I had to come."

"Cheers, then." They charged their glasses. Jane saw Emma as she had seen herself a decade ago: fresher faced, more able bodied.

NOVEMBER, 1954  
(GARDENING)  
SOUTH CRONULLA,  
NEW SOUTH WALES

Jane stepped off the verandah and crossed their back lawn to her row of vegetables planted along the wire fence at the cliff's edge. Despite last night's rain, the coarse grass, infested with patches of burrs and bindi-eyes, crunched under her sandaled feet, the wetness flicking up on her legs, itching her skin. There lay her

"hopefuls:" a few sad carrots, a tired pumpkin, an unlikely union of spices huddling together for mutual protection. It's death row, she thought. They'd surely jump if they had any courage.

Jane squatted and poked her index finger into the earth at the foot of a tomato plant. Dry. There had been good rain last night; but she knew the sandy soil lacked depth. Besides, she thought, to plants this exposed the southerly busters are merciless on anything taller than a small boy. And the sun and salt contribute to—well, they just contribute. She rubbed the waxy skin of a green tomato on its vine and it snapped off.

The door banged behind George as he considered stepping out across the lawn.

"That tomato ripe already?" He called from the verandah. She watched the wet, uncut grass seducing his bare feet. A vacant moment passed before he found his "take charge" face. He marched over to her, his strides measured and sure, the grass licking at his ankles.

"I picked it accidentally," she said as he drew near.

"If you pop it on the windowsill it'll ripen in the sun." George looped his arm inside Jane's and held her hand, adding, "Won't it." George looked out at the morning sun. "It's going to be a humid one today, yeah?" She didn't answer. He turned and looked over at the Royal National Park, his eyes combing the bush for movement of any kind.

"Nothing grows here," said Jane as she handed the green tomato to George.

"My carrots were good last year."

"George, you never said what Dr. Northcliffe wanted yesterday. Did he say anything?"

"Just to keep at it." George gave his wife a squeeze. He handed her back the green tomato, saying: "Put that on the kitchen windowsill." He turned, leaving her, retracing his steps back across the grass that was already beginning to dry. From where she stood, the top strand of the thin wire fence clumsily followed the horizon's line. She remained fixed there before her garden on the clifftop, alongside her hopefuls, waiting for better rain.

---

*Jonathan Bennett lives in Bloorcourt Village. He was born in Vancouver, but grew up in Sydney, Australia. His work has appeared in Descant, Matrix, and Blood and Aphorisms. His first novel, After Battersea Park, was published this spring by Raincoast.*



# **THIS** FIFTH ANNUAL LITERARY CONTEST

Now in its fifth year, *This Magazine's* Great Canadian Literary Hunt is on the trail of Canada's brightest new creative writers.

Enter by **July 1, 2001** and join *This's* 34-year-long tradition of presenting the best in Canadian writing

## **RULES**

1) Poems of up to 100 lines and short stories of up to 5,000 words are eligible for entry.

2) All entries must be original and unpublished.

3) First prize in fiction is \$750; second prize in fiction is \$500; third prize in fiction is \$250. First prize in poetry is \$750; second prize in poetry is \$500; third prize in poetry is \$250.

4) The first-, second-, and third-prize short stories and the first-, second-, and third-prize poems will be published in *This Magazine's* fall issue.

5) Entry fee is \$10 per piece of fiction and \$10 for two poems.

6) Entry fees must be paid by personal cheque or money order made payable to *This Magazine*.

7) Individuals may send in multiple entries. Each entry must be accompanied by an entry fee.

8) All entries must be accompanied by a separate cover sheet with entrant's full name, address (including postal code), telephone number, email address (if applicable), submission title and category. Entrant's name **MUST NOT** appear anywhere on the manuscript itself.

9) Winners will be contacted by telephone. To receive a list of winners, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope with your entry. *This Magazine* is not able to return manuscripts. **DO NOT SEND ORIGINALS.**

10) By submitting an entry to the contest, entrants agree to be bound by the contest rules. Judges' decisions are final.

11) Entries must be postmarked no later than **July 1, 2001**.

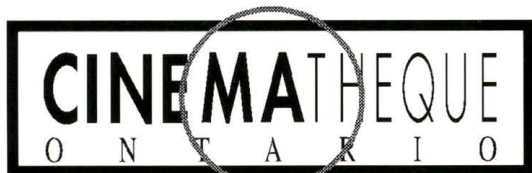
12) Entries should be mailed to:  
**The Great Canadian Literary Hunt**  
c/o *This Magazine*,  
401 Richmond Street West, Suite 396,  
Toronto, ON M5V 3A8.

# THE GREAT CANADIAN LITERARY HUNT



**1ST PRIZE IN FICTION: \$750 · 1ST PRIZE IN POETRY: \$750**  
**2ND PRIZE IN EACH CATEGORY: \$500 · 3RD PRIZE IN EACH CATEGORY: \$250**





A division of the Toronto International Film Festival Group



*Coming in July 2001*

**The Last Sensei:  
The Odd Obsessions of  
Japanese master  
Kon Ichikawa**

23 films! Many new 35 mm prints!

Accompanied by a  
450-page publication.

Sponsored by  
The Japan Foundation



DORA-HEITA

FOR MORE INFORMATION



*With*

HARP OF BURMA  
FIRES ON THE PLAIN  
KAGI  
PUNISHMENT ROOM  
AN ACTOR'S REVENGE  
ALONE ON THE PACIFIC

TOKYO OLYMPIAD  
THE WOMAN WHO TOUCHED LEGS  
I AM TWO  
TEN DARK WOMEN  
THE MAKIOKA SISTERS  
*and* DORA-HEITA



Cinematheque Ontario screenings are held at the Art Gallery of Ontario's Jackman Hall, 317 Dundas St. West. All screenings are restricted to individuals 18 years of age or older, unless otherwise noted. For more information, call the Bell Infoline, 416-968-FILM, or visit the Official Website: [www.bell.ca/filmfest](http://www.bell.ca/filmfest). \$4.80 Members; \$4.25 Student Members and Seniors; \$8 Non-Members.

Cinematheque Ontario thanks its Cinema Ten Sponsors: Astral Media, Bell Canada, Cineplex Odeon Corporation, Goodman and Carr, Herzog Eye Institute, In Style, TFO and Hospitality Partner Delta Chelsea.

THE TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL GROUP IS A CHARITABLE, CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION DEVOTED TO CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE IN FILM AND THE MOVING PICTURE.



# STEAM WHISTLE

Pilsner



Now in Beer Stores  
and LCBO Stores

Take Home  
a Carton  
Today!

Join us at Steam Whistle Brewing for the  
Taddle Creek Author Reading Night

Thursday September 13th - 7p.m. to 9p.m.  
Celebrate the launch of the special one-time-only fall  
e-issue of TADDLE CREEK

[www.steamwhistle.ca](http://www.steamwhistle.ca)

FROM THE *Good Beer* FOLKS!