

MACLEANS



CANADA'S NATIONAL MAGAZINE · JULY 2020



Desmond Cole
Andray Domise
Esi Edugyan
Lawrence Hill
Sandy Hudson
Eternity Martis
Rinaldo Walcott &
Ian Williams on
racism in America
and Canada—and
what's next for an
unyielding protest
movement P.36

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Chloe LeMoynes, 15, studies in her room—normally a refuge—at home in Montreal: ‘I feel like my whole school year is going down the drain’ p.57

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Urgent care

COVID-19 HAS PROVEN highly contagious and cruelly lethal for elderly patients—characteristics that seem specifically engineered to wreak havoc on nursing homes, as attested by worldwide mortality figures. Yet Canada's experience has been “uniquely bad,” laments Michael Nicin, executive director of the National Institute on Ageing (NIA) at Toronto's Ryerson University. “With 82 per cent of all COVID deaths in Canada occurring in long-term care homes, we are unfortunately leading the world in this regard.” So how do we fix this national embarrassment?

The scathing report by the Canadian Armed Forces into conditions at five Ontario nursing homes, where soldiers provided emergency support, has been a clarion call for change, and point to significant issues, both urgent and heartbreaking, in working conditions and preparedness. Many of the homes were overwhelmed as a result of the coronavirus, and a key transmission mechanism for the virus has been workers with jobs at multiple homes. British Columbia's early move requiring personal service workers to commit to a single worksite may explain the dramatic difference between the nursing home death toll in B.C. and those in Ontario and Quebec.

Long before the coronavirus hit, the cost of providing care for Canadian seniors beyond regular health care had been going up. Annual public spending on long-term care facilities and home care currently stands at \$22 billion a year, and the NIA projects this will hit \$71 billion by 2050 as demographics shift. Add the value of unpaid family care, and the total could hit nearly \$100 billion.

Fixing problems in nursing homes now means we can expect the overall price of long-term care to grow substantially above those estimates, accompanied by newer costs such as those associated with “hero pay” bonuses and a rising global demand for health-care employees. Coping with these new costs will be made more difficult by massive federal and provincial deficits in the wake of the economic lockdown. But we must be pragmatic.

Demands to nationalize for-profit long-term care are impractical; private businesses currently comprise more than half the sector in many provinces, and it's impossible to contemplate taxpayers assuming such a huge burden. It also appears that a reliance on multi-bed wards, not ownership or ideology, has been driving the shocking death rates in Canada's nursing homes; and converting these units into private or semi-private rooms will require even more funding and capacity.

One solution is to ask Canadians to do more to save for their own future needs through a mandatory scheme similar to the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). In Germany, for example, workers face a long-term care insurance payroll tax of 2.55 per cent, with an additional fee for childless adults. While an interesting concept, such a charge would be on top of the current CPP rate of 5.25 per cent; that's a steep bill, and shifts much of the burden onto future generations. (In Japan, this insurance is only paid by those over 40.) Alternatively there's Denmark, which seeks to keep nursing home costs down by allowing seniors to live at home for as long as possible.

Danish seniors are encouraged to age in place through a wide range of in-home care services, including mandatory visits by health-care professionals after age 75. Not only does this provide dignity and choice, it has allowed Denmark to keep a lid on capital expenses—Nicin notes the country didn't build a new nursing home for nearly 20 years. But high-touch home care isn't cheap either. Denmark spends 50 per cent more, as a share of GDP, on caring for its elderly than Canada. Whatever the solution, taxpayers should prepare for a bigger seniors bill.

Finally, any comprehensive solution will have to navigate the complications of Canadian federalism. But, despite all the obstacles, Nicin sees reason for optimism. “There's been a political awakening that we can't keep going down the same path,” he says. “It is no longer acceptable to spend the bare minimum protecting our elderly. We will have to do better.” ♦

‘There’s been a political awakening that we can’t keep going down the same path’

LETTERS

Crushing COVID-19

I was amused by the comedy of errors that Paul Wells exposed in our history of dealing with epidemics (“The 30-year battle to stop a pandemic,” *Coronavirus*, June 2020). It shows the problem of compartmentalized thinking. How do you eat an elephant? One part at a time. But you can’t stop when you’re full, change utensils, or decide not to pay the whole bill; seldom do we have a plan for the tail or cleanup of the mess. We tire of the planning. I have been at those planning meetings. Nobody wants to go the extra steps. Nobody wants to fund it. Co-operation among nations? That’s another elephant. The aftermath will have the whole world swallowing hard as the indigestion from loss of life, income loss, and governments rising and falling builds. Living with a novel virus is the hard part; a vaccine helps only if you are alive to get one. I pray that someone has thought this last part through.

Paul Lainan, Hamilton, Ont.

Pandemic coping

The wheels are in motion, moving to our new normal, but what really lies ahead (“Who gets the vaccine first?” *Coronavirus*, June 2020)? Reading your article, I realized this could be a catch-22. Would a nation use the discovery of a COVID-19 vaccine for its own purposes exclusively, or use it as a bargaining tool for political gain? I can’t help but wonder, with rising international tensions—particularly between the U.S. and China—what their course of action would be. I’m proud to be Canadian and hope we would continue to be proactive in maintaining our image as a fair and welcoming nation. This pandemic is a world issue, and nations must certainly address their internal

‘It took years of research to prove to military historians that the unit who waded ashore that day was the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders’

Brig.-Gen. William J. Patterson, Kingston, Ont.



requirements, but then reach out to assist other nations in need. The countries of the world must act as a team against this pandemic!
Bill Hamilton, Virgil, Ont.

We are experiencing unprecedented responses by both federal and provincial governments to prevent the spread of COVID-19. They have demonstrated that when there is political will, a meaningful response to a crisis can happen overnight. Both have stated that we need to follow our health professionals and make evidence-based decisions to save lives. We have also witnessed, for more than five years, an appalling lack of meaningful response and political will in response to the opioid drug crisis. There have been 5,000-plus deaths in B.C. since 2016, and more than 15,000 in Canada during the same period, lost to the viruses of organ-

ized crime and illegal drugs. Our health professionals tell elected governments that we must treat addiction as a health issue, not a criminal one, but politicians have refused to acknowledge the failed war on drugs. The toxic drug supply took our son Ryan, who died on April 24, 2017, when he relapsed after eight months of recovery. He died on his job site during his lunch break. Politicians need to be held accountable and be made to defend the reasons why our beloved family members continue to die daily, year after year, when a vaccine that will kill the organized crime virus is available. That vaccine is a government-controlled system that is already in use for alcohol and marijuana, and should be used so that the toxic drug supply will stop.

John and Jennifer Hedican, Courtenay, B.C.

Land of the free

I found Shannon Gormley’s column on the U.S. moving and so true (“Liberty in America,” *United States*, June 2020). America has lost its democracy, its rule of law. Trump has insulted all its allies, praised its enemies and lied to the world. Small penis syndrome. Those masked, armed protesters who entered the Michigan state government building should have been stopped and arrested. If they had been black, they would have been shot dead. The world needs more journalists to take issue with the United States of today with its dysfunctional government and injustices. America’s founding fathers never intended it to be this way—make America crappy again.

Brian Mellor, Picton, Ont.

Congratulations to Shannon Gormley for such a well-written column. The Trump era is the beginning of the end for U.S.-styled democracy. Powerful nations eventually fall, and America will be no exception. How one person can degrade a progressive and rich nation through fear, ignorance and lying is unfathomable. Hitler, Stalin—and now Trump and Putin. Canada has had a very co-operative and mutually beneficial relationship with our closest neighbour, the U.S. Now, for the most part, that relationship has been politically torn down. Canadians would do well to take special note. Stay the course. Don’t ever wish our country to be a world power. The very best national leaders are too often disposed of by those who won’t learn from history. The worst leaders take us all to war and deprivation. Leadership must have an inherent concern for social justice. We

Canadians are fortunate to have a very good semi-socialist style democracy, and it is crucial to retain this and improve on it. Democratic systems are easily broken. Look no further than our southern neighbor.
Don Armitage, Cobble Hill, B.C.

Camilla vs. Diana

Bravo, Patricia Treble (“The grown-up people’s princess,” *Royalty*, June 2020)! Our king in waiting and his well-matched mate are finally being seen as the admirable loving couple they truly are. Charles and Camilla should have married when they first met, but are now an example of how good love can be the second time around. Charles and Diana were totally mismatched in almost everything.
Bob Verdum, Stratford, Ont.

While the article is sweet in its adoration of Camilla Shand Parker-Bowles Windsor, Duchess of Cornwall and whatever, Patricia Treble is missing the entire point. Camilla may do more royal engagements than other royals and she may have chosen to be un-botoxed, but she has taken the safe route, and has always chosen causes that don’t offend anyone. The world loved Diana not because Charles spurned her; it’s because she took on issues that the palace found unpalatable—AIDS, homelessness, landmines. Diana was certainly beautiful and could have just chosen to live her own life and take her own lovers while Charles was taking his. Instead, she used her fame to bring attention to people who otherwise would not have received any. William and Harry and their wives pay tribute to Diana not only because the brothers lost their mother so young, but because of the causes Diana worked on. While I certainly wish Camilla a great life, whether she becomes queen consort really is irrelevant to most of us, as there are real doubts about how long the British monarchy will last after the Queen’s death. What Diana did was show me that I

could put on lipstick, wear nice clothes, look pretty and still care about the downtrodden.

Jennie Jonasson, Montreal

Where credit’s due

It was heart-warming to see this well-written article illustrated by the most famous Canadian photograph of the landing of Canadian troops on Juno Beach on June 6, 1944 (“Lest we forget again,” *History*, June 2020). However, the caption was disappointing to the members of the 1st Battalion, Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders, the sol-

ved the proof. In memory of the 327 Glens who gave their lives in the Second World War, let’s give them credit for this photograph.
Brig.-Gen. William J. Patterson, Kingston, Ont.

Feline fix

I just finished reading Brian Bethune’s article on Peter Christie’s book *Unnatural Companions* (“Animal lovers needed,” May 2020). Cats vs. birds is quite a dilemma for those of us who are field naturalists and lovers of “all creatures great and small,” including cats. I live on the edge of a

the cats get their shots before the surgery, and the shots come in two stages, two weeks apart, so one needs to keep the feral cats indoors or hope that they can be recaged for the second shot. Females must be kept indoors for two weeks after surgery, at which point the cat is taken back to the vet to have the stitches removed. Five hundred dollars later you have a healthy cat that can no longer procreate. Until there is more co-operation from various organizations regarding capture of feral cats, this overpopulation will not go away.

Judy Buehler, Perth, Ont.

As I sit and watch the world news during these times of uncertainty, I am reading one of your recent issues. Your picture of a cat with its prey has a very misleading caption (“Contents,” May 2020), where it notes that “the world’s 750 million cats are the deadliest invasive mammal species known.” I believe that humans are the most deadly invasive mammal species known. You should check on their list of linked extinctions. By the way, cats may invade a habitat but they don’t knowingly go in and remove a habitat.

Paul Clarke, Halifax

History of violence

Following the recent, appalling rampage in Nova Scotia, it has become common to label it as “Canada’s worst mass killing” (“It should not define us,” *Crime*, June 2020). That is not correct. We should not forget that a match and gasoline, not gunpowder, were used in 1972 to burn to death 37 people in the Blue Bird Café on Union Street in Montreal. Refusal of service at the bar was apparently the motive. The three arsonists spent less than 10 years behind bars for their murders.

Richard Green, Nelson, B.C.

We welcome readers to submit letters to either letters@macleans.ca or to *Maclean’s*, 11th floor, One Mount Pleasant Road, Toronto, M4Y 2Y5. Please supply your name, address and daytime telephone number. Letters should be fewer than 300 words, and may be edited for space, style and clarity.

Good Point

I appreciated economist Armine Yalnizyan’s distinguishing between essential and non-essential workers to champion an “essential economy” (“The death of growth,” *GDP*, May 2020). Given its focus on food, shelter, safety and care, I think it could equally be called the “health and well-being economy.” The broad public support for its rise to prominence also raises the question: **might the COVID-19 crisis prove to be “the crack in everything,” letting in the light of a new way forward—in which the needs of this economy continue to hold ground against the needs of the market-growth economy, continuing to prioritize the health and well-being of society?**

Heather Menzies, Gabriola, B.C.

diers on LCI(L)-299 who waded ashore that day, but were identified only as Canadian infantry. It took years of historical research to prove to military historians that the unit in question was the SD&G Highlanders, in spite of the testimony of veterans who landed that day. Finally, it was the evidence of Royal Naval Manifest Records and, more recently, the discovery of wartime film showing the invasion fleet leaving Southampton, which identified LCI(L)-299 as carrying “D” Company of the SD&G, that pro-

small Ontario town, across the road from an agricultural fair-ground and a couple of blocks away from two, now-unused, industrial buildings. We have our fair share of feral cats. Three years ago, a mother and several kittens decided to set up a household under our garden shed. I called several humane society/cat rescue/animal control organizations and no one was prepared to remove them. My next-door neighbour has since had the patience to capture and spay/neuter four of the cats. Vet clinics insist that

THE COLUMNISTS

PANDEMICS

Our own tsunami stones



SCOTT GILMORE

IN JAPAN, THERE are stone markers that can be found around the island, on high ground, near the shore. They are inscribed with variations of the same warning: Do not build below this point.

These monuments were erected by survivors of long-forgotten tsunamis. The stones marked the point where the waves crested. They were meant to warn future generations to stay safe by avoiding the coastal lowlands at this particular point.

Some are ancient, others were placed as recently as 1896, only a century ago—but long enough for people to forget the two tsunamis that struck that year, killing over 22,000 people.

In some cases, these ancient warnings were heeded and the nearby towns stuck to the safety of the high ground. In other places, the warnings were forgotten or ignored, successfully for the most part—until 2011. That year a magnitude-9.0 earthquake sent waves as high as 30 feet crashing against the shore, drowning 12,000 people. The villages that had heeded the warnings of the tsunami stones survived far better than most.

Japanese academics who study disaster preparedness believe it takes about three generations to forget hard lessons of survival. We tell our children what happened, and our grandchildren, and then memory fades.

The last great global pandemic was just over 100 years ago. My grandfather told me that his father had just returned by boat from overseas, where he'd been gassed in the trenches. He had travelled overland to their farmstead in northern Saskatchewan, to be reunited with his family. He brought

influenza with him, and his wife died mere days after he came home.

My family remembers the broad strokes of that tragedy, but not the details. I can't tell you what they tried to stay safe, or what they wished they had done differently. As I worry about keeping my own family safe with the arrival of another global pandemic, I wonder what my great-grandfather would have to say. But those memories are gone.

There will be other plagues. Our children or grandchildren will almost certainly be faced with the same dilemmas we face now and our great-grandparents faced in 1918. If we could erect our own tsunami stones, what would they say?

I am not an epidemiologist. But, like all of us, I have been consuming the advice and warnings of those who have spent a lifetime studying pandemics. And, what has become painfully obvious is that no one really knows what to do. Some experts advised shutting the borders immediately. Others claimed the ensuing panic to come home flooded our airports and only accelerated the spread of the virus.

For weeks we were told not to use face masks. And then we were told that we must. A professor with a long string of academic titles wrote that we must sterilize our groceries. I

then read another who assured us this wasn't needed. Some governments are testing and tracing everyone—others don't think this is a priority at all.

With all the confusing and contradictory guidance, I don't know how to best protect my own family. Can they walk in the park with their friends? Should I be wiping down the vegetables? And when do we wear masks?

The high ground is hard to find.

Unfortunately, these days I have limited faith in the ability of our political classes to set aside their partisan interests in favour of the collective good. Ass-covering and point-scoring is now so instinctive most politicians aren't even aware they're doing it. But, I would like to think that when this tide begins to ebb, our leaders will make a sincere effort

to take stock and understand what worked, what failed, and why.

And, once we have done this, I hope we also give some thought to how we can erect our own tsunami stones, warnings that will abide, outlive us, and point our grandchildren toward safe ground, so they can do better than we have done. ♣

Follow Scott Gilmore on Twitter @scott_gilmore

HEALTH

Better race-based data



DENISE BALKISSOON

CANADA'S HIGHEST incidence of Indigenous COVID-19 infections is in Saskatchewan. On that, the federal government and independent researchers agree. But they're sharing wildly different

numbers: as of May 26, Indigenous Services Canada had counted 49 Indigenous COVID-19 patients in the province, while the Yellowhead Institute at Ryerson University knew of 241. That yawning gap is because the feds only count cases on reserves, even though the majority of Indigenous people don't live on them.

Endless surprise at evidence of racism is one of the most racist things about Canada, and sloppy data collection has long helped maintain plausible deniability. It's well past time for better information about how Indigenous, Black and other racialized people interact with Canadian health-care systems.

The goal, though, must be more sophisticated than gathering numbers and spitting them out. After all, the United States has a whole lot of race-based health data, yet outcomes for Black, Latino and other racialized communities are often abysmal. If such information is going to be meaningful, it matters who collects it, how they collect it, and what happens next.

Clearly, COVID-19 and racism are a dangerous combination. Look at the Montreal-



A man is tested for COVID-19 at a Montreal clinic; Montreal-Nord, home to many Haitian newcomers, has Canada's highest infection rate

Nord neighbourhood, which has a large Haitian population and the country's highest infection rate. As of May 29, there were 2,686 cases per 100,000 people. Quebec has walked back its data-collection pledge, but connecting the dots isn't difficult. This is a community where many people have precarious immigration status, which limits their employment options. That in turn leads to low incomes and overcrowded housing, which now brings a heightened risk of infection, and even death.

A lack of options also leads to dangerous work, and over a quarter of infected Montreal-Nord residents do crucial work in health care. Yet it took weeks for Premier François Legault to even consider fast-tracking permanent residency for long-term care workers, because Haitian migrants are treated as political footballs in this country, not human beings.

The city of Toronto says its race-related data isn't ready yet, but it did release neighbourhood information in late May. Of the five neighbourhoods reporting the city's highest COVID-19 infection rates, four are at least 59 per cent "visible minority." Four out of the five with the lowest rates have visible minority populations of 26 per cent or less.

"Visible minority" is the city's term (likely following Statistics Canada), and it's an irritating example of how poorly many Canadian researchers conceive projects on race. I've never been convinced that the "minority" part doesn't mean "lesser than." If it's supposed to be demographic—as in, there are fewer people who don't look white compared to

people who do within a certain place—"visible minority" is factually incorrect in Toronto, where people of colour make up over 50 per cent of the population.

More broadly, it's not useful to lump all racialized communities together. In his years researching how to make education more equitable, York University professor Carl James has combed through disaggregated racial information from the Toronto District School Board. He's consistently found important differences among students categorized as "Black." For example, newcomer students from the Caribbean or Africa tend to fare better than those born here. James has theorized that it's because Black Canadian citizens have endured racism at school their entire lives.

James is Black, and all race-related research is most intuitive, ethical and meaningful when it's done by those with an intrinsic understanding of what questions to ask. Another overly broad category that he's pulled apart is "Asian," noting that Filipino students struggle more than those with roots in other countries. That's another community that needs particular attention now: to list just one reason, most of the workers at Cargill's Alberta meat plant, which had a terrible COVID-19 outbreak in April, are Filipino. If the goal of data collection is targeted action, the target needs to be clear.

Target is a poor word choice, considering how often race-based health data has been wielded

as a weapon. (This is, after all, a country where Indigenous children have been used in medical experiments.) Like everything else, data needs to be decolonized, which means it needs to be developed, collected and owned by the people it's supposedly for. They might actually use it, unlike the Canadian government, which endlessly documents its discriminatory practices, but very rarely moves to fix them.

As protests against police brutality roiled in late May, the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) put out a statement pledging to

"eliminate the disparities that exist between communities." The next day, the Black Medical Students Association at the University of Toronto shared a post welcoming 24 new students, set to be the largest group of Black students to graduate

in the medical school's history. If the OMA is sincere, these future doctors will soon be creating and leading data projects, on teams full of racialized researchers, health-care providers and software developers. Heartfelt statements are easy, and actions speak louder than words.

So yes, Canada should collect race-based health information, but only intelligently. Our lack of data infrastructure is unfortunate, but also an opportunity to design it properly, with an eye to ending the injustices that are so hazardous to health. ♣

DATA NEEDS TO BE DECOLONIZED— COLLECTED AND OWNED BY THE PEOPLE IT'S SUPPOSEDLY FOR

Follow Denise Balkissoon on Twitter @balkissoon

NATIONAL NOTES



Farmhouse Garden's Barabash and Buckwheat dial in to a recent Zoom call; attendees were playing a game, and the donkey was on the blue team

ONTARIO

An episode of hee-haw

When a donkey joins your video-conference meeting, all but one of the long faces disappear

BY HAMD I ISSAWI · In a bid to liven up his regular Friday video-conference call, Andrew Price recently invited a fresh face to the meeting. But instead of noting his guest on the agenda, the executive decided to keep her a secret. The reason: she's a complete ass. That's not an

insult. It's just the type of humour she tends to trigger on these kinds of calls.

After the pandemic hit, the Scouts Canada CEO began hosting weekly staff meetings for the non-profit's 200-odd employees across the country. On May 8, Price took the

virtual floor from his home office in Ottawa until 2:06 p.m., when his video feed was interrupted by an unusual on-screen notification: *Buckwheat joined the meeting.*

After taking a moment to acknowledge the apparent intrusion, the CEO's visage vanished from the feed. In its place appeared a moustached man with a long-faced associate. "I'm Tim, and this here is Buckwheat," the man said. "Buckwheat is a donkey, and she is crashing your meeting."

Almost instantly, Price was fielding text messages from other Scouts Canada executives who feared something malicious was afoot. "I had several who thought it was a real hack," he recalls, "and then most people were

PHOTOGRAPH BY DELLA ROLLINS

just loving it.” Suspicion gave way to pleasant surprise as laughter poured through the conference’s chat window, eventually teeing up what’s become a boilerplate pun at these appearances: “And here I thought I was the only ass on the call!” an attendee cracked.

Before COVID-19, 12-year-old Buckwheat was just another resident of Farmhouse Garden Animal Home, a former cattle ranch in Uxbridge, Ont., that was converted to an animal rescue in 2016. Originally raised as a guard donkey to protect livestock, Buckwheat made a mid-life career change in April and has become a rising star in the meeting-crasher business. At a time of heightened anxiety and social distancing, Price thought a farmyard interlude would kick a little joy into the meeting. “There are not a lot of positives [during the pandemic],” he says, “and this is a cool way to not only give back to the community, but to have a lot of fun.”

Like many organizations hampered by public health orders, Farmhouse Garden had to suspend fundraising visits to its sanctuary, a one-hour drive northeast of Toronto. Besides Buckwheat, the farm has a horse, a handful of chickens and ducks, and 29 cows that depend on monthly charity drives for food. With virtual conferences becoming a sign of the times, executive director Edith Barabash saw an opportunity to pick up the slack and deliver a few laughs along the way. So far clients have included everyone from elementary schools to ICU doctors. The program was inspired by similar operations south of the border, including a coalition of American sanctuaries who’ve partnered to provide “Goat-2-Meeting” conference calls. It features a variety of animal ambassadors (cloven-hoofed or otherwise) from farms across the United States.

But in Canada, Buckwheat has been making hay, so to speak, booking several meetings a day—to the point that her new-found stardom appears to have gone to her head. “She’s definitely become a diva,” says Barabash. “Every time she sees me, she expects me to hand her a bowl of treats.” To get the best out of Buckwheat on camera, volunteers bribe her with oats and chunks of dried apple, which she gently grasps with quivering lips. She’s also got a penchant for gazing at herself onscreen, so camera operators use the front-facing camera on their phones to keep her interested.

But what really makes a meeting magical, Barabash says, is when Buckwheat is sprung on an audience by surprise. “A donkey,” she observes, “is so random.” After the big reveal at the Scouts Canada meeting, the audience was bouncing off the chat-room walls—and

fawning over the rest of the farm’s fauna. Besides Buckwheat, they got to meet Willard the muck-loving duck; a steer named Gord (after Gord Downie, because he was born on the day the Tragically Hip frontman died); and Melody the horse, Buckwheat’s pushy (and often jealous) paddock-mate.

The virtual visit couldn’t have come at a better time for Kate McNeil, a scouter relationship manager who joined the May 8 call from her home in Warkworth, Ont. The past few weeks have been difficult for her family, she says. She and her husband have been juggling their jobs while caring for their five-year-old son at home, and McNeil has to plead with her boy to keep quiet for business calls. Earlier that week he confessed to her that he felt lonely. “When Buckwheat came on the screen, I immediately called him into my office,” she says. “His face lit up and his excited shrieks and laughter filled our home. For once, he was included in the call. He was allowed to be loud, and he smiled and laughed for 15 minutes.”

Even as Ontario reopens for business, slowly easing restrictions on public gatherings, Barabash isn’t sure when the public can visit the farm again to connect with the animals in person. But with access to a new audience beyond provincial borders, she doesn’t expect Buckwheat to quit crashing meetings any time soon—not while laughs are still in demand, and the barnyard star is hot to trot.

Price discovered as much when several employees emailed him after the meeting to express their gratitude. Many said it was the most fun they had all week. “For our audience,” Price says, “this is just what the doctor ordered.” ♣

ONTARIO

Mmm... history

BY PRAJAKTA DHOPADE • In the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown, when amateur bakers were tiring of sourdough and banana bread, another, more novel-sounding recipe bubbled up and went viral: peanut butter bread. Specifically, people wanted the version from the 1932 edition of *A Guide to Good Cooking*, published by Lake of the Woods Milling Company (the makers of Five Roses Flour), in Ontario.

The recipe’s leap from the pages of a vintage Canadian cookbook to the internet was the work of Torontonians Glen Powell, 53, star

of the YouTube channel *Glen & Friends Cooking*. “Welcome friends,” the silver-haired, bespectacled Powell says to start his peanut butter bread video, and picks up a timeworn copy of *A Guide to Good Cooking*. “It’s Sunday morning, and we’re going to do another recipe out of a Depression-era cookbook.”

In his day job, Powell is a freelance producer of food videos for major brands. In his spare time, he uses his filming equipment to create videos for *Glen & Friends*. His backdrop is a standard—albeit conspicuously tidy—kitchen featuring white cabinets and a wall oven, with a KitchenAid mixer on display in the corner. But if the camera were to pull back a step, viewers would see professional-grade studio lights and soundproofing; a few more steps would reveal that the whole, elaborate set is contained inside his backyard shed.

Powell launched his cooking channel in 2007, and in January 2019, started a regular weekend series in which he makes recipes found mostly in Canadian cookbooks from decades past. The idea arose after he investigated the purported Canadian origins of sticky toffee pudding (the recipe’s English creator said she got the idea from two Canadian airmen); Powell’s wife, Julie, who frequently appears in his videos to taste test his creations, suggested he go through her grandmother’s recipes in the attic. “I opened up this box and it was all of these church cookbooks from the 1930s,” he says. “I thought, this is amazing, we need to share this.”

Since filming the making of Date Versatile using a well-worn 1938 Ontario cookbook (basically a date loaf, which Powell found tastes identical to sticky toffee pudding, bolstering the Canadian-origin theory), he has featured approximately 70 old recipes, from Coronation Cake (a simple loaf with allspice, cinnamon and raisins) to Economy Bean Soup



Powell tries recipes from vintage Canadian cookbooks and posts the results on YouTube

(which tastes better than it sounds). In each video, he provides historical context for the dish, explaining why unusual ingredients were used. He now has more than 100 old cookbooks in his collection, most handed down by family or sent in by viewers.

Over the years, Powell has garnered a following—his channel currently has more than 300,000 subscribers, many of them loyal viewers of his old cookbook segment. But “vintage Canadian cuisine” is not a phrase known to stimulate saliva glands, and it wasn’t until people were forced into isolation, faced with an economic downturn rivalling the Depression, that he truly tapped the zeitgeist.

That so many of the dishes originated during crises like the Dirty Thirties and the First World War might explain the spike in interest: since the pandemic began, Powell has seen an uptick in views and subscribers, noting that viewers are searching for “Depression-era recipes” and landing on his YouTube channel. It certainly adds a degree of difficulty. Though recipes from the period tended to be uncomplicated, detailed instructions like

ing bare as people feared to venture outside.

“Humans are very social and we’re sort of trapped right now, but a big part of that social part of our lives is food,” Powell says. “People are looking for something that’s comforting, that warms them emotionally in this time where we’re questioning what’s happening around us. Simple recipes seem to bring that for people more than the really complex ones.”

Simplicity is one of the reasons Ottawa-based viewer Caroline-Isabelle Caron, 50, enjoys making food from Powell’s videos as well as her own old cookbooks. She’s a peanut butter bread fanatic who has also made Powell’s 1930s date square and key lime pie recipes. Caron recognizes in his videos versions of foods from her childhood, but for her, cooking old dishes is about more than nostalgia; she’s a historical anthropologist who teaches at Queen’s University. “It makes me feel a sense of solidarity,” she says. “I feel like I’m preserving knowledge rather than reminiscing.”

“Use it up, wear it out, make it do or do

Canadians were eating at the time. *A Guide to Good Cooking*, home of the peanut butter bread recipe, was composed of submissions from across Canada.

All cookbooks of the time were dessert-heavy, however: women were expected to know how to cook savoury mainstays, whereas measurements are vital in baking. Still, many recipes used processed ingredients—like peanut butter, as well as breakfast cereals, crackers and tinned soups—to create filling dishes for less, says Lucas.

That resourcefulness is resonating during the pandemic of 2020. “I’m just like everyone else and want to go out there to a restaurant and have a meal,” says Powell. “But if we can help people with a can of beans at home, that’s important.” ♦

ALBERTA

Cleared for takeoff

BY NADINE YOUSIF - In early May, about a dozen waterfowl arrived at the front door of the WILDNorth Centre, a wildlife rehabilitation agency located in a one-story building in Edmonton’s northwest end. They had not come of their own volition: their feathers were saturated with thick, tarry bitumen that made it impossible for them to fly or even swim. A few were hours from death.

The birds—mostly eared grebes—were among an estimated 60 that Imperial Oil workers had plucked from a tailings pond at the Kearl oil sands facility, 70 km north of Fort McMurray, Alta. Most didn’t survive, but Imperial staff tasked with wildlife mitigation nestled the few that had a fighting chance on towels, and dispatched them in makeshift cardboard travelling crates on the six-hour journey down Highway 63 to the Alberta capital.

Over the following days, a few more birds arrived in the heated luggage compartment of a plane, bringing the number of new admissions at the agency to 16—13 eared grebes, two horned grebes and one pied-billed grebe. All were listed in “intensive care.”

Rehabilitation missions of this magnitude are rare for WILDNorth, an organization that runs a small staff and survives mainly on donations. The requirements of social distancing didn’t make the task easier. Still, the centre’s team began the painstaking process of feeding the grebes fluids through



Peanut butter bread: a Depression-era recipe turned 21st-century viral sensation

oven temperatures and cooking times were rare due to a lack of standardization in kitchen appliances.

In April 2020, the peanut butter bread video Powell made in 2019 resurfaced and the six-ingredient Canadian recipe set Reddit alight. Its sparse ingredient list (no yeast, eggs or butter), in combination with the era it came from, struck a chord during a modern moment when pantries were also grow-

without” was a popular phrase during the ’30s. “Housewives abided by this for decades,” says Canadian food historian Fiona Lucas. Despite that, she says, most mainstream cookbooks “ignored the fact the Depression was on.” Not everyone was facing economic hardship, so those recipes were aspirational, whereas community cookbooks—usually published by church groups—were full of submitted recipes that are more indicative of what



Employees at WILDNorth in Edmonton prepare an eared grebe for release back into the wild; each survivor is “the best of the best,” says Blomme

throat tubes and waiting for them to stabilize to allow cleaning—a process that required seven pairs of hands, three bottles of Dawn dishwashing liquid and several gallons of soft water for the entire flock.

The odds were long: if half the birds survived, the effort could be considered a success. “Some people think it’s a complete waste of time, money and energy,” says Kim Blomme, who founded the centre 30 years ago. “But it’s very difficult to see an animal in distress.”

The threat the oil sands pose to wildlife is a sensitive issue in Alberta. Lakes in the province’s northern portion are landing spots for several migratory bird species, while its boreal forest is home to grizzly bears and beavers—creatures whose welfare has been overlooked, critics say, in the rush to develop energy resources.

Those calls intensified in 2008, when 1,600 ducks died after landing in a Syncrude Canada tailings pond. The oil giant was forced to pay \$3 million in penalties, part of which went to fund bird migration research and conservation, and the disastrous publicity from that incident reverberated among oil and gas companies. Many stepped up efforts to minimize their ecological impact.

Wildlife advocates, however, say animals and birds are still being caught in the industry’s path. “These are the ones we know about, right?” Blomme says of the animals her organization has rescued. “I’m sure it happens more than we know.”

Still, it’s been seven years since Blomme has seen a bird rescue mission the size of the one in May, and Imperial Oil officials can only

guess why their efforts to keep these birds out of harm’s way failed. Knowing that spring marks the return from Mexico of migratory birds such as the eared grebes—so named for the unique golden feathers that sprout out of the sides of their heads—the company had deployed its wildlife monitoring system in late March, which includes deterrents in the form of noise cannons, eye-safe lasers and scarecrows.

The grebes, however, were likely tired after flying thousands of kilometres back to northern Alberta for breeding season, and evidently mistook the tailings pond for one of the nearby freshwater sloughs. In an email, Imperial Oil spokesperson Lisa Schmidt noted that, unlike the tailings pond, most of the natural water bodies in the area were still frozen from a long winter, the end of which had started an “abrupt migration.” The landings, she said, “were most likely influenced by near freezing precipitation, which historically has resulted in migrating birds landing on such areas due to exhaustion.”

Imperial reported the incident to the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) and has provided updates on it. The AER could trigger an investigation if it suspected non-compliance, but on May 20 it suspended environmental monitoring due to COVID-19, and at press time, no formal investigation had been opened. Said Schmidt: “We very much regret this situation and are making every effort to protect the birds and learn from these increased landings.”

The damage to the grebes, meanwhile, was plain to the naked eye. The water in their first

baths quickly turned chocolate brown, as did the white latex gloves of the workers handling them. Handlers must ensure every drop of bitumen is cleaned off a bird—from underneath its feathers to the corners of its eyes—to maximize its chance of survival. If water doesn’t bead on the feathers of aquatic birds, they’ll have difficulty moving or swimming.

By the end of two weeks, only eight had survived and been released back into the wild. Six died during cleaning, and two were euthanized because they showed no signs of improvement. Each loss is heavy, but Blomme and her team regarded the outcome as a minor victory. The survivors, she says, are “the best of the best”—the ones that have the exceptional fortitude to carry their species forward.

Like most Canadians (and many Albertans), Blomme has never set eyes on the sprawling clusters of brown and beige—pits, ponds and industrial plants—that compose the Alberta oil sands. She credits energy companies like Imperial for increased mitigation efforts of late: “They’re proud of their company and they’re proud of the work that they do, and this has been a disaster for them.” But given the way humans inhabit earth, she adds, the creatures around them will keep paying with their lives: getting hit by cars, electrocuted by power lines or unwittingly landing on tailings ponds.

“We feel like we created this situation, so we have an obligation to try to assist,” she says. “It’s compassionate care. What else are you going to do? You can’t leave them out there like that. That’s inhumane.” ♣

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Stinging in the rain

BY **HAMDI ISSAWI** · In Nanaimo, B.C., Conrad Bérubé keeps a memento that the Western world largely figures for a monster. One of the few Canadians to encounter the Asian giant hornet on domestic soil, he is a guardian of sorts—at least to Vancouver Island’s honeybees. When a colony of the creatures cropped up last year in his hometown, the trained entomologist volunteered with members of a local beekeeper club to neutralize the nest. The stings left him with two lentil-sized marks, one on each thigh, that tell half the story. “It’s like a red-hot tack being driven into the flesh,” Bérubé recalls.



The sting of a ‘murder hornet’ feels like ‘a red-hot tack being driven into the flesh’

Sitting on his workbench, the preserved carcass of the colony’s queen spells out the rest. “I kept her as a trophy,” he says.

Nanaimo was ground zero for the hornet’s foray into North America last summer, when Canadian and international experts identified several specimens as *Vespa mandarinia*, the scientific name for the invasive species that on this continent has become known as the “murder hornet.” In May of this year, others were spotted in the Lower Mainland and northwest Washington state, suggesting they’ve overwintered to become more than a one-year wonder. Depending on their caste within a colony, they range in length from 3.5 to five centimetres, and pack menacingly large mandibles often used to decapitate honeybees.

Tim Lawrence, an apiculturist with Wash-

ington State University Extension, notes that the “murder” moniker (now the bane of many entomologists) is a misnomer. While the species is reportedly responsible for dozens of deaths a year in Japan, he says, it tends to reserve aggression for those who approach its nests or the occupied hives of honeybees—the real victims of this story—which the hornets besiege to harvest brood for food.

As few as 15 hornets can decimate a colony of more than 25,000 bees in a few hours. Asian honeybees have adapted a defence against these strikes by swarming, heating and suffocating the invaders. But Western honeybees have no such strategy, making the hornets a threat to both hobby hives and those in the wild. “Yes, we should be concerned,” Lawrence says, before adding: “But you can sleep at night. They’re not going to be chasing school buses down the road.”

Certainly Bérubé, a B.C. pesticide compliance officer in his day job, was undaunted when members of the beekeeping club discovered a nest burrowed in a wooded area near Nanaimo’s Honey Drive. Dressed in a beekeeper’s veil, he armed himself with a carbon dioxide fire extinguisher to stun the insects and a handheld vacuum to sweep them up.

That’s how a nest of about 200 adult hornets met its unmaker on the night of Sept. 18, 2019, but not without a fight. Squatting at the nest entrance, Bérubé realized “at about the same time the hornets did” that the vacuum nozzle was too small to receive them. “I got stung four times across the top of my thighs, where the fabric was stretched tight,” he says. Two stings drew blood and became the war wounds he wears today. The hornets hit him twice more on the ankle, and once in a calloused finger where one left a quarter-inch-long lancet.

Still, keeping calm, Bérubé found a rhythm, firing the extinguisher in bursts to disable waves of workers before drowning them in the alcohol he’d brought along to preserve them. After exhausting the colony’s defences, the team unearthed a nest comprising several cardboard-like combs the size of dinner plates, housing hundreds more immature insects and the queen.

Bérubé thought he’d thwarted the threat in Canada, but before the year was out there were confirmed sightings of more hornets on the mainland, in White Rock, B.C., and just over the Canada-U.S. border in Blaine, Wash. The latest, on May 15, was spotted and killed in nearby Langley Township, shortly before authorities in Washington state received photos of what appears to be their third, also near Blaine.

B.C.’s provincial apiarist, Paul van Westendorp, is keeping the latest Canadian carcass on ice while awaiting an autopsy to learn if it’s a queen. This one, however, was found far enough from White Rock to suggest a separate nest in the Langley area.

How the insects reached North American shores remains a mystery. DNA sequencing traced the Nanaimo and Blaine hornets’ origins to Japan and South Korea, respectively; van Westendorp says it’s possible a reproductive queen stowed away aboard a container vessel. As for whether the species can establish itself on this continent, he offers reassurance. Mountain ranges, a dry Okanagan Valley and the vast prairie present formidable obstacles to a species that prefers warm, moist climates. What’s more, two seasons alone don’t make for a foothold. “A Hollywood image of marauding insects overrunning the countryside—that is what Hollywood enjoys,” van Westendorp says. “The reality is totally different.”

Still, the experts are fairly certain the West Coast can expect to see more hornets, which are likely preparing for seasonal raids later this year. For the sake of B.C.’s bees, Bérubé hopes the species stays in check. If more surface in his area, he’s looking forward to taking another stab at them. He’s already got one hive under his belt, and the scars to prove it. ♣

ONTARIO

Canada’s hair apparent

BY **MARIE-DANIELLE SMITH** · The nation has already reckoned with the beard.

The beard—to some a harbinger of a more serious style of governance or a more mature Prime Minister, to others just a goddamned beard—is here to stay.

The beardless Justin Trudeau had been a Justin Trudeau of hope and colourful socks. A politician of close shaves, on his person but also on matters of national interest. A man of clean-faced about-faces. A leader, comfortable in the spotlight and confident of his divine birthright, amen, who needed no soul patch to harness attention. (We do not talk about the soul patch.)

And well, it turned out that the bearded Justin Trudeau was basically the same guy, less a majority mandate.

It is probably safe to say that our fellow countrymen have tired of interpreting the

deeper meaning of the Prime Minister's facial hair. But, reader, let us turn our attention to another phenomenon entirely: the hair on top of his head.

As recently as February, the Prime Minister's do was as kempt as kempt can be—short and coiffed enough to seem adequately business-like, but long enough for seemingly intentional fly-aways to give the vague impression that Trudeau could at any moment loosen his tie and crack open a Labatt 50.

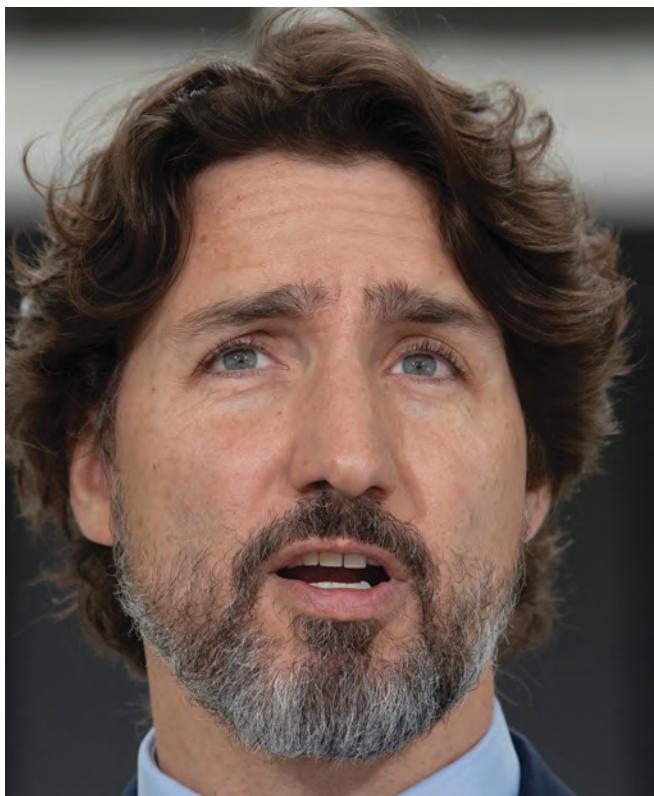
It may be difficult for any of us to believe that February was not so long ago, and that just a few months have passed since Can-

of us, he is alarmed at the prospect of picking up a pair of scissors himself. Perhaps his communications team has forbidden it. Because there is a message in the hair: Follow the rules. Do not visit black market hairstylists. (Asked whether a haircut is on the horizon, a spokeswoman for Trudeau clarified in an email: "Geez, I know he can't wait to get one.")

Of course, none of this actually matters. Have no fear: I am not about to argue that a couple of months without a trim means Trudeau will govern any differently. I will not, and cannot, suggest that this superficial change transforms our PM into a world-worn, solitary

The man who stands outside the cottage is noticeably more demure in his responses to reporters' questions. He has delegated substantial responsibility to a trusted deputy prime minister, Chrystia Freeland. Plenty of pundits have noticed his relative inactivity on social media, at a time when it feels as though the entire world is sitting on a couch craving content. Would Justin Trudeau, circa 2013, have missed out on that opportunity?

It is not so difficult to entertain the idea that this cottage-abiding man, sans perfect hair, might be having a weird time just like the rest of us. And on the other hand, it is



Trudeau in early January (left) and late May; in the perpetual Groundhog Days of quarantine, the PM's hair is a way to mark the passage of time

adian life felt in any way normal. As the days blur together, to notice the Prime Minister's hair is to be aware of the passage of time. To feel in some way grounded. To know that we are still in the middle of the tunnel of our national nightmare.

In early June, it is easier to relate to Trudeau than ever—not because of what he says, but because he needs a haircut. Because like the other dads of this country, he's starting to look a little less kempt. Because on a windy day, he is bested by his fringe.

It is easy enough to understand how we got here. While Trudeau self-isolates at home, as he is asking Canadians to do, he isn't about to hire a private barber. Perhaps, like many

Luke Skywalker, staring out into the distance ready to impart a lifetime of wisdom. Besides, it may only be a matter of time before we are discussing a prime ministerial man bun.

But consider this. Trudeau's hair is now almost as long as it has ever been. It is as if he is going back to his free-spirited roots. It is as long as it was during the days of the soul patch (and moustache) that we do not talk about.

And the fact he looks more and more like a past version of himself makes it all the clearer that Trudeau has changed. Not just over the past couple of months, but over nearly five years of governing, seven years of party leadership and a dozen years of sitting in the House of Commons.

more difficult to imagine this man calling a former cabinet minister a "piece of s-t" in the House of Commons (it happened when he had the soul patch) or elbowing a member opposite in the chest during an unparliamentary scuffle. It is more difficult to imagine this man making a shirtless cameo in someone's wedding photo or even rolling his sleeves all the way up to the elbow.

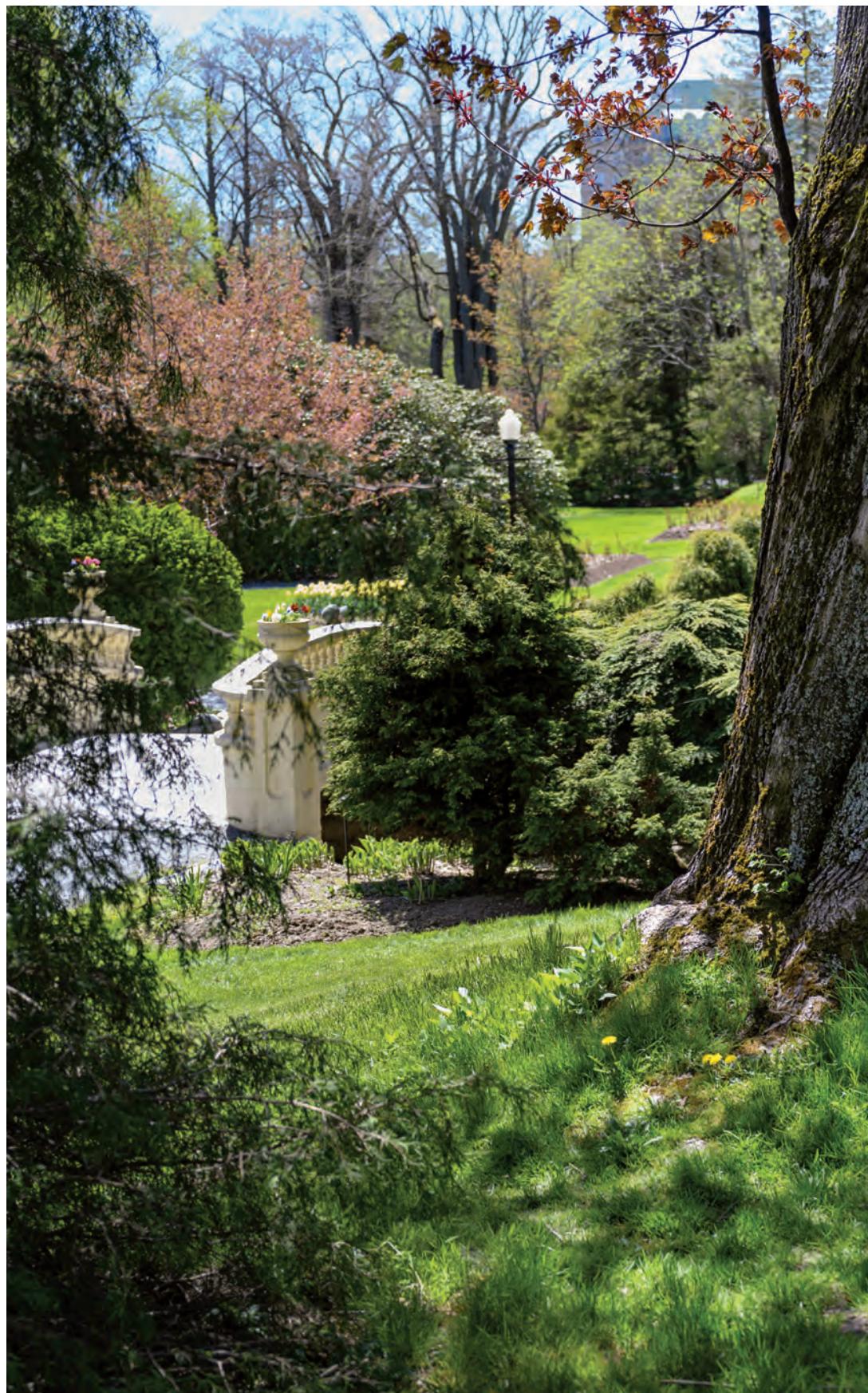
Maybe the longer hair makes it easier to notice that the Prime Minister seems more mature—more statesmanlike, more weathered by the travails of his position and more prepared for the gravitas that a global pandemic and economic crisis requires.

Or maybe it's just the beard. ♣

The great outdoors

IF ABSENCE DOES indeed make the heart grow fonder, cooped-up Canadians are bursting with love for how beautiful life can be when you're actually allowed to leave the house. Suddenly, every blade of grass is a blissfully unbridled manifestation of Mother Nature. Closet-sized condo patios feel as big as backyards; actual backyards have been promoted to "provincial park" status; provincial parks are upgraded to the furthest afield we can legally trek. Even just the shade of a nearby tree, like the one pictured here in Halifax, will do just fine. Canada is a land of bountiful outdoor spaces; our collective image is that of moose, maples, glaciers, Rockies, tundra and coast. It's impossible to stay indoors. "Fresh air impoverishes the doctor," goes an old Danish proverb. Our doctors aren't in danger of impoverishment—but if a dose of the outdoors can help give them a break, let's call it a win-win. **MICHAEL FRAIMAN**

PHOTOGRAPH BY DARREN CALABRESE





A portrait of Health Minister Patty Hajdu, a woman with short, straight, light-colored hair and bangs. She is wearing a black dress with white polka dots and has her hands clasped in front of her. The background is dark and out of focus.

THE INTERVIEW

Health Minister Patty Hajdu talks to Paul Wells about the fears and frustrations of fighting a global pandemic, closing borders, and what it will take to return to 'normal'

JUST MONTHS AFTER being named Canada's new health minister, Patty Hajdu was confronted with the biggest health crisis in modern Canadian history. With no end in sight, the pandemic has derailed much of the Liberal government's agenda. Hajdu, who prior to her current portfolio was the minister for women and gender equality, and before that ran a large homeless shelter in her riding in Thunder Bay, Ont., spoke with Paul Wells about the urgency during the first months of the outbreak, her own sense of dread as the virus spread across Canada, and the impact the crisis is now having on everything from federalism to Canada's relationship with China.

Q: *I don't know if you have any thoughts to sum up this journey you've been on with all of us since this crisis began—where are we in the arch of this management of this crisis?*
A: To be the health minister at the time of a global pandemic, the likes of which we haven't seen in size or intensity in 100 years, is really quite sobering. In terms of the question around how we're doing as a country, I would say we're cautiously optimistic that we're flattening the curve. We've managed to avoid that kind of crushing surge on hospitals that we've seen in other countries, including our closest neighbours and friends to the south of us. But that doesn't mean that we're out of the woods yet.

We have some big decisions ahead of us as a country, and as well in terms of how we increasingly restart our economy and rejoin the international world.

Q: *What can you tell people who are wondering, "Well, wait a minute, wasn't this supposed to be over by now?"*

A: Well—first, I'd say I completely share their desire to go back to what we called normal. I think it's a strange phenomenon to be the health minister, because I'm also just a regular human being and I miss all the aspects of regular human life. I would love to go out for dinner with my friends or go grab a glass of wine. So, I feel that anxiety and that frustration.

I can say also that, as we learn more and more about the virus, I think we will start to see more and more "normality." But right now, given that we have limited options in terms of treatment and limited options in terms of protection in terms of a vaccine, we do have to be more cautious, and we're learning together how to do that—and it is painful and it is slow.

Q: *How worried are you about a second wave?*

A: I think everybody is worried about the coincidence of additional infections, along with the increase in flu activities that we see every single year. We know that influenza

picks up its activity—actually, somewhere around now—and starts to gain steam into the fall and winter. And what we really want to do is make sure that we're not having a surge of flu at the same time as we can see surges of coronavirus.

And so I am worried, but I also am confident that the provinces and territories are doing what they need to protect their [health-care] systems, and that we at the federal government are supporting them with resources and tools.

Q: *When did you begin to realize that this was going to be really serious, and that your agenda for this entire term in office was going to be on hold for a while?*

A: I think I had a growing sense of dread over the several months that we saw this pick up steam in China, first of all, and then as it started to transmit around the world. I had a growing sense of anxiety that we too were not going to escape being hit with the coronavirus.

The weekend that we made the decision to close the border was a very profound one. You could feel the ground shift. When you take a big decision like that that has international consequences, that is not so easy to unroll. I think you know that you're in a new world and that, rapidly, countries were making those decisions as well, and that it was going to be very hard to imagine going back to normal.

Q: *Already on Feb. 25, you had suggested that people might want to go out and get vital necessities, which was a statement that, at the time, seemed quite jarring. Was that an expression of this dread that you're talking about?*

A: What I asked Canadians to do was to prepare for an extended period of illness of themselves or their loved ones, because we knew that people that were getting coronavirus—the Canadian cases that we had—were demonstrating that this wasn't something you got over in three days, and that also you had to be quarantined or isolated while you were sick. So I was asking Canadians to be ready. And yes, I wanted to indicate to Canadians it was serious.

Q: *Ontario and Quebec between them account for 95 per cent of the deaths due to COVID-19 in the country to date. Alberta and B.C. account for 80 per cent of what's left. In most of the provinces and all of the territories, there essentially is no pressing crisis. What kind of challenges does that present?*

A: It's a really big challenge, because of course

some of the measures that we've asked Canadians to take—particularly around the social distancing and physical distancing—don't make sense sometimes for a community like Manitowadge, in my riding, which is far off the beaten path. Nonetheless, we also know that, again, there is a risk to even small communities and, in a way, especially small communities. As we've seen when we have an outbreak in a plant that isn't actually in a large centre, it can create quite a crisis.

Q: *If I'm in New Brunswick, why should I not be going out to the park, why should I not be reopening my hair salon?*

A: At the national level there never was "a lockdown." We were really giving advice nationally, but at the provincial and territorial level—that's really where those particular regulations came into place about whether or not shops could be open. In B.C., for example, they didn't have a complete shutdown; there were many sorts of stores that were allowed to stay open.

Q: *You had been minister for a month and a half before all of this began. Were you briefed in those crazy first days on pandemic preparedness plans?*

A: I actually knew that Canada had a pandemic plan. You get all these binders as the new minister, and you read about every little agency that you have the responsibility for, and what they are working on and their pro-

grams, et cetera. So, I had actually just finished that work, and I was first briefed by Dr. Tam in early January about the suspicious cases that were being reported out of China. But again, it was very early days, so it was not as alarming just because I do have that background in public health—so I knew that there was an alert system, and I knew that this was sort of normal behaviour for public health officials to be on guard for this.

Q: *Once there were cases in Canada, the first deaths in Canada, the cabinet committee started. What was your planning horizon? Were you looking forward to getting over the hump at the end of May?*

A: I was very grateful that the Prime Minister pulled together the special committee. I likened [COVID-19] to a tsunami, [in] a way—you know it's coming, and those of us who are the early alert system of health saw this thing coming and, you know, we were preparing from a health perspective. But it was very clear, as those waves were washing on the shores of Canada, that it was going

We know that ... there is a risk to even small communities and, in a way, especially small communities

to have a massive impact on other things besides health.

Q: *You have sounded skeptical about the usefulness of closing borders, from before the Canada–U.S. border was closed. How come?*

A: First of all, there are international health regulations [that] say, during a global outbreak, that we should not shut down our borders and we should not in any way inhibit trade or travel because, in fact, the most effective way [to track an illness] is to do screening at the borders and to try to catch those cases. I think what happened for me, though, was—as we saw the pandemic evolve—what became clear is that the capacity of other countries to understand what their own disease outbreak looked like was not there.

Q: *Would you put China on the list of countries that haven't been entirely transparent?*

A: I think there is going to be a post-pandemic review of all countries' actions, and I am certain there will be lots of questions about China's actions in those early days.

Q: *There are more generally questions about this government's stance on China. Does it see China as an investment partner, an ally, or does it see it as an increasingly belligerent force on the world stage?*

A: I think our government has always been clear that the way to manage, even with difficult countries, is one of collaboration if possible, but—for sure—communication. In terms of a global health response, we are not going to be able to beat down any global illness unless we actually worked together with countries, and there is an opportunity to welcome countries to the table to participate in those conversations with a healthy degree of questioning.

Q: *For all the pandemic planning, nobody had really anticipated a global shutdown of the day-to-day economy.*

A: Certainly at Health we had prepared what we called scenario binders for all of the ministers about, should we see this kind of disruption, what it might mean.

Q: *I guess what I'm getting at is, I'm not aware of a binder that says, "Here's how you shut down an economy."*

A: So true, and you know what doesn't exist? "Here is how you start one up." So that is what the world is grappling with now. I mean, take the issue of international travel. You know there is no best practice for how you reopen the borders once the entire world has, to some degree or another, stopped international travel. And so, we are working with international

partners, and with the IATA [International Air Transport Association] and all kinds of different organizations, to look at what will inevitably become a new world order about how we screen from a health perspective in a more comprehensive way.

Q: *Federalism has kind of become a bit of a rusty machine. Did you have to relearn very quickly how to work with the provinces, and what was that like?*

A: Every minister of health across the country has my cell phone number and they call me bilaterally whenever they need to talk to me about whatever the issue is, and likewise I can call them: and we do. We also have regular meetings—in the crush of it, twice a week; now once a week—to talk about what kinds of supports they need from me, what's going well, what's not going well. In many of those ways, the pandemic has broken down some of those barriers that exist.

Q: *I think a federation should work like that most of the time.*

A: Exactly, it would be wonderful. You may not always agree [with] or even like the person you are working with, but there has to be a foundation of respect and openness. I truly believe that this pandemic has taught us that this isn't me talking to the Government of

Ontario—this is me and minister Christine Elliott working together on solutions for Ontario in a very challenging time.

Q: *Let's talk about those long-term care homes. Why did it need Canadian Forces soldiers writing back to their superiors in Ontario*

and Quebec for government attention to focus on what seems to have been a crisis that was already underway before COVID happened?

A: Yeah, it's a pretty disturbing report. There is no way you can read it and not feel horror. I felt incredible sadness. I had a loved one die in long-term care; it was in no way as appalling

I don't know if things will go back to normal until we get an effective treatment or a vaccine

Ambulance attendants move a patient from a long-term care facility in Montreal



as what was reported in that document. But nonetheless, the care was not what I would have considered satisfactory.

We have heard many stories of families that augment care to make sure that their loved ones are fed. This is not surprising, I think, to Canadians. It's shocking in its extremeness but it's not surprising, and I think it's a wake-up call for all governments to say we have to do better. I think there's a much larger systemic fix that needs to happen.

Q: *Is the federal government prepared to put money in?*

A: I think the Prime Minister was very open to saying that we will be there to help support provinces and territories, but we obviously do respect that this is a jurisdictional authority of the provinces and territories. Nonetheless, I don't think Canadians want us to argue about who is supposed to fix that.

Q: *Is there room here for a national plan, intense federal-provincial collaboration leading to national standards?*

A: Well, that's the challenge, when the federal government steps into a jurisdiction for

which it does not have authority to mandate specific approaches; when we know that some provinces and territories are doing very well in the area of long-term care, and some provinces and territories have recently changed how they deal with long-term care, specifically as they saw COVID affect the care of the elders in their communities. Things always work better when you work with provinces and territories, instead of trying to dictate to them how to do it.

Q: *This crisis isn't the only thing happening in health in this country: there's an opioid overdose epidemic that's in its fifth year; and there is growing concern over mental health, that people are facing increasing strain from the kind of lifestyle that we are all having to live right now. Are you able to devote some of your time to these concerns?*

A: Absolutely. In terms of mental health, we saw early on that there was going to be a need for additional mental health resources. We launched something called Wellness Together, which is an online portal where people can go online and get self-help tools, but also

connect to professionals either by phone or text or virtual care. We have been investing in things like supporting the crisis hotlines, the suicide lines, the Kids Help phone lines, ensuring that the domestic violence hotlines can maintain their services.

One of the things that I am most proud about in terms of our approach to substance use is the restoration of harm reduction to the drug strategy. That is making safe injection sites easier to start in communities that want to have them, ensuring that people have a safe supply if a community wants to be using that particular tool. There is way more to do on substance use, and part of it is having a broader conversation about substance use and just how endemic it is in all of our lives.

Q: *I still hear from a lot of people who say the best answer to all of these problems would be to just let people get back to their lives. How long is this path from our lives likely to last?*

A: That's a hard question, and it's the one I have been asked over and over and over. Everybody wants to know when things will go back to normal. I don't know if things will go back to normal until we have an effective treatment or a vaccine. I think the challenge with coronavirus is that, for many people, it's not going to kill you—but for those few people that it will, it's extremely, extremely dangerous.

And so to protect those people in our lives who are elderly, who do have vulnerable health conditions that make them more vulnerable, we are going to have to adapt the way that we live—and I think, you know, even people that get the illness who are well sometimes have a very severe bout of illness. So, I think it's going to be a while; that we are going to have to learn how to live in a way that really focuses on protecting our health.

Now the good news is there are some things that are pretty simple to do. We are all remembering to wash our hands and use hand sanitizer. We are going to have to stay home when we are sick—that's harder, that's a cultural change. We have a culture that's very driven, and people go to work when they are sick for a whole bunch of reasons—sometimes money, but sometimes because we have sent signals as a society that you battle through that sore throat or that headache, or even that sort of bad head cold, and that has to change.

And then, finally, we are going to have to stay physically distanced for a while outside of our household bubbles. And how long? Well, we are investing a ton of money in our research community and supporting that research that will help us better treat, prevent this illness, and that really is the long-term answer. ♣



POLITICS

THE WORLD AS THEY SEE IT

Trudeau's Liberals sense opportunity in the current crisis. Their track record with 'innovation' suggests another reality: complex problems are a slog.



PAUL
WELLS

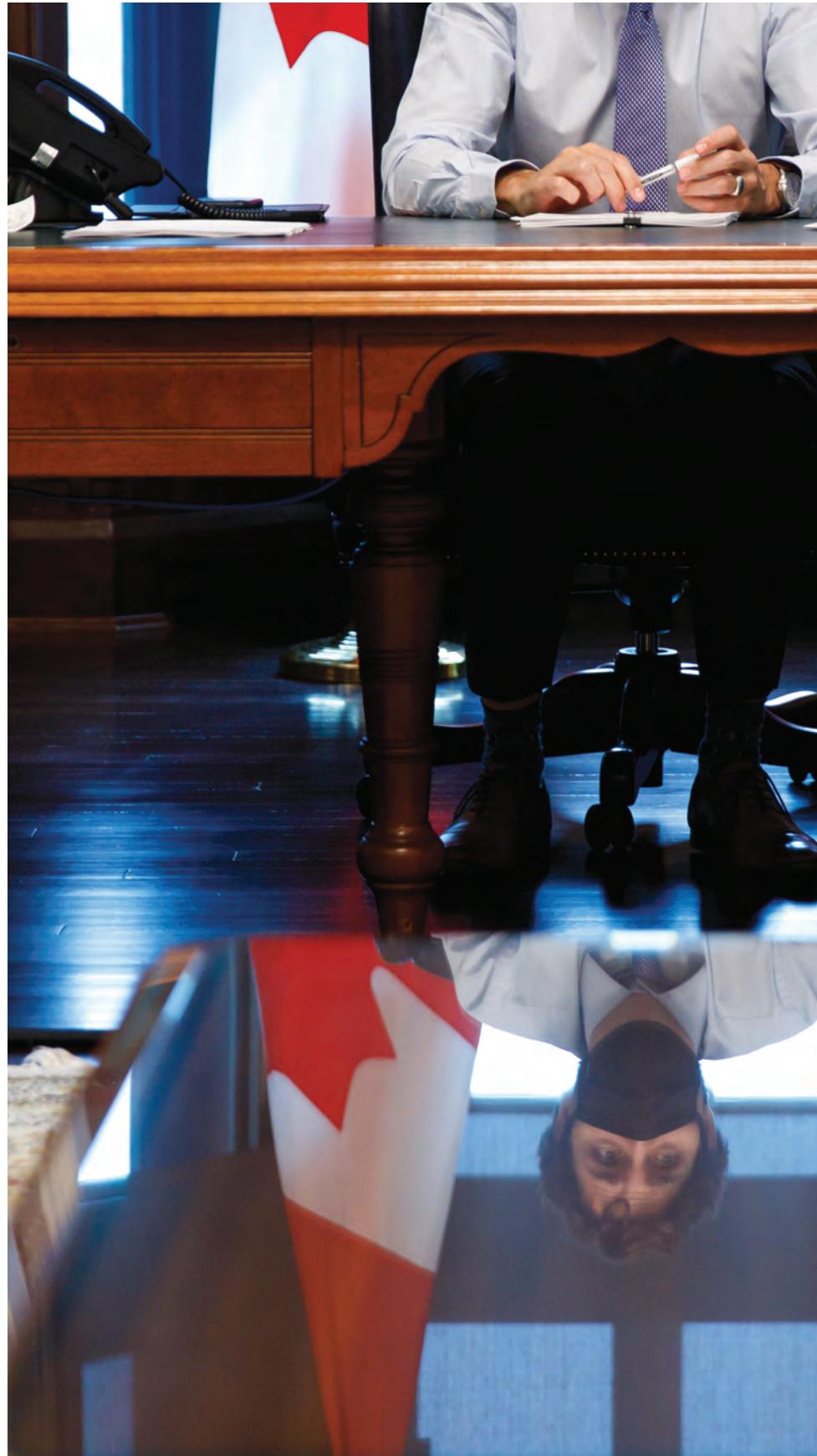
THE STRANGE THING, as the economy contracts, millions lose their jobs and thousands die, is how excited some Liberals and their friends seem to be.

"It'll be a good time to be a progressive government," an unidentified senior Liberal told *Le Devoir* in mid-May. "There are a lot of us who are dreaming big, who have an audacious vision for this enormous social and economic challenge before us."

Another told the same reporter: "I know that behind the scenes, this thinking is underway and I have more confidence than ever, because Justin Trudeau seems to really grasp the immensity of the moment, how important it is for his political legacy, and we'll have a plan that will be exciting to put to Canadians at the next election."

And in late March, only days after the coronavirus lockdown began, Michael Sabia had a remarkable opinion article in the *Globe and Mail*.

Sabia is a veteran mandarin and business executive who'd just stepped down as head of the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec





public pension fund. He's no partisan, but he did serve on the Advisory Council on Economic Growth that Bill Morneau appointed to generate big economic ideas for the Trudeau Liberals' first mandate. In the *Globe*, he said that protecting Canadians' health and helping them pay their bills were only the first part of the challenge facing government.

The big challenge will be building the new post-lockdown economy, Sabia wrote. "Governments will need to lead on this," he wrote. "Leaving it to chance will only make the reignition process longer, more difficult and more haphazard."

But the risk of a shaky recovery is nothing compared to the "precious opportunity" this global pestilence now offers, Sabia said. "Remember Rahm Emanuel's famous 'You never want a serious crisis to go to waste.'"

What on earth did that mean? Well, damn near everything, apparently. Governments needed to "begin thinking now" about "a new generation of infrastructure" and "spending on education," Sabia wrote. "About clean tech and retooling our health-care system. And about refinancing for the long term a small and medium enterprise sector that will emerge from this crisis battered but still the engine of jobs in our economy."

Given "the scale of investments likely required," Sabia wrote, the post-COVID world offers "an opportunity to do things faster, more effectively and more coherently to secure our future prosperity in what will likely be a changed world."

Sabia's message was clearly catnip to the big dreamers working on Trudeau's audacious vision for the immense moment. Two weeks after Sabia's *Globe* article appeared, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities Catherine McKenna appointed Sabia the new chairman of the board of the Canada Infrastructure Bank.

Perhaps you've already forgotten about the infrastructure bank. It was the brainchild of the same Advisory Council on Economic Growth of which Sabia was a member. The growth council's titular leader was Dominic Barton, who at the time was the managing director of the global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company. He's now Canada's ambassador to China. Using a \$35-billion, taxpayer-funded endowment from one of Morneau's federal budgets, the

The Liberals have found it hard to turn enthusiasm for big, shiny ideas into big, shiny results

infrastructure bank was established in 2018 to attract the deepest of international investor pockets—trillion-dollar pension funds from Dubai or Sweden or wherever—to help pay for really big infrastructure projects.

Really big. Barton told *Maclean's* in 2017 that he hoped the infrastructure bank would pay for transportation and power-transmission projects "that you can see from the moon, maybe." Yet, so far, the moon people's view of Canada remains stubbornly unmodified.

In fact, despite the best efforts of the outgoing management of the infrastructure bank, hastily dismissed in April, it's managed to contribute so far to only two projects of any scale. The bank is paying \$2 billion toward an expansion of the commuter-rail GO Transit network around Toronto. And it has put \$1.3 billion into an electric light-rail network around Montreal. The Montreal rail project was conceived by the Caisse de dépôt as a high-yield

investment destination for Quebec pension money when the Caisse was run by... Michael Sabia.

So yes. The brand-new institution Michael Sabia talked the feds into creating has put \$1.3 billion into the rail network Michael Sabia conceived.

And now Michael Sabia is in charge of deciding what the brand-new institution will do next.

I feel a need to emphasize, as I sometimes do when discussing the work of the infrastructure bank and the Caisse, that none of this is nefarious. If the rail network generates a decent return through transit fees, one day the infrastructure bank will even get its money back. But it's hard to shake the feeling that if the Liberals' enthusiasm for this shiny new world were a bit more infectious, to use an unfortunate figure of speech, then Michael Sabia wouldn't have to keep playing every single speaking role.

Unfortunately, other potential players keep insisting on keeping a social distance. There's been a lot going on, so perhaps you missed some news that appeared in the business pages during the lockdown. On May 7, the Google sibling company Sidewalk Labs announced it was abandoning its project to spend billions building a model smart city of the future on Toronto's eastern waterfront.

Dan Doctoroff, Sidewalk's CEO, made the announcement in a blog post. He chalked the withdrawal up to the economic mess caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the so-called Quayside project had been in trouble from the start. Before it decided to walk away,

On file after file, the Liberals have discovered that rich or powerful partners can be skittish

Sidewalk sank close to \$1 billion into the project, which would have used breakthroughs in urban design and information technology to make a clean, efficient, prototype neighbourhood of the future.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association lined up early against the project, however, worried that it was an attempt to data-mine the city's condo class in ways that might eventually bode ill for the data security of anyone within spitting distance of a silicon chip. Others were alarmed when the project's proponents asked for control over a big share of municipal tax revenues as a way to fund their development scheme. The coronavirus didn't help.

If a project sounds futuristic and ends up not working, perhaps you won't be surprised to learn Trudeau was excited about it from the start. And indeed, there was the Prime Minister at the Oct. 17, 2017, announcement of Sidewalk Labs' "new partnership" with Waterfront Toronto.

Watching the video of that announcement now, it's impossible to miss Trudeau's enthusiasm. He welcomed Doctoroff and Eric Schmidt, who ran Sidewalk's global parent firm Alphabet. "Eric and I have been talking about collaborating on this for a few years now," he said, beaming, in a departure from his prepared text.

The Prime Minister's digression was a pretty big faux pas. The Waterfront development contract was supposed to be

a competitive bidding process. It never did become clearer what the nature of Schmidt's conversations with Trudeau had been.

Developing this stretch of the Toronto waterfront, Trudeau told the crowd of assembled dignitaries, had always been "in line with our government's plan to build greener, smarter towns and cities." But landing Sidewalk was a whole other level of awesome. "With this partnership, Sidewalk has demonstrated its trust and confidence in Canada."

Then the Prime Minister delivered an ode to the gleaming future he had talked these smart, rich guys into building right here in Canada. "The future that our kids and grandkids are going to inhabit is one where bold, innovative thinking is the norm," he said. "Where our complex challenges are solved by innovation and partnership."

"This announcement today is about promoting and fostering that innovation and leading the way forward. This partnership will effectively transform Quayside into a

thriving hub for innovation and create the good, well-paying jobs that Canadians need."

That's four uses of the words "innovation" or "innovative" in 30 seconds. It was clear Trudeau was excited. And then, over the ensuing three years, the whole project fell apart.

It's funny how some collapsed investment schemes become big political news and some don't. When Teck Resources Ltd. abandoned its Frontier oil sands mine project in February, the news became emblematic of the Trudeau government's inability—and perhaps its reluctance—to get large energy projects built in the country's resource-extracting heartland. No such political uproar accompanied the Quayside project's collapse.

That's kind of weird when you think about it. Teck was always going to be a hard file for a Trudeau government. It set up a direct clash between oil sands development and climate virtue—in a part of the country where Liberals never win. It's no surprise when a hard file that plays to a government's weakness ends badly. But when a dot-com giant backs away from urban development in the heart of Liberal Ontario? To me that sounds way more symbolic.

The only simple way to keep enough Canadians loyal is to keep coming up with new reasons to give them money

When the Trudeau Liberals won the 2015 election—after a brutal decade in the wilderness that saw them reduced, two elections in a row, to historic-worst levels of voter support—it was easy for them to imagine that their comeback would be synonymous with Canada's. In fact, that was pretty much their selling proposition: that a weary world would want to build great new things with a fresh-faced and energetic Canada. It wasn't even a bad idea. If it had worked, that would have been excellent. But on file after file, the Trudeau Liberals have discovered that rich or powerful partners can be skittish, or that their partnership comes with hidden costs that come due fast. That the world doesn't stop being a difficult place just because Justin Trudeau is running the government of Canada.

The chummy optimism that characterized Trudeau's remarks at the Quayside announcement in 2017 was a big part of the Liberals' tonal palette for many months after they returned to power in 2015. One such bright moment was an opulent dinner that drew a huge invitation-only crowd to the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, early in 2016,

A chair sits, abandoned, on the site where Sidewalk Labs was to build its Toronto offices

to welcome Ban Ki Moon, who was then the secretary-general of the United Nations.

The message of the night was that Canada was back—in world affairs in general, and in the United Nations in particular. Ban was happy to play along, and he used the happy phrase—"Canada is back!"—in his own remarks to the crowd. But two more years would go by before Canada would contribute even a modest and short-term military deployment to a UN peacekeeping mission in Mali. With that deployment over, Canada's peacekeeping contribution is now at a historic low. Trudeau has spent much of the spring lobbying



via webcam for a Canadian seat on the UN Security Council. It's touch-and-go. The odds aren't terrible—Norway and Ireland are the other candidates, and two of the three will win. Of course, Canada might be one of the two. But it's hardly been the cakewalk Trudeau once imagined.

Canada's relationship with China was supposed to be another area where Trudeau's style and family lineage would pay big dividends. "We should be creative when thinking about what a trade deal with China could look like," Trudeau wrote in the *Financial Post* when he had been a candidate for the

Liberal leadership for barely six weeks. "What if our goal was to become Asia's designer and builder of livable cities?"

Instead Canada has become a leading supplier of sleep-deprived hostages to an increasingly callous and belligerent Chinese regime, whose role in covering up the early days of the coronavirus outbreak sometimes seems as much of an embarrassment to Trudeau as to Xi Jinping.

The point of this little *tour d'horizon* isn't that Trudeau has made a hash of things. It's just to emphasize that the world is a tough neighbourhood. Partnership and collabora-

tion, especially the kind that comes with enough money to make a difference in the Canadian economy, is not something even investors with deep pockets have much appetite for these days. A lot of the things Trudeau set out to do were going to be really hard. Sure enough, they turned out to be hard. The only big mistake was to approach them with wide-eyed optimism in the first place—the kind of glib optimism that's making a truly weird comeback in the depth of a global health crisis.

What we've all been reminded this year, with brutal finality, is that complex problems actually don't get solved with innovation and partnership that you can see from the moon. Complex problems are a slog. They're boring. They're no fun. As one example among many, they look like long-term care homes where the staff needs decent pay and tolerable work conditions. Getting there from here is the kind of dreary, discouraging work that self-impressed governments like to avoid while they build still more monuments to their own cleverness.

After the coronavirus, as before, the Trudeau government will quickly discover that the only simple, reliable way to keep enough Canadians loyal is to keep coming up with new reasons to give them money. Deep-pocket "partners" from far away are too likely to flake, as Sidewalk and China did. Fair-weather friends are not made for climes like ours. But a client waiting for a cheque will wait a long time.

Don't get me wrong: the array of emergency benefits that kept misery at bay for millions of Canadians through the spring were, by and large, absolutely necessary. But will this government dare wind those benefits down as the world of 2021 turns out to be just as thorny as the world of 2020? Especially with an election looming?

The surest way to win an election that Liberals are already talking to *Le Devoir* about will be to establish a steep gradient between the benefits you enjoy if the Liberals stay in power and the benefits you'll be left with if the Conservatives win.

That's been the playbook for many Liberal re-election campaigns. It won for Trudeau in 2019. Given the utter absence of new thinking in the Conservative party, it's got a good chance of winning again. It won for the provincial Liberal government of Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne in Ontario, until it stopped working altogether and their opponents didn't need any new thinking. Politics after the plague won't look much like the imaginary city of tomorrow. It'll look like the same old hard choices. ♣



CORONAVIRUS

THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-ISOLATION

First Nations are finding ways to keep the virus—and outsiders—at bay

BY HAMDII ISSAWI · On April 27, the Nuxalk First Nation, nestled in British Columbia's Bella Coola Valley, simply stopped asking. Five weeks earlier, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the chief and council had declared a local state of emergency and set up a checkpoint on the only highway into the valley to restrict non-essential traffic. Like many remote and coastal communities in the province, and as one known for its salmon fishing, the Nuxalk are wary of the risk of infection that comes with tourists visiting their territory.

They had no idea that over the next few days the B.C. government would declare fishing and hunting essential services in the province, effectively opening the door to travel in their territory. While B.C.'s Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation insists that the province respects First Nations' states of emergency and travel bans, it would not issue orders affecting travel in and out of these communities.

Instead of turning visitors away from the territory, Nuxalk watchmen and hereditary chiefs merely tracked traffic on the provincial highway into the valley, asking returning residents to self-isolate and urging tourists to reconsider their trips. That was until an outbreak swept into Alert Bay, an island community off Vancouver Island's northeast coast, and claimed the life of a 'Namgis Nation woman on April 24—the province's first COVID-19 casualty in a First Nations community.

The ripples were felt up and down the coast. Three days later, Nuxalk hereditary chiefs and elected council members, led by Chief Councillor Wally Webber, unanimously ordered their own lockdown of the Bella Coola Valley and issued a public notice: from then on, visitors and tourists would be turned away at the checkpoint 80 km outside town; residents who left the valley for non-medical or non-essential purposes risked being locked out upon return. "To watch other [First] Nations,



or other people, getting the virus and going 'Holy crap'—it's just unreal," Webber says. "It shows us that we really have to start protecting our people."

While local and provincial governments loosen lockdowns and restart economies, vulnerable Indigenous communities across the country say they're fighting an uphill battle to safeguard their residents. Though few have been exposed to the pathogen—sometimes by dint of the isolation that makes them medically vulnerable—they feel that the interests of their communities are not top of mind for the leaders guiding the rest of the country through the pandemic. Some voice a sense of outright neglect on the part of the provinces and Ottawa, and are taking an increasingly active hand to protect their people—even if public health measures lie outside their jurisdictions.

The frustration runs especially high on remote First Nations, where leaders are making common cause—and sometimes butting heads—with non-Indigenous communities. In April, more than a dozen First Nations and municipalities from B.C.'s north and central coasts penned an open letter urging the B.C. government to restrict non-essential travel to

their territories. The combination of warming weather and an urge to escape weeks of lockdown, they warned, was bound to beckon visitors to enjoy sanctioned hunting and fishing; with them would come the threat of infection to remote communities that have not yet been exposed to it. But according to the signatories, that call for help went unanswered. An April 30 press release from the Council of the Haida Nation claimed that, more than three weeks on, they'd received no indication that they'd get the support they were seeking.

Transportation Minister Claire Trevena eventually responded to the letter on May 5, government officials say, highlighting measures to reduce non-essential traffic to the coastal regions, such as posting highway signs to discourage visits, screening passengers on B.C. ferries and tasking ferry terminal staff with warning travellers of lockdowns. But, while the minister's response recognized the communities' concerns, it added: "We need to leave our ferries and roads open for essential travel."

Webber, one of the signatories of the letter, says the province is sending a potentially deadly mixed message by advising the public to stay home while granting permission



Members of the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation oversee a checkpoint near Stony Plain, Alta.

are scared,” Banerji says. “If an outbreak occurs, then many people are getting sick at once, and if you don’t have capacity to put them on a ventilator, these people will die.”

In mid-April, the federal government pledged \$305 million to help First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities respond to the pandemic. But for Canada’s 634 First Nations, which includes 96 fly-in communities, that’s simply not enough, says Assembly of First Nations National Chief Perry Bellegarde. “Those dollars were spent on supplying food to the most vulnerable, to the elders, to the people that are staying in their homes, to supplying personal protective equipment,” Bellegarde says. He highlights the need to address the cost and challenges of transportation—specifically for fly-in communities like those in Nunavut (though as of late May the territory had yet to report any confirmed cases). “Will the federal government or provincial governments cover the cost of transportation if you have to medevac people out of the communities?” he asks. “Because there are no hospitals. There are health clinics, and a lot of times they are understaffed.”

More than just financial support, Bellegarde is calling for the inclusion of First Nations in the development of pandemic plans, which he says is lacking: “It’s not just a federal government or provincial governments in Canada. There’s the original governments of this land and there’s a separate jurisdiction that needs to be respected and included going forward.”

FOR THE HEILTSUK Nation, on an island west of Bella Coola, a seat at the table begins with disclosure—specifically the location of positive COVID-19 cases. Currently, B.C. identifies only the health region where patients live. Campbell Island’s Bella Bella, home to about 1,400 Heiltsuk, falls under the purview of Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), which serves 1.25 million people—about a quarter of the province’s population—and includes residents of Vancouver, Richmond and the North Shore. While Dr. Bonnie Henry, the provincial health officer, has said that information is at the heart of public health (specifically, “knowing what our risks are, where they are coming from and who is affected”), she also maintains that flagging affected communities can stigmatize those associated with them, and cast a false sense of security on those who aren’t. Heiltsuk Chief Councillor Marilyn Slett can’t help but highlight an uncomfortable irony: “Our communities live under stigma every day.”

to fish, hunt and travel around First Nation territories. A housing shortage in the village of Bella Coola, part of which lies within Nuxalk reserve land, has led to overcrowding, he notes, with anywhere from five to 15 people occupying a single home, making community spread almost impossible to control if a carrier gets past their checkpoint or alights on their shore. “They’re holding a gun to our heads by allowing people to come in here,” he says.

Those fears are by no means restricted to remote First Nations. Leaders of the Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, headquartered less than an hour’s drive northwest of Edmonton, closed their borders to outsiders in late March, creating a system of passes for essential workers and permanent residents to come and go. Mohawk communities at the confluence of Ontario, Quebec and New York state have introduced similar controls, or set up mobile clinics so residents don’t have to go to nearby cities to get tested. In almost every region of the country, Indigenous leaders have been on a crash course about how the virus spreads,

scrambling to adapt prevention measures to the circumstances of their communities.

Housing is just one of the common risk factors making First Nations particularly vulnerable. Others, says Anna Banerji, an infectious disease and public health specialist at the University of Toronto, include higher rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive

pulmonary disease, cancer, malnutrition and poverty.

Banerji is heading up an online petition urging the federal government to give Indigenous communities enhanced health care, as well as testing and outbreak

control. Health factors aside, she says, First Nations in isolated areas are particularly at risk because they often lack access to infrastructure and health-care resources to manage the disease. The petition calls for, among other things, rapid testing kits, the construction of field hospitals and temporary quarantine housing, and for Ottawa to enlist support from the Canadian Forces, Médecins Sans Frontières and the Red Cross. “I get emails on a regular basis from chiefs saying, “We

‘WATCHING OTHER NATIONS GETTING THE VIRUS SHOWS US THAT WE HAVE TO PROTECT OUR PEOPLE’

So far, Heiltsuk Nation, like the Nuxalk, has managed to avoid infection. But Slett sees the secrecy around confirmed cases as a slight to the First Nation on two levels: not only does it leave the community's emergency response team working in the dark, it effectively snubs an Indigenous government that has existed for about 700 generations. "It blindfolds our people," Slett says. "I know they've got these blanket policies, but we are unique, and we have a different history, so we do need to take a look at it through our lenses. We need to make sure that we're also protected."

Without a provincial restriction on travel to the region, or any other way to keep out visitors to the remote island community, the Heiltsuk passed a bylaw banning travel to and from its traditional territory. But such bans are only as good as their wording, and the authorities' ability to enforce them. In more populous southern Quebec—one of the few places where in-province travel bans were put in place—First Nations have taken extra steps to keep away non-essential traffic. About an hour's drive west of Montreal, the Mohawk Council of Kanesatake sought in March to deter visitors by closing businesses in the territory—a magnet for residents of surrounding communities looking to buy cannabis and bargain-priced tobacco.

'IS IT GOING TO COME IN UNOPPOSED, LIKE A WAVE? OR ARE WE GOING TO PUT UP A FIGHT?'

Quebec's regional travel rules nevertheless allowed Montrealers and travellers from surrounding municipalities to venture on to Kanesatake territory, which led the council to set up checkpoints near its entrances to shut out visitors. Says Kanesatake Grand Chief Serge Simon: "We know it's going to come in. But is it going to come in unopposed, and like a wave with community spread? Or are we going to put up a fight and make sure that it comes in small and manageable cases?"

Putting that idea into action, however, was less simple than it sounds. Kanesatake territory includes dozens of land lots located within the nearby village of Oka. To protect Mohawk families living there, the Kanesatake also installed checkpoints outside the village. If a non-resident approaches, Simon says, "We tell them, 'No, if you don't have an address around here, turn around and go home.'" In response, Oka Mayor Pascal Quevillon filed complaints with Quebec's provincial police and ministry of transportation, while threatening legal action against the council. On social media, Quevillon called the checkpoints unacceptable, claiming they threatened the town's economy as the province is in the midst of reopening for business.

Although sympathetic to the plight of the

local economy and businesses crippled by ordered closures, Simon says his priority is ensuring the health and safety of the entire community, which he doubts will be possible until there's a vaccine against the coronavirus. "We know we'll have to adapt," Simon says. "Right now we survive, and then we look at the [province's reopening] plan." In the meantime, his worries increasingly run beyond matters of physical health. Most of the roughly 60 fluent speakers of the Mohawk language left in the community, he notes, are elders who may be susceptible to the pathogen. "If we lose these elders," he says, "our language goes along with them."

BACK IN B.C., tensions seem to be running at a lower ebb between the Nuxalk, the provincial government and non-Indigenous residents. Hereditary Chief Mike Tallio says all but a few drivers have co-operated with guards who staff the checkpoint outside Bella Coola, noting: "We've had a couple of people run through our checkpoint at high speeds." So far, he adds, no one has been hurt, and after the checkpoint has been breached, the Nuxalk contact the RCMP to track down the culprits. "We want to make sure they are looked into, to see why they are putting people in danger," he says.

Meanwhile, on May 22, Webber and Slett finally received an audience with members of the B.C. cabinet, along with Henry, the provincial health officer, in a conference call that included community leaders from the province's north and central coast. A statement from Scott Fraser, B.C.'s minister of Indigenous affairs and reconciliation, recognized the "specific needs and unique circumstances" of Indigenous and remote communities responding to the pandemic, and committed to regular dialogue with them as reopening continues. Still, for the time being, the province will continue to permit hunting and fishing so long as the public follows provincial health orders and guidelines, as well as band council resolutions and travel advisories. "This means hunters and fishers should respect checkpoints and comply with restrictions unless providing services at the request of the First Nation community," a government spokesperson says.

While long overdue, Slett says, the meeting offered a starting point for better communication. Meantime, for both the Nuxalk and Heiltsuk, the travel restrictions and checkpoints remain essential until those nations feel safe again. Short of expressing concern in "moderate dialogue," says Slett, "there's not a lot that we can do." ♦



Kanesatake, west of Montreal, closed businesses in its territory in March to discourage visitors

STUMBLING TO THE END

Canada is mismanaging its most significant peacetime crisis in a century, and the seeds of our failure are everywhere

BY AMIR ATTARAN · About two months ago, as Canada was thrust into a terrifying lockdown, I wrote a piece in *Maclean's* asking what the COVID-19 endgame would look like. As a scientist, I offered a road map for returning Canada to normalcy, and explained that it would be a long but predictable slog: first, riding the lockdown to the point where disease transmission was down to virtually nil, followed by a series of staged reopenings, and monitored throughout by extensive COVID-19 testing and contact tracing to detect minor outbreaks quickly and squash them.

That approach is now so uncontroversial that no serious experts disagree.

But it has become apparent, however, that some provinces are not following that approach, and that Canada is stumbling through the endgame.

Our progress on “bending the curve” is halting and unimpressive compared to that of Europe and Asia. Our testing is so broken-down that it lags behind Rwanda’s and Ethiopia’s. Our epidemiological data is so inadequate that, even if we wanted to conduct the endgame well, often we cannot. Places like Toronto and Quebec are reopening too soon, risking the possibility of sickening—and killing—people needlessly, while the Maritimes and Prairies are reopening too slowly, strangling the economy.

Simply put, Canada is bungling its most significant peacetime crisis in a century. That is why I am writing this sequel not just as a health scientist, but as a constitutional lawyer—because the seeds of our failure are everywhere.

Canada is failing at disease control

Let’s start with the big question: Is Canada really “bending the curve”?

The answer is: not much. Many Canadians think we have because we are doing better



The inability of three provinces to bend the curve is threatening the others with economic disaster

than the United States—a country with no public health care, vocal COVID-19 deniers, and a president who recommends injecting bleach. The Americans are obviously not the right comparators: better to compare Canada with other wealthy countries, especially those confederations that have federal-provincial complications like our own.

The graph below shows daily confirmed COVID-19 cases in seven countries, averaged every seven days and adjusted for population size. Each country’s line starts on the day that it crossed the threshold of one case per million persons, just before a runaway climb.

Canada (the black line) was the last country to cross that threshold. That lucky turn gave us extra time to prepare and the benefit of learning from others, which we could have parlayed into a lower infection peak.

Except our governments blew it fantastically. Instead of the successful nosedive seen in

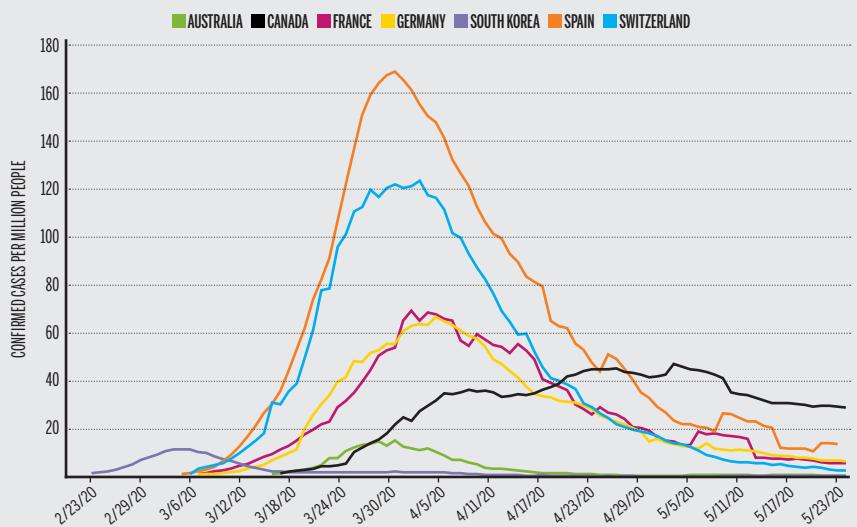
France, Germany, Spain, or Switzerland—a feat their governments achieved despite a faster climb and higher peak—Canada’s curve resembles an undulating plateau or a skier’s bunny hill. By May 25, Canada was in the same place as it had been on April 4—fully seven wasted weeks, littered with thousands of dead.

We could have been like Australia. It is a large, sparsely populated, regionalized confederation of states, much like our own provinces. Australia crossed the threshold of one case per million just a day before us—we were tied in mid-March. But instead of dithering, Australia’s endgame smashed the curve hard and fast. Its results are almost as impressive as South Korea’s, but with less authoritarianism, and accomplished in a society very much like our own.

Now Australia is reopening, confidently, and we are not. Through the crisis, they suffered barely 100 dead. We are nearing 7,000

THE LONG DECLINE

Canada had extra time to prepare and avoided a dramatic spike, but a nosedive in cases hasn’t followed



dead—which works out to a per capita death rate only a little better than Donald Trump’s United States.

Testing is failing

Let’s talk next about COVID-19 testing. Nobody disagrees that Canada needs more, faster testing. The scientific goal is not simply testing the sick, but tracing and over-testing the healthy around them, so as to isolate the positives for 14 days and nip new outbreaks in the bud. Do that enough, and it’s possible to drive COVID-19 down to virtually nil, as in Australia. This is the so-called “testing and tracing” strategy.

Yet Canada’s testing remains awful, especially in Ontario and Quebec.

The graph to the right shows over-testing as the ratio of total COVID-19 tests per positive result. The higher that ratio, the more over-testing, and better the chance of spotting and containing outbreaks (this is true regardless of the absolute number of tests, for which there is no magic number). If one chooses not to worry about the cost of testing—and one shouldn’t, because it is peanuts compared to hospitalizations or economy-killing lockdowns—then it is better to test too much than too little.

On this measure, Canada doesn’t just lag top performers like Australia and South Korea; it’s behind even Cuba, Ethiopia, Kenya and Rwanda (the epidemic will likely hit them later). Africans outclass Canada on sheer effort too: Addis Ababa’s feat of screening millions door-to-door puts Montreal and Toronto to shame.

For Canada to be beaten by some of the world’s poorest countries is a humiliation. Can it be that Canada lacks the scientists, laboratories or wealth to do better? Certainly not. The fault instead lies in the cupidity and stupidity of our governments—for while the *agent* of the pandemic is a virus, the *cause* of Canada’s failure lies in its political choices.

Where’s the data?

Nothing showcases Canada’s failure better than its inability just to count and analyze COVID-19 cases.

Canada still uses fax machines in medical practice and to communicate critical epidemic data. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, Montreal hired two dozen clerks to type in faxed case reports. The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) collects case reports from the provinces by fax too, but stupidly asks for an “email notification” of the fax without attaching the reporting form.

Of course, this system is cratering. At this



writing, PHAC possesses detailed data on just 36 per cent of known COVID-19 cases, either because of lateness, or because provinces do not want to share. If you imagine disease clusters as mines on a field that Canada is soldiering through, the provinces are only providing snippets of their maps, leaving the country dangerously blind.

Without complete, timely data, it is *impossible* for scientists to analyze the epidemic optimally in real time. And so it is also *impossible* for PHAC to know, until weeks later, whether efforts are succeeding to keep the virus’s effective reproductive number (called “ R_e ”) well below 1, signifying that the curve is bending sharply down. Successful countries

like Germany and Norway calculate and transparently publish this critical indicator daily, so they always know where they stand and needn’t fear a crippling “second wave.”

But PHAC, blinded by its own data incompetence, has yet to publish R_e even once. Worse, PHAC signed a foolish agreement in 2014 that gives provinces a veto on publishing analyses—the better to censor anything embarrassing. We are sitting ducks for a second wave.

I cannot exaggerate how dangerous such blindness is. Without complete, accurate, timely data, Canada is fighting COVID-19 not by skating to where the virus’s puck is going, or even where it is now, but to where it was several weeks ago.



Health ministry workers go door-to-door in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, screening residents to curb the spread of COVID-19

class? To grumble, shrug and mutter that “health is provincial.”

But this excuse is lazy, immoral, and wrong. The state has a duty to protect life. The Supreme Court has said that “health is a jurisdiction shared by both the provinces and the federal government.”

The Constitution gives the provinces jurisdiction over health care, which is different from public health, and over “Matters of a merely local or private Nature,” which the pandemic certainly is not. It deals better cards to the federal government, whose jurisdiction includes epidemiological “statistics,” “quarantine,” and, for enforcement, “criminal law”—or absolutely anything else during a temporary national emergency, like a pandemic.

Now in normal times, Ottawa rightly lets provinces run their own show.

But a once-in-a-century pandemic is not normal. Either the federal government becomes more significant, or it ends up tearing the federation apart in the mistaken belief it is protecting it.

The federations that successfully fought COVID-19 did not do so using a weak federal hand or by giving provinces free rein. Australia, on Feb. 1, banned travellers from China as a precaution, and its prime minister and state premiers signed a partnership agreement on health-care funding for COVID-19 in March, even before cases took off. Germany launched a single national testing strategy for COVID-19 in January, which by April was executing more tests per week than Canada had mustered in several months. Switzerland's federal council declared a national emergency in March, including a uniform national lockdown, which explains how they crushed their soaring curve so quickly.

None of this happened in Canada. Instead, our federal government folded its cards.

While I do not like personalizing failure, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is proving an unfit leader. He does not understand public health. In 2018, he wrote a depressingly myopic article in *The Lancet* that reduced global health—a massive subject—to women's rights. Pandemics have never concerned him, and are not even mentioned, much less prioritized, in the mandate letters he has issued to his health ministers, which set the

stage for bizarre actions like destroying Canada's emergency stockpile of personal protective equipment. Even during the COVID-19 crisis, his government has reiterated planned cuts to PHAC's budget.

Instead, the Prime Minister's instinct is to help victims of COVID-19, whether by sending the Canadian Forces to care homes in Ontario and Quebec, or by sprinkling cash upon distressed Canadians and businesses. The expenditure required for this economic life-support is enormous—in the ballpark of \$40 billion monthly—and everyone agrees it is impossible to sustain.

Which leaves only one pragmatic and potentially affordable option: the federal government must intervene to bend the curve and stanch the bleeding of lives, of money, of the macroeconomy plunging into extreme recession—basically, Canada's future. Doing so will upset the failing provinces and the bromides of federation.

Canada uses fax machines to communicate epidemic data. Of course this system is cratering.

Too bad. Australia, Germany, and Switzerland

knew they could not wholly defer to the states, *Länder* and *cantons*. Canada cannot either, or it immorally makes Canadian lives expendable.

I am positive the federal government can be a constructive force for all three scientific problems I've highlighted. The Emergencies Act allows the cabinet to draw *cordons sanitaires* that would isolate the Prairies and the Maritimes from a second wave of infection, so their people can resume their lives safely. The power of the purse allows the finance minister to make bailout dollars contingent on the provinces successfully executing a national testing strategy. The Public Health Agency of Canada Act allows the cabinet to make regulations for how provinces share epidemiological data, so that we can finally trash the fax machine, and have the timely epidemiological analyses needed for safe reopening.

All of this is possible. But for it to happen, the Prime Minister must reconsider refusing to use emergency powers, rejecting a national testing strategy for COVID-19, and fulfill his promise to share epidemic data and analysis openly. If he really wants to help, he will.

Lawyers have a cautionary saying: “The Constitution is not a suicide pact.” But, unless Canada solves the problems of federation that are standing in the way of crushing a pandemic, that is what it will become.

Scientifically, we know what Canada's end-game must be. I hope, legally, we find the will and national cohesion to do it. ♣

Broken federalism

Currently, just three provinces—in order, Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta—are responsible for 95 per cent of COVID-19 cases in Canada. Their failure to bend the curve is threatening health in other provinces and imposing massive economic costs rivalling the Great Depression. The longer it takes these irresponsible “have” provinces to perform, the worse the downturn, and the costlier it becomes to “have not” provinces in the Prairies and Maritimes, where very little disease is present. The current reality is not strengthening national unity, but tugging at its weakest seams.

And the response of Canada's political

CHARTS

THREE MONTHS OF COVID IN CANADA

We huddled, we peaked, and now we're living in a new reality

BY PATRICIA TREBLE - At the end of February, there were just four cases of COVID-19 in Canada. It would take another eight days before the nation recorded its first death. After that, the numbers increased with mind-numbing speed and, by the end of May, the cumulative tally of cases was more than 92,000 while the death toll had surpassed 7,300.

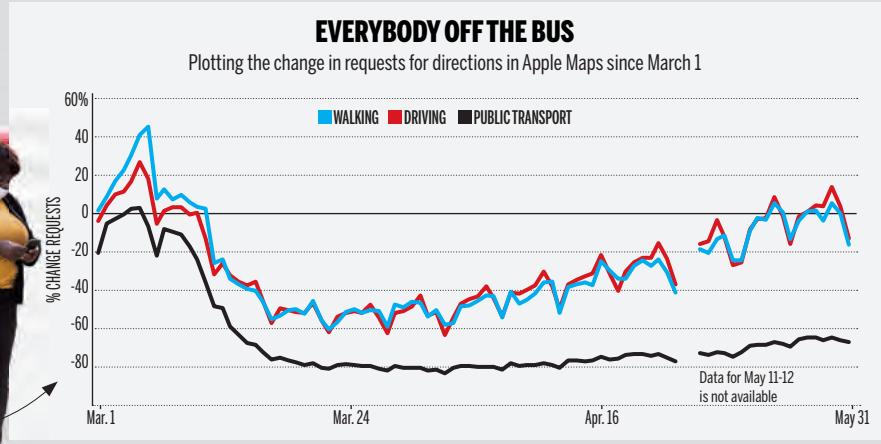
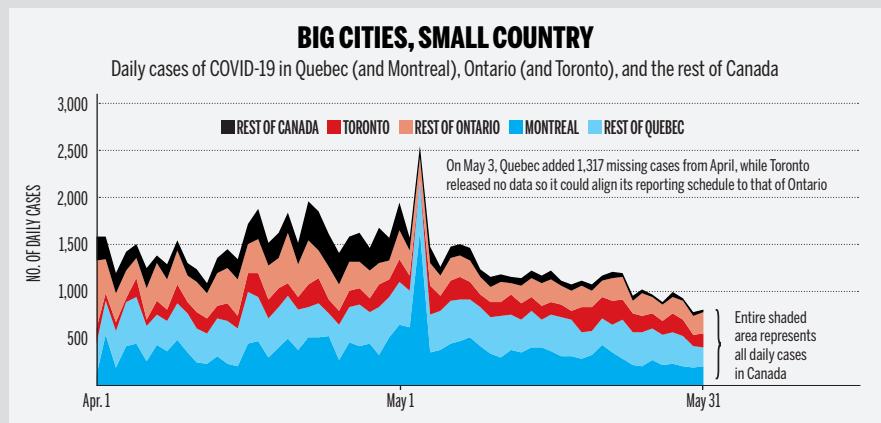
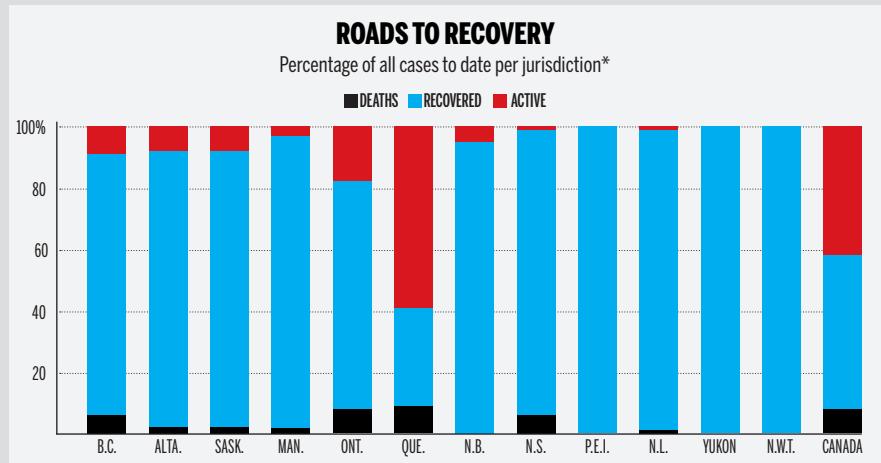
Yet for all the grim news, there is hope: most provinces have vanquished their coronavirus outbreaks and are reopening their economies, while Canadians are adapting to the new reality of living with COVID-19.

These numbers show where we sit as of May 31, within our borders and without. ♣
—with Lauren Cattermole

Sources: COVID-19 Canada Open Data Working Group; Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center; provincial and municipal governments; Iacovos Michael's Ontario LTC dataset; Apple Mobility Trends Reports; Worldometer; Maclean's calculations



BY END OF MAY, TRANSIT DEMAND WAS DOWN 68%; WALKING 16%



BURDEN OF DISEASE

Provincial tallies reveal extreme disproportion, with Ontario and Quebec accounting for 87 per cent of cases and 95 per cent of deaths nationally between them

THE TOLL TO DATE	B.C.	ALTA.	SASK.	MAN.	ONT.	QUE.	N.B.	N.S.	P.E.I.	N.L.	YUKON	N.W.T.	
CASES (since the first on Jan. 25)	2,582	7,010	646	295	29,318	51,059	132	1,056	27	261	11	5	} TOTAL CASES IN CANADA: 92,415
% OF NATIONAL TOTAL	3	8	0.7	0.3	32	55	0.1	1.1	0.03	0.28	0.01	0.01	
DEATHS (since the first on March 8)	164	143	11	7	2,327	4,641	0	60	0	3	0	0	} TOTAL DEATHS IN CANADA: 7,356
% OF NATIONAL TOTAL	2	2	0.1	0.1	32	63	0	1	0	0.04	0	0	

*Nunavut has no cases; 13 repatriated travellers were infected

STEPHANIE FODEN/BLOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; NATTRASS/ISTOCK; JUSTIN TANG/CP; LINH PHAM/GETTY IMAGES; FRANK GUNNY/CP; NEXT SPREAD: PHOTOGRAPHS BY SERGHEI CEBOTARI

THE SPEED OF SPREAD

Days it took the five nations with the most cases to reach milestones (after 100th case)

NO. OF CASES	U.S.	RUSSIA	BRAZIL	SPAIN	U.K.
50,000	21	35	41	24	32
100,000	24	44	51	30	42
200,000	29	54	62	49	62
300,000	32	64	69		
400,000	36	75	75		
500,000	39				
1 MILLION	56				
1.5 MILLION	76				

IN CONTRAST, IT TOOK CANADA 48 DAYS TO HIT THE 50,000 CASE MARK

NEIGHBOURHOOD TALES

The COVID-19 pandemic is a regional—and sometimes provincial or even municipal—story in Canada. Residential and work outbreaks often spark localized epidemics.

LARGEST OUTBREAKS

B.C.
87

CASES LINKED* TO THE PACIFIC DENTAL CONFERENCE IN VANCOUVER
*in B.C. alone

ALBERTA



1,632

CASES LINKED TO THE CARGILL MEAT PROCESSING PLANT IN HIGH RIVER

DEADLIEST LONG-TERM CARE HOME OUTBREAKS

ONTARIO

64

DEATHS AT CAMILLA CARE COMMUNITY (MISSISSAUGA)

58

DEATHS AT DOWNSVIEW LONG TERM CARE (TORONTO) AND CARLINGVIEW MANOR (OTTAWA)



QUEBEC

77

DEATHS AT CENTRE D'HÉBERGEMENT CHAMPLAIN-MARIE-VICTORIN (MONTREAL)

85

DEATHS AT CHSLD LAURENDEAU (MONTREAL)

93

DEATHS AT CENTRE D'HÉBERGEMENT SAINTE-DOROTHÉE (LAVAL)

CITIES* AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL CASES IN A PROVINCE

VANCOUVER 35%
TORONTO 38%
MONTREAL 50%

MOST CONSECUTIVE DAYS WITH NO NEW CASES

N.B. 17 days N.L. 21 days
N.S. 2 days Yukon 42 days
P.E.I. 34 days N.W.T. 56 days

CITIES* AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL CASES IN CANADA

VANCOUVER 1%
TORONTO 12%
MONTREAL 28%

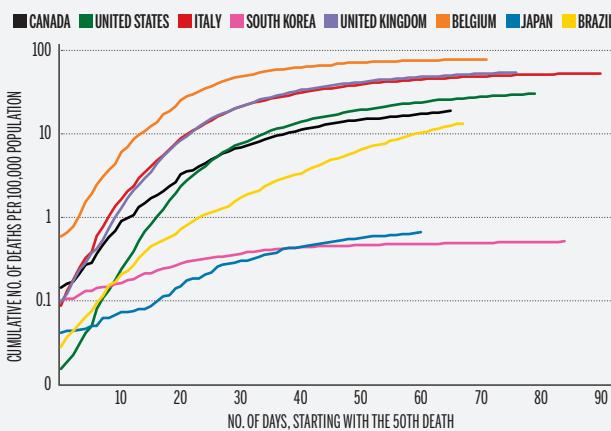
MOST CONSECUTIVE DAYS WITH NO NEW DEATHS

SASK. 21 days
MAN. 27 days

*data by public health region

CANADA AND THE WORLD

Cumulative deaths per 100,000 population



LAND OF ZERO DEATHS:

Vietnam began tightening its long border with China on Jan. 3, a few days after a strange pneumonia was reported in Wuhan. Strict public health measures combined with early actions—flights from China were quickly stopped—were informed by decades of dealing with contagious diseases, including SARS. In April, the nation of 97 million eased its lockdown and had reported just 328 cases and zero deaths by the end of May.

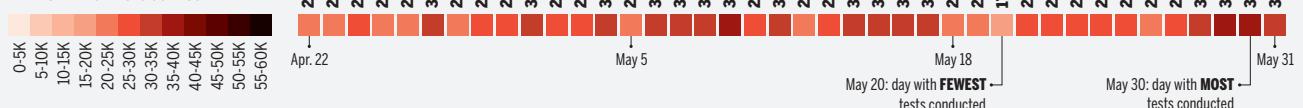


THE ONGOING STRUGGLE TO TEST

On April 22, Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer, said the nation's labs have the capacity to process roughly 60,000 tests a day, about triple the amount of testing that was taking place at the time. Even though Ontario and Quebec have promised to ramp up their efforts, Canada has never come close to that testing level.



NUMBER OF TESTS CONDUCTED



The city that battles back

A string of calamities has revealed the resilience and sense of unity Fort McMurray spent decades building



BY NADINE YOUSIF · At the start of May in 2016, the wildfire that would sweep through Fort McMurray, Alta. had arrived at the front steps of the city's Royal Canadian Legion branch. Thick smoke and burning ash enveloped the two-storey metal building, which sits at the city's south edge. A large Canadian flag at its entrance flew high in the hot wind.

Branch president Pat Duggan—a firefighter himself—was busy elsewhere, protecting lives and property while more than 88,000 residents fled to safety, when he received a call from a friend. “Your legion is still standing,” Duggan remembers him saying. It was news Duggan couldn't believe until he laid eyes on the building himself.

Not only was the legion unaffected, thanks to its flame-resistant metal structure and gravel rooftop, but it had served to shield a dozen residential homes behind it—the only structures saved within a half-kilometre radius.

Though damaged from the smoke and slightly tattered, the flag survived, too. As a tribute to the city's endurance during the largest wildfire evacuation in Alberta's history, and to the outpouring of national support that followed, Duggan collected signatures on the flag from other legion branches across the country that had donated labour and funds to Fort McMurray. He then framed it to display at his local branch as a token of hardship overcome.

But four years later, to the week, misfortune struck again—this time in the form of a flood unlike any the city has seen in recent

history. And in this instance, the legion's luck ran out: six feet of water inundated the building's main floor and threatened to destroy its cherished artifacts, including the flag recovered from the fires.

The flood wreaked havoc upon significant portions of Fort McMurray, particularly the downtown core. Its casualties included department stores, the city's food bank, and scores of homes and small businesses, with damage estimates that soared above \$100 million. Some 13,000 people were forced once again to evacuate, and all this came at a time when many residents and businesses had just finished rebuilding from the fires. To make the whole situation seem cartoonishly cruel, the COVID-19 pandemic had sent oil sands crude prices plummeting into the negatives, exacerbating a pre-pandemic supply glut—ghastly numbers never seen before by a community largely built and employed by the oil and gas industry.

It would be easy for a city to let such an onslaught of disaster become its default identity, or regard events as some biblical portent of doom. And there's no denying that Fort Mac has its challenges, starting with its ties to an oil sands industry that environmentalists and critics around the world want phased out. Around 13,000 residents have departed amid this run of misfortune, disappointed that the promise of prosperity that lured them in the first place had turned to ash.

But for many, Fort McMurray is still home, and not even a run of calamity can change that.

“Fort McMurray is the biggest family any of us know,” says Meghan MacDonald, who has lived here for seven years. Like so many, she and her husband moved from Nova Scotia after he landed a well-paying job in the oil sands. Their home was spared in the fire, but COVID-19 brought new challenges. Among them: MacDonald, 34, was laid off indefinitely in March from her job as an educational assistant at the local school board.

Then the floods hit. “It was that fire mentality all over again,” she says. Emergency updates became routine. Cars, again, were queued bumper-to-bumper on the highway

MacDonald (above left) on the north bank of the Athabasca; Edwards (opposite, centre) says food bank supplies lost in the floods were quickly replaced by donations; Martin and Norris (below) in the rebuilt Paddy McSwiggins



out of town during the evacuation. News of friends losing their homes travelled fast. “I was gutted,” MacDonald says.

Her grief and love for her community, however, forced her into action. Calling on her network of friends, colleagues and acquaintances, she filled her van three times over with donations of food, bedding and kids’ colouring books, which she delivered to flood evacuees. The money came pouring in, and she wasn’t surprised.

It was one more example, MacDonald says, of the familial spirit that has kept the town together time and again. “So many people from Fort McMurray have come from nothing,” she says. “We came from the East Coast where we’d barely gotten by.” But since arriving, MacDonald has never felt abandoned or homesick. “We never had

a holiday where our house wasn’t full of people,” she says. “You make your own family here because everybody knows what it’s like to be alone.”

Some of the donations she gathered found their way to the Wood Buffalo Food Bank, which lost its 2,700 sq.-foot downtown building and 100,000 pounds of food due to water damage. It was a devastating blow, director Dan Edwards says, but one quickly remedied by the generosity of the community. In less than a month, the food bank had received six times the amount of food it lost. “It’s just part of being Fort McMurray,” Edwards reflects. “You know someone is down, you roll up your sleeves and get to work.”

That hard-working mentality, of course, is what built Fort McMurray in the first place. The city, seemingly isolated in the middle of

But it didn’t take long for Norris to embrace Fort McMurray. He joined the local rugby club, started a family and opened a bar called Paddy McSwiggins, which became a neighbourhood mainstay. In 2016, his bar suffered considerable damage from fire smoke and had to be demolished per Alberta Health orders. When his insurance company refused to pay for the rebuild, a local handyman and restaurateur named Billy Martin stepped up to help, charging next to nothing, and summoning a team of workers and volunteers who reconstructed the bar in 10 months. In July 2019, Paddy McSwiggins opened its doors again for the first time since the fires.

In 2020, Norris is nothing but grateful to call Fort McMurray home. He still walks around the bar when it’s closed, marvelling at how strangers—now dear friends—came together to save his business. “‘Thank you’ just doesn’t work,” he reflects. “It just seems so insignificant.”

Martin, who is originally from Kelowna, B.C., has been recognized over the years for his tireless volunteerism. In 2018, he assembled a team that upgraded an entire home for the family of a local girl with a congenital heart condition. When this year’s floods hit, he was forced leave his own downtown home, retreating to his small restaurant to make sandwiches for first responders. The place quickly turned into a makeshift donation centre for other evacuees.

The 38-year-old maintains his success would not be possible anywhere else in the country. “There’s a giving nature here,” he says. “I don’t think I could pull it off in Kelowna. It’s just the Fort McMurray way of thinking.”

MacDonald says many people outside Fort McMurray misunderstand it, or downright “loathe it.” But more than its industry and headline-grabbing disasters, it’s a community with green spaces, parks, and families raising children in for the long haul. “We don’t live in some rugged one-horse oil town anymore.”

Exhausted, some leave after cycles of hardship. Nobody judges them, MacDonald says. “No matter what happens, we seem to get stronger,” she explains. “We honestly say, ‘Bring it on,’ because what else could you go through at this point in this town?”

Back at the Legion in May, Duggan found himself surveying yet another aftermath scene, braced for the worst as the framed Canadian flag rescued from the fires had been submerged in the flood. It was slightly wet and muddy when Duggan recovered it, but the banner remained intact, with the signatures still visible on its white and red threads. A sign of yet another hardship overcome. ♣



Alberta’s vast boreal forest, was a pivotal stop on Canada’s historic fur trade route. Its population began flourishing in the 1970s with the rising national interest in petroleum development, and the laborious process of separating oil from sand made careers for thousands who moved to the area.

When Gareth Norris arrived with his family from Wales 38 years ago, recreational spaces and department stores were scarce, and many were forced to drive four hours south to Edmonton for anything but basic goods. Then 14, Norris couldn’t understand why his parents chose the seemingly desolate town to settle in.



Demonstrators in Washington gather outside the White House to protest the death of George Floyd DEE DWYER



RACISM

LETTERS TO AMERICA

Eight Black Canadian
writers on the racism
crisis gripping the world

WITH THREE WORDS and his life, George Floyd delivered a message that, down the centuries, America's ruling class has seemed no more inclined to hear than the white Minneapolis cop who knelt upon Floyd's neck.

I can't breathe.

Rare is the phrase that cuts so cleanly through the modern-day cacophony to capture a moment, and describe a shared feeling. What is it to be Black in 2020? To feel consigned to a permanent underclass by dint of one's race?

It is, say many of those who live the experience, to suffocate.

Floyd, 46, had scarcely uttered his haunting words before joining the shamefully long roll of Black men and women to die in the United States at the hands of white police officers. Footage of his last moments ricocheted through social media, prompting sympathetic protests in cities across the United States, as well as in Canada. As it has throughout America's troubled racial history, anger turned to violence. At this writing, 11 civilians and one law enforcement officer in the U.S. had died in riots and shootings. Far from seeking to ease tensions, President Donald Trump stoked them, threatening to deploy the army against his own people.

Through it all, Floyd's dying phrase was on the signs, tongues and protective face masks of many demonstrators. *I can't breathe.* But will it effect lasting change? Will anything? With those questions in mind, *Maclean's* asked Black Canadian writers Desmond Cole, Andray Domise, Esi Edugyan, Lawrence Hill, Sandy Hudson, Eternity Martis, Rinaldo Walcott and Ian Williams to pen open letters to America addressing the recent upheaval and the task of confronting racism that—deny it as some Canadians might—persists in their own country. ♣

Ian Williams

The cameras on your phones make Black people invisible



Dear cellphone manufacturers,

Something seems to be wrong with the cameras on your phones. They're recording double exposures. When Black people look, we see a white officer shooting a Black man five times in the back (*Walter Scott*), or pummeling a man for jaywalking (*Nania Cain*), or killing a man in front of his apartment building (*Keith Lamont Scott*), or choking a man then pressing his head into the sidewalk until he can't breathe (*Eric Garner*).

That last scene, only with the white officer's knee on the Black man's neck, was recorded again recently (*George Floyd*), but we can't keep recording on these defective cameras. These recordings eat up battery and Black people. And when we show the videos to white folks, they don't see anything. The only explanation I have is that there's some kind of filter on your camera that's making Black people invisible.

As a result, some of us are trying to become visible by gathering in groups. Make yourself large when attacked by a bear, right? We gather and adjust the lighting by setting places on fire. Your cameras are better at capturing these moments. Yet, in the playback, we're backlit by the past, and the more the file is shared, the more compressed it becomes until all that most Americans see is high-contrast black and white. What is corrupting our files?

Your devices also have a problem with the focus. A police officer murders a Black man, but the focus is on race riots. Even on the social media apps I download, the subject keeps changing from #blacklives to #alllives.

Focus is bad. Resolution is poor. Objective video evidence is not enough to convict officers—*no charges, charges dropped, not guilty, mistrial, paid administrative leave*—or to make substantial policing reforms.

Evidence. We have so much evidence, our phones are out of storage. Evidence has been repeatedly controverted by white America. I got a news notification: *George Floyd's—I*





A protester in Minneapolis is helped by medics after being teargassed outside the city's Fifth Precinct. CHANDAN KHANNA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

can't breathe—autopsy report claims that he did not die from traumatic asphyxia but, in part, from his own underlying health conditions. Again I watched the video on my phone. The cop is kneeling on his neck. I don't get it; is the news app buggy?

Somehow your phones work well for white women who call the police on Black people as we birdwatch (*Amy Cooper*), sell water (*Alison Ettel a.k.a. Permit Patty*), barbecue (*Jennifer Schulte a.k.a. BBQ Becky*), and nap at Yale (*Sarah Braasch*). I can't tell what brand of phone they're using to make them sound so convincing.

Although I no longer live in America, sometimes I think a white woman will call the police on me for entering my own vehicle if I linger too long outside, searching for keys. She'll think I'm carjacking my absent white

self. When I go running (*Ahmaud Arbery*) at a nearby track, I leave my backpack on a bench. When I retrieve it, I worry that people will think I'm stealing my own backpack so I always open it immediately and confidently, and sip water to prove that it's mine. According to a poster taped to a tree, a backpack was stolen recently. Everyone's on high alert. I've never seen another Black person at that park. You know what that means.

There are software issues with your phones that I won't get into. My date and time function is frozen in the 18th century. My location tracker positions me crossing the Atlantic Ocean. The system updates to this point have failed to fix your devices. What you really need is a totally new operating system. ♣

Ian Williams is the author of the novel *Reproduction*, winner of the 2019 Scotiabank Giller Prize.

Esi Edugyan

'The weight of change should not rest on the shoulders of Black people'



To the woman on the plane,

It was the spring of 2018, and we were flying from Denver to Seattle. You were in late middle age, your blond hair greying at the roots, and you were travelling with a younger woman I assumed to be your daughter. After some polite greetings, I settled silently into my window seat, listening to the two of you talk. You were dismayed by a piece you'd watched on the news the previous evening in your hotel, the story of a Black Lives Matter protest turned fiery. "I don't understand why anyone would turn against the police," you said in resignation to your daughter. "Why go out of your way to make enemies of the people whose job it is to protect you?"

You did not seem like a malicious person, and you are probably kind and considerate in your daily life. But you spoke as someone who has always had faith in the system because you'd been given no first-hand reason to doubt it, without allowing that such faith is a luxury not everyone has access to, that someone whose life looks nothing like your own might have sound reasons to be angry.

Your words surprised me. Just days earlier, Stephon Clark, an unarmed 23-year-old Black man, had been shot to death in his own back-

yard. I did not understand how anyone viewing the footage of this or other fatal confrontations with police could come away speaking as you did. I felt the same unease when, after the death of George Floyd, an acquaintance expressed surprise at the vehemence of the protests shaking America. "But then, I'm not Black," she said.

I understood she was trying to be empathetic. But the weight of change shouldn't rest on the shoulders of Black people—and indeed, it doesn't. For true systemic shifts to occur, everyone has to feel the disgust and frustration; everyone has to recognize that the whole underlying structure is so irreparably broken that no one can afford to live like this anymore.

The historian Adam Hochschild has written that modern protest has its roots in England's abolitionist movement. It was the first time in history that such a substantial group of people became indignant—and remained indignant—over the rights of others. Few Englishmen had any experience with the slaves a continent away whose toil made their consumption of sugar, coffee and tobacco possible. And yet huge numbers of Britons tirelessly signed petitions; more than 300,000 refused to eat sugar; slavery in Britain eventually met its end.

Idealism is not only for the young. Nor

should it be left only to those who bear the greatest brunt of systemic inequities. Everyone must do the work. The pattern of outrage and forgetting cannot be sustained. This changes nothing in the long run. The work is never finished, in the way that the work of a modern marriage is never finished—it requires constant recommitment and vigilance, and a dismantling of archaic roles to avoid total collapse.

And so, to you, I ask this: please don't leave the work for your daughter. Or your daughter's daughter. Nothing thrives in complacency. Don't let forgetting prevail. ♣

Esi Edugyan is an author. Her most recent novel is *Washington Black*.

Desmond Cole

*One lake divided by a line.
They said it would be
different on this side.*



*To the Canada-U.S. border,
You lied to us. You promised us things would be different on this side. They are, but not different enough to save us.*

When I was a boy, I traced your shadow from underneath white paper through a page in my giant atlas. I didn't understand how you could divide Lake Ontario in half, the same water with seemingly different owners and responsibilities. But I envisioned the magic moment when weary Black freedom-seekers passed through you like ribbon at the end of a marathon, as their white captors watched helplessly from their side of the line. You promised so much.

And things are different on this side. Every day our white majority wakes up to discover we are here, and by night they have forgotten us again. They say we are so few that we need not be counted, so they don't know how many of us spent the day growing their vegetables, driving their cabs and nursing their elders. We say there are too many of us in jail, in child welfare, in immigration detention. They laugh and say, "Don't be silly, you barely exist." They tell us the real dividing line is the border.

We are African and Afro-Indigenous and Afro-Latinx, we are Bajan and Jamaican and



Marchers in Washington express their anger and outrage over George Floyd's death to police DEE DWYER



Haitian. In their remembering, the white people will boast about this diversity, like the proud kid showing you his collection of marbles. But in their forgetting, when no one's around to impress, they put us back out of sight. Once we cross over you, we must be quiet, like grateful and humbled guests in a museum.

Our Prime Minister has made a joke of our complexion more times than he can remember. He said he mistook us for a costume—he loves costumes. His supporters have warned us that if we don't forgive him, a much more awful white man will replace him. They point in your general direction, and remind us how much worse things can be if we insist on being seen. They created you to have an elsewhere to send us back to.

Indigenous writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson says her people have called that great divided lake Chi'Niibish rather than Ontario. The Nishnaabeg and other Indigenous peoples were here long before you were an idea. White settlers on either side of you could not destroy each other and didn't need to. Instead they drew you up on maps and agreed to only steal from their own sides of the line. More recently they have agreed that Black freedom-seekers who try to cross the line must now be sent back.

Despite your insistence on dividing us, we can still see through you. We see Black people in the United States setting a country that is trying to kill them on fire, and we know they are fighting with and for us, making space for us to speak, too.

Things are very different here, but not enough to save us. ♣

Desmond Cole is the author of *The Skin We're In: A Year of Black Resistance and Power*.

Eternity Martis

'Black women: It's time society fights for our lives, too'



Dear Black women,
America was built and sustained on your labour and loss.

You've picked up your signs and loudspeakers more times than you can count, carried your babies on your backs and organized groups to head to the front lines, demanding justice for your fathers, sons, friends

and partners. The tear gas and smoke from burning buildings have brought you to tears, but this was no match for the pain of losing another Black man.

You continue to lead racial equality movements, from the Combahee River Collective in 1974 to Black Lives Matter in 2013, demanding justice for others. But who demands justice for you—for me—in a world that forgets our existence?

We tell Black men and boys to watch out at night, to know their rights, to survive. We remind them that this cruel world sees them as suspicious, aggressive and inherently criminal. But who reminds us—our mothers, daughters, girlfriends and partners—that we are also in danger?

Black women, who experience “misogynoir,” a mix of misogyny and racism, are also aggressively punished by police. The cases are endless: in July 2014, 51-year-old Marlene Pinnock was pummeled by a cop on a California highway; also in California later that year, Charlena Cooks was handcuffed on her stomach while eight months pregnant for not showing her ID; and a month later, Dajerria Becton, a 14-year-old girl, was repeatedly slammed to the ground by an officer at a pool party in Texas. A 2018 U.S. study found that Black women are the group most at risk of being shot by police while unarmed.

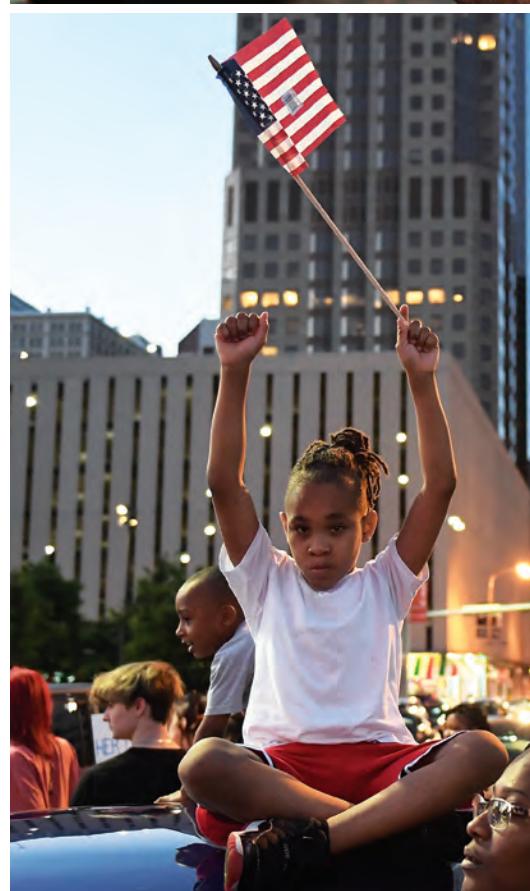
Canada has its own cases—in 1989, Sophia Cook was shot and temporarily paralyzed by Toronto police, and in 1993, Audrey Smith

was forcibly strip-searched on a Toronto street corner by police because she looked “like a drug dealer.” A 2019 Nova Scotia human rights report found that Black women are “significantly overrepresented” in street checks, being stopped 3.6 times more than white women.

Following the mysterious death of 28-year-old Sandra Bland in Texas in 2015, who died in police custody after being arrested at a traffic stop (authorities ruled it a suicide), the #SayHerName movement was galvanized, bringing awareness to the police brutality that Black, cis and trans women experience. In the years following, Black women who were killed by police faded into the collective memory. Then in March 2020, Breonna Taylor, a Black emergency medical technician, was fatally shot eight times by police who raided her Louisville, Ky., home unannounced. Her death has not been brought to justice.

There is hope. As I write this, there are protests in Toronto and Halifax for Regis Korchinski-Paquet, a 29-year-old Black and Indigenous woman who fatally fell from her Toronto apartment while in the presence of police. Meanwhile, protests for Breonna Taylor are still strong in Louisville. It’s time society fights for our lives, the way we fight for all others; America—and Canada—depend on it. ♣

Eternity Martis is the author of *They Said This Would Be Fun: Race, Campus Life, and Growing Up*, a memoir.



Rinaldo Walcott

‘The passing ceremonies marking his death did not stop the war’



To the late Essex Hemphill,

Your poetry and essays have been a force in my life since my first encounters with them. As a Black gay man, you have given me language to see myself and to be an actor in the Black community. Your moral and ethical clarity on homophobia, anti-Black racism and living life during AIDS, that other pandemic, has become part of my perspective. Your uncompromising challenge to Black, white, straight and gay remains a powerful guide for how to be in the world. In moments of crisis, I turn to your example and words.

I want to bring you up to speed on the ongoing disregard for our Black lives, on the ongoing state violence that we’re continually subjected to across North America. I want to tell you what has been kindled for me with the brutal murder of George Floyd in Minnesota by the police.

Essex, I live north of the 49th parallel where we are repeatedly told we have it better than those in the U.S. I live in a place where our current Prime Minister wore blackface so many times he could not recall, and where Black life is given short shrift, too. In Ontario, where I live, Black people are more likely to be living in poverty and substandard housing. We are over-policed and we are 20 times



Former NFL player Tyrone Carter hugs a protester at the site where George Floyd was killed JERRY HOLT/STAR TRIBUNE/GETTY IMAGES

more likely to die in encounters with the police compared to a white person. But there has been something animated by the death of George that is deeply familiar and that calls out for something more—something beyond mere redress, arrest and conviction.

This time we must work toward an abolitionist future for our world. It will begin with redirecting billion-dollar police budgets to communities in distress, giving them access to better housing, health care and transportation, and ownership over how conflict is managed in their communities. Abolition of governance by violence is the only option for our future now.

The calm solemnity on the face of the police officer as he knelt the life out of George Floyd will stay with me for the rest of my life. While George's death was the most sensational one recently, here in Toronto we lost Regis Korchinski-Paquet under suspicious circumstances; in February we lost Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia while he was jogging; Breonna Taylor in Kentucky while she was sleeping in her bed; Tony McDade, a trans man in Miami.

Tony's death in particular would have hit you hard in the chest, Essex, because we were reminded that some Black deaths can matter less. Hearing of Tony's death made me recall your poem *When My Brother Fell*:

*I only knew he had fallen
and the passing ceremonies
marking his death
did not stop the war.*

Essex, I am swinging wildly between anger and despair, between sadness and outrage, but I won't let them see me cry. Tears are not what is called for at this time. ♣

Rinaldo Walcott is a professor of Black diaspora cultural studies at the University of Toronto.



Protests across the U.S. began in May and continued into June: a young girl in St. Louis on May 29 (left); a protester in Los Angeles on May 27 MICHAEL B. THOMAS/GETTY IMAGES; JASON ARMOND/LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY IMAGES

Lawrence Hill

*Vote that Willy Lump Lump
out of the White House*



Dear Dad,

It has been a century since you were born in Missouri; 75 years since you served as a Black, non-commissioned officer in the American army in World War II; 67 years since you moved to Canada after marrying my white mother in

Washington; 58 years since you became the first director of the Ontario Human Rights Commission; and 17 years since you have been resting in Toronto's Mount Pleasant Cemetery.

I remember you on Sunday mornings: you would play Count Basie on your record player, and using a miniature fork, you'd pry smoked oysters from a tin and place them onto Ritz crackers. With mustard.

After the war, when I was just 10, you told me that your own father told you that you were not made to live in a segregated nation. After you moved to Toronto with mom, you made sure that your three children knew that Canada and the United States were founded on misdeeds—stealing land from Indigenous peoples, disenfranchising and killing them, and using enslaved peoples.

Since you've been gone, a Saskatchewan farmer was acquitted of second-degree murder after shooting an Indigenous man, who was just sitting in an SUV, in the head. Cops are killing unarmed Black folks. The man in the White House waits for peaceful protestors to be teargassed so he can walk to a photo-op outside a church where he does not worship.

Your slender fingers ensnare another Ritz cracker. Playfully, because you laugh to survive, you drum up your most derisive term for an ignoramus and say, "That no-account in the White House is a Willy Lump Lump.

"Do not let him and his enablers out of your sight. Raise hell until the cows come home. Put more into education and anti-poverty programs. And vote that fool and all of his down-ballot folks out of office."

Your words continue to rise out of my soul: "They have no respect for Black folks, Muslims, Mexicans, refugees or women," I hear you say. "They seek to turn the United States of America into a dictatorship. Don't believe it? Hitler was elected. Give that Willy Lump Lump and his people another inch, and they'll pervert the things that we hold most sacred."

Dad? From the Mount Pleasant Cemetery gravestone etched with the name "Daniel G. Hill," *What else have you got for me?*

You switch the record to Duke Ellington, and start humming *Take the A Train*. "If you think it's just an American problem, you're a fool. In the 1950s, your mother and I could not rent an apartment in Toronto. In the past 20 years, dozens of Black, Indigenous and people of colour have been killed by police in Canada."

I imagine you offering me a cracker. The oysters remind us of family and all the great things we miss from the United States. You lift your chin as your voice trails off: *Keep up the good fight in Canada. We have the same problems here, but we're just in denial.* ♣

Lawrence Hill is the author of 10 books, including *The Book of Negroes* and *The Illegal*.

Sandy Hudson

'We must defund the police; it is the only option'



Dear white people,

I have a singular focus in my appeal to you today, and I need you to hear me. Our lives depend on it. It's time to defund the police.

I believe that we can do better than the slipshod "safety services" the police claim to provide for us. I know many of you are unfamiliar with the everyday activities of the police. They do not patrol your neighbourhoods under the guise of providing "safety." They do not stop you on the street under the pretense of "protection." They do not kill your people with a casual and consistent regularity that announces, *Your life is worthless.*

When they killed 26-year-old D'Andre

Campbell in Brampton, Ont., this year, the police proved to us that they are ill-equipped to provide emergency mental health services. When in early 2018, bystander Bethany McBride recorded a Black boy being brutalized by fare inspectors in Toronto, police showed that they could not be trusted to help patrol our transit systems and campuses. In 2016, when an off-duty Toronto police officer and his brother beat Dafonte Miller so badly that they took his eye, police showed they cannot be held accountable for their actions. And when they refused to properly investigate the death of 26-year-old trans woman Sumaya Dalmar in 2015, the cops confirmed, yet again, that our deaths are not taken seriously.

Perhaps to many of you, defunding the





Police in Minneapolis move toward protesters on May 30 (above); a woman gets help rinsing her eyes with milk after being targeted with pepper spray JASON ARMOND/LOS ANGELES TIMES /GETTY IMAGES



police sounds impossible. But Black people will continue to fight against accepted wisdom: we must defund the police; it is the only option. Through your inaction, you show us your inherent belief system—a Black life lived with dignity is unreasonable, and a liberated Black life is impossible.

White people, I need you to look beyond the limitations of your own making and understand that the possibility of my liberated existence requires more than a retweet, an opinion piece, and even more than attending a demonstration. That's the easy way out.

How can we expect an institution that has failed all attempts at reform to suddenly refrain from targeting, maiming and killing Black people because of a new police chief, mayor or policy? I am asking you to refuse an approach to safety that is simply good enough for you, and absolutely unjust to me.

I need you to believe that, for Black people, this maddening cycle of trauma and despair is not inevitable. It only becomes so when we fail to evolve. ♣

Sandy Hudson is one of the co-founders of Black Lives Matter Toronto and a law student at UCLA.

Andray Domise

Canada's own legacy of oppression



To my brothers and sisters in America,

I owe you a debt of gratitude, more than you can possibly know. I watch as protests blossom across the

United States with collective anger at the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the hundreds of Black people whose lives were brutally ended at the hands of police, since the death of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Mo.

The moment of course belongs to the families of the dead, and the pushback against police brutality, but the never-ending and increasingly shocking deaths put a spark to the fumes of the broken promise of the American Dream. This wouldn't have been possible without the persistent stench of systemic anti-Black racism in America.

You don't need statistics to know America

has cheated you out of a legacy. That your ancestors' work has endured cycles of co-opting and plunder. But the numbers prove what you know, and at the moment the numbers state that roughly one in every 1,000 Black men can expect to be killed by police. The numbers show that the income gap between Black women and white women is almost as large as the gap between white women and white men, despite the fact that Black women are the fastest rising demographic in higher education.

In Canada, other writers, advocates, activists and I, parse what little information we can get—between meagre data collected by our government agencies, and work by non-profit agencies and universities—into a patchwork of evidence that this country has its own legacy of racist oppression. Of broken promises and cyclical violence.

You may not know this about us. You may also be unaware that Canada—despite forever touting its status as the final stop on the Underground Railroad—aligned itself against your lives when it mattered.

As droves of Black Americans fled the violence of Jim Crow, Canada's government and residents organized to refuse you entry and even deport those fortunate enough to clear the bureaucratic obstacles. You may not know about the vile dispatches from government agencies and even the daily newspapers, of people feeling “sorry that this country should be saddled with those that the southern States are only too glad to be rid of.”

You may not know this ideology of anti-Blackness persists today, as many of the most virulent racists who've embedded themselves in America were born and raised right here in Canada.

But in my duties as a writer and historian—as I discover ever more about white North America's wretched behaviour toward a people who've endured ancestral and contemporary trauma that is unimaginable to most nations—I discover stories of beautiful struggles, of pain transmuted to the iron resolve of resistance.

In your current struggle I feel the spirit of Harriet Tubman and Nat Turner, of L'Ouverture and Cudjoe. I know that you will endure, and that you will prevail.

For your endurance, and so much else, I owe a debt of gratitude to Black people putting their bodies, minds and lives on the line across America.

I am because we are. ♣

Andray Domise is a contributing editor at *Maclean's* and a historian.





A young woman takes a knee in front of police officers during a protest in San Jose, Calif., on May 29

DAI SUGANO/MEDIA NEWS GROUP/THE MERCURY NEWS/GETTY IMAGES



Of 63,000 small businesses in Brooklyn, one in three may never reopen; 'I have to keep going,' says Mack, manager at the K & S on Utica Ave.

UNITED STATES

Avenues of sorrow

Brooklyn, long a home to America's strivers, became an epicentre of the pandemic. Will the place that forever reinvents itself ever be the same?



ALLEN ABEL

IT WAS TOWARD the end of April in the plague year 2020, on the flatland of outer Brooklyn, NY. Going about their daily business far from the brownstone wonderlands closer to Manhattan, folks coming out of the Utica Laundromat and the Dollar General and the Tu Bohío Dominican grocery began to notice a noxious odor emanating from a U-Haul that was parked against the curb at number 2037A Utica Ave.

It was the bouquet of death—the stench of a cord of human bodies stacked like firewood in the sun-baked, uncooled truck. The enterprise

at 2037A was a funeral parlour licensed to a man named Andrew T. Cleckley; his picture was on the marquee. But after two months of rampaging infection, so many of the good people of Brooklyn had been conquered by COVID-19 that even Andrew Cleckley's ablest embalmers weren't nimble enough to unzip and wax and export all of them to Brooklyn's cemeteries before the weather turned warm and they putrefied in their eternal sleeping bags and stank up the neighbourhood.

It was not only at poor Cleckley's, of course, that the dead had overwhelmed the living. No place on this wounded planet had been stricken more devastatingly than the African-American and Caribbean and Hispanic

districts of the Greatest City in the World, with their ethnic lunchrooms, bustling dollar marts, boarded-up failures, and hushed little chapels of grief. All across Brooklyn and the Bronx and Queens, orderlies had been forklifting bodies into rented vans and storing them in closets and corridors for weeks.

There were zip codes in Brooklyn where the rate of death was 30 times higher than in the wealthier, whiter zones. Utica Avenue was one of the worst affected. Out here, the dead were the strivers who, even as the great city's elites Zoomed home in fear, still had to strap-hang the subways, crush the buses, restock the panic-stripped emporiums, cleanse the pathogenic countertops and comfort the

PHOTOGRAPHS BY IDRIS SOLOMON

brown-eyed great-grandmothers who, through no sin of their own but poverty, were gasping toward Jesus alone.

One of the decedents in the U-Haul truck may (or may not) have been the parent of a woman named Tamisha Covington, who told the *New York Post* that the coffin that came out of Cleckley's was much too narrow to possibly contain the remains of her mom, who weighed in at 140 kg before the virus swept her and more than 20,000 other New Yorkers away.

"We don't know what's in that casket," Covington said, pledging to find out what really happened in a macabre game of hide-and-seek. This was what underclass Brooklyn was like in the plague year of 2020.

The rotting corpses, the overwhelmed mortuaries, the forgotten poor—to venture here from Washington, costumed in melancholy and a mask, wasn't just reporting. For me, it was going home.

It was sunny May on Utica Avenue. There was a battered Toyota Sienna in front of Cleckley's, defiantly blocking a bus stop, the disgraced mortician's driveway and a fire hydrant—fuggedaboutit, it's Brooklyn. The rear seat had been removed and there was a catafalque on wheels in the hold, eager for COVID's next cadaver.

A FedEx truck rolled up and the driver came out with an envelope and rammed it into Cleckley's overflowing letterbox.

"Probably another lawsuit," the FedEx man said.

A young woman named Gabrielle Smith was sitting on her stoop on Avenue M, sipping tea. She remembered smelling something unpleasant from the U-Haul and her shock at learning what it was. "We thought everything was done correctly over there,"

she said. Smith believed that she might have taken a touch of the corona herself, back in March—chills, sore throat, coughing—but she hadn't been tested and she hadn't died, and in Brooklyn in 2020, that was a pretty good outcome.

"I never get sick like that," Smith said.

"If there was a vaccine, would you take it?" I asked her.

"No," she answered. "There are better things we can take for our health that come from the earth."

"Is this God's vengeance on New York City?"

"No. No. No," the tea drinker replied. "Man made this. We have been manipulating nature in the laboratories and that is where this came from. 'Man made this.'"

LONG, LONG AGO, a few blocks off Utica Avenue, there was a 10-stool soda fountain and newsstand to which three brothers, combat veterans all, gave the best decades of their lives, spending 10 hours a day on their feet, seven days a week, to clear maybe three hundred dollars a month. They were the Abel brothers—my father Ben, and George, his twin, and Davey—and now, with their store long since sold to newcomers from Korea, and with the Borough of Churches ravaged by disease, it was not a stretch to suggest that the corpses in the hallways and the U-Hauls of Brooklyn were not anonymous strangers.

They were our customers.

No fairy tale could match growing up in a Brooklyn candy store in the 1950s, of revelling in a private castle of comic books and Lady Borden ice cream, with my dad behind the

counter in his apron, baseball on the radio, and the Yiddish-speaking cook we called "Pot Roast Willie" boiling beef tongue for the Special of the Day. But eventually, the Abel brothers of Brooklyn gave way to the Ding sisters of Beijing, and my sugary playhouse became the Wing Hing Loon ("Eternal Prosperity") grocery and lottery stand, and the little boy grew grey.

(In the 1970s, after my parents divorced, my mother and her second husband went into the same unprofitable industry. One of their ventures was a little coffee shop on Utica Avenue, just down the boulevard from Cleckley's, that in 2020 had been reborn as the Dominican grocery called Tu Bohío.)

Now, the Wing Hing Loon was shuttered, perhaps forever, its menacing grate a barricade between the morbid reality of the new Brooklyn and the remembered paradise of the old. (One in three of the borough's 63,000 small businesses may never reopen, a charity called the Bring Back Brooklyn Fund calculated.) But across the street, in what had been Nat Birnbaum's apothecary in another century, the avid crowds swarmed.

"I've got paper towels," the manager of the K & S Department Store was merrily griping. "I've got toilet paper. I've got masks and gloves. I've got everything but the Big Kahuna."

"What's the Big Kahuna?" the little boy from the candy store wondered.

"Lysol!" laughed the manager, a hearty man named Mike Mack. "They tell me, 'Maybe by Christmas.' That will be a great Christmas present—'Here you go, darling, I got you some Lysol.'"

Smith hadn't been tested and she hadn't died. In Brooklyn in 2020, that was a pretty good outcome.



The Andrew J. Cleckley Funeral Home, where the bodies piled up; the Wing Hing Loon grocery, formerly the Abel brothers' soda fountain

Thirty and more years ago, Mike Mack's house on Albany Avenue shared an alley and a backyard—fenced off today and abandoned to the weeds—with the Abel brothers' luncheonette.

"Why has this happened to New York City?" I asked him.

"Number one," he answered, speaking in capital letters, "PEOPLE DON'T LISTEN. I don't care how high and mighty you are, people need to LISTEN."

"Number two, if you didn't die in your sleep and you woke up this morning, PAY ATTENTION."

There was a number three, as well: "CLOSED MOUTHS DON'T GET FED," said Mike Mack, though it was hard to imagine his being silent in the face of extremity for very long.

"They don't get Lysol, either," I noted.

"The chain has been broken," Mack said. "It took two months to break what took two years to build. It's going to take a minute to fix it. We need to get back to work. If we don't get back to work, we're DONE."

There were other links that never could be mended—Mack had lost his beloved cousin Kim, the family baker.

"Did you ever have carrot cake?" he sighed. "Her carrot cake could knock you out." But it was the virus that had kayoed cousin Kim: "It took her quick, two days. She was kind of overweight and diabetic and had high blood pressure. They were trying to get medicine in her, but there wasn't enough time."

Mike Mack stood at the entrance to the K & S and, as a preventive against thievery, checked shoppers' purses and their takeout lunches from the China Express across the street, which used to be the Behrens family's German delicatessen.

"I have one daughter," Mack said. "She gives me the spark. She keeps me going. When cousin Kim died, I realized that I have two sisters, I have no brothers, I have my daughter, I am the only man in the family."

"It all comes down to me," he said, and it was difficult to tell through his mask but he may have been weeping. "I have to keep going, because it all comes down to me."

THE SIGN ON the door of Barone's Funeral Home on Avenue D said "No walk-ins."

What could you do in Brooklyn now but laugh?

The flower shop next door to the magic candy store had become Kennedy Fried Chicken.



Rowe, owner of Rowe's Restaurant, says the desire for staying is greater than the desire to give up

Amici's Pizza was Rowe's Restaurant, serving Jamaican food. An 80-year-old Ukrainian named Semeon Zemovich had bought out Vito's Shoe Repair and he was standing in the open doorway, just for something to do.

"If New York no come back, America dead," Zemovich said.

There was a hearse in the driveway next to Barone's and cars were idling along my beloved, broken, beautiful childhood street and mourners were blinking out into the sunlight. A block away, at St. Thérèse of Lisieux Roman Catholic Church, they were live-streaming a mass in Haitian *kreyòl*

and I could hear the pious organ even through the bolted doors.

Dudley Rowe, successor to Amici's, had come to Brooklyn from St. James Parish, Montego Bay, Jamaica. His restaurant was unlit but open—the chairs inverted on the long, communal tables, the steam cabinet bare at mid-morning, a few hot patties in a glassed display. Rowe reckoned that he had lost 80 per cent of his income, but he said, "The desire for staying is greater than the desire for giving up. If you give up, you lose everything. If you go on, there is always greener grass."

"If I had to do it all over again," said Dudley Rowe, "I'd own a liquor store."

Scrubbing the syrup containers and the ice-cream scoops near midnight, washing

the coffee cups before the pre-dawn opening, Ben Abel used to say the same thing. But the Abel brothers never had to survive COVID-19.

"I know six of my customers personally who passed away," Dudley Rowe said. "One man, I let him run a tab, and he would pay me every two weeks. He died before he could pay!"

The deficit was \$47, and there were people in Brooklyn in 2020 to whom \$47 was a considerable amount of money.

"I know that, biblically, God visited plagues on men because of their behaviour," Rowe philosophized, trying to make sense of the calamity. "I am not putting the blame for this on anyone. I could blame the governor, the mayor, the president—initially, they did not handle this in the proper way. There was too much politics. New York is the world city. When they saw it starting in China, they should have prepared. They should have known it would come here."

It was too late now for should-haves, too early for greener grass. On the outer flanks of my Brooklyn, the most wretched winter in history had finally passed, leaving a lesson in the epidemiology of caring and the resilience of the human heart.

"When it just started, the first week when the city shut down, I decided that I was going to close," said Dudley Rowe. "Then some folks called me from Kings County Hospital and asked me to donate food for them. I could not give up. I felt like a billion dollars."

"That's the best feeling in the world. When there are people who need you." ♣

My **wife** works at Mount Sinai Hospital in Labour & Delivery. She's a trooper and hero. My **aunt** works as a cook at the Main Street Terrace Long Term Care Home, preparing wonderful meals for all of the residents. My **niece**, a recent nursing graduate who works at St. Joseph's Health Centre, is my hero because of her tenacity and bravery. **Natasha**, an ICU nurse, is the most selfless person I know. My sister **Vanessa** works at Markham Stouffville Hospital as a Respiratory Therapist. She is on the front line, assisting people who require ventilators knowing that she is placing herself in danger every single day she goes to work. My cousin **Heather** is a Registered Nurse in the ICU at Toronto General Hospital. She is working day in and day out to care for patients suffering with COVID-19. **Carol** works at Women's College Hospital. She has always been a superstar, no more so than in these challenging times. **Brittany** is my total hero. She is a social worker who goes to St. Mike's every day to face this awful virus and she unselfishly helps others with absolute courage and commitment. My second cousin **Natasha** is an ER nurse at Mackenzie Health Hospital. She is in the COVID-19 trenches for 12 hours a day. She is strong, compassionate and kind. She is my hero. My daughter **Michelle's** courage and sacrifice for her own health make her our true hero. She has never complained or wished to stay home; she's even more eager to take shifts to help as much as possible. **Charmaine** is a nurse supporting patients at CAMH. **Sunitha** is a food service staff member at St. Joseph's Health Care in London, Ontario. She loves her work, knowing the elderly she serves every day would suffer without enough people to help. **Donna** has served as a nurse at St. Joseph's Health Centre in Toronto for 27 years. She is committed and dedicated to her patients, always dependable and accepting of the long shifts during this crisis. **Georgia** supports the health and well-being of employees as an Occupational Health Nurse at Markham Stouffville Hospital. My hero is my **life partner**, a Registered Midwife and RN in York Region. She is a dedicated and experienced professional who provides care, insight, guidance, reassurance, wisdom and a wonderful sense of humour to women expecting and delivering newborn family members in these trying and anxious times. **Kimberly** is a pediatric oncology nurse at SickKids, helping families deal with their children's very scary health issues at a particularly scary time. **Michelle** works at a long-term care facility in Calgary as a Therapy Assistant. She goes to work every day not knowing what she will face, but is willing to be re-purposed however they

need. My very dear **friend** is a paramedic, risking his and his family's well-being every day he goes to work to respond to emergencies. A **neighbour** of ours works at Credit Valley Hospital in Mississauga as a Cardiology Technologist, going into COVID-positive rooms to do ECGs as necessary. **Julie** works in East York and is a Registered Practical Nurse, doing home care visits for patients with limited mobility. She has such enormous strength. We are very proud of her. **Komal** is a Registered Nurse in New York, working 4 to 5 days a week for 12 hour-shifts, leaving her 18-month daughter and husband at home knowing she is at high risk every day. **Patti** works at Stevenson Memorial Hospital in Alliston, Ontario, leading the team that registers patrons of the hospital. **Roxanne** is a healthcare provider at Muskoka Hills Retirement Villa in Bracebridge. She goes into work every day with a smile on her face and a love for her patients. Their health and care is her passion. **Andrea** is a PSW at North York General and Brampton Civic Hospital. She approaches this mission with a spirit

OUR HEROES- THANK YOU.

of gratitude and blessing, always looking at those around her, instead of at herself. **Mary** is a psychotherapist and mental health nurse, continuing to provide mental health counselling by phone for her patients during this much needed time. **Marianna** works at North York General Hospital as a Registered Dietitian, continuing to show daily strength and courage. **Lisa** works at the Fairhaven Long Term Care Home in Peterborough, Ontario as a PSW. She is known to go above and beyond without complaint. I am proud to call her a life-long friend. **Editha** is an RN at a nursing home and took care of one of their two COVID-positive cases. **Arlene** is a charge nurse at Humber River Hospital. One of her

biggest challenges is managing her patients' COVID symptoms, because it can get bad very quickly, all the while making sure her non-COVID patients have equal care. She is a true inspiration in these troubled times. My daughter **Brandie** is a member of the housekeeping staff at Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie, mainly in the emergency, ICU and operating theatres. My friend since high school, **Lisa**, works tirelessly as an RN in Labour and Delivery at Toronto's North York General, continuing to bring joy and laughs to her patients and colleagues in a stressful time. **Tabo** is a nephrologist at Scarborough General Hospital, treating vulnerable patients with kidney disease. Kind and empathetic, he makes the extra effort to overcome distancing challenges, reaching out to the families of his patients so that, even though they might not be allowed to be with their loved ones, they know what's going on every step of the way.

Who is **your healthcare hero**, unrelenting in their strength and care in this once-in-a-generation crisis? The **first 1,000 readers** to submit a nomination will receive a free one-year magazine subscription voucher to send to their hero as a small token of our gratitude. (Heroes can select their choice of *Toronto Life*, *Maclean's*, *Chatelaine*, *Châtelaine* or *Today's Parent*.) Visit stjoseph.com/insight/ourheroes to nominate.



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RECOVERY

A NEW DEAL

Canada is facing a crisis comparable to the Great Depression. Is a total economic rethink our only hope?

BY JASON KIRBY · On March 4, 1933, Franklin Roosevelt placed his hand on a bible opened to a passage extolling the virtue of charity and was sworn in as president. Around him the Great Depression was at its horrifying worst. America's banking system was near total collapse, the economy had shrunk by one-third, and one in four workers were jobless, with many more living on sharply reduced wages. Soup kitchens overflowed with the poor and hungry while as many as two million Americans were homeless. As FDR told the crowd that day, fear itself—"nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror"—stood between the desolation of that moment and recovery.

Over the following days and weeks the new administration unleashed a dizzying assault on the economic crisis, providing relief and jobs for farmers, the unemployed and the homeless while launching ambitious projects to overhaul the nation's infrastructure, including roads, bridges and power dams. The fear soon started to wane, albeit slowly—to this day the record for the biggest one-day gain for the Dow Jones Industrial Index (for those presidents who like to keep score of such things) remains March 15, 1933, when stocks were allowed to start trading for the first time since Roosevelt's inauguration, though it would take until the 1950s for the market to reclaim its pre-depression peak.

But Roosevelt intended his "New Deal for the American people"—a term he'd first used when he accepted the Democratic nomination the year before—to go far beyond simply reassembling a shattered economy. Three weeks after taking office Roosevelt published *Looking Forward*, a book drawn from his



speeches and articles during the previous year, in which he explained that the New Deal was "plain English for a changed concept of the duty and responsibility of government toward economic life." It would not be enough just to staunch the downturn with emergency relief, he wrote. "It corrects nothing. From now on we must be far more concerned with the quality of life itself. Concentration upon purely temporary relief measures must not cause a 'freezing' of national progress along lines of social equality and justice." The result would be a sweep of new programs and laws, including social security, minimum wage and unemployment insurance to name just a few, that fundamentally reshaped American society.

Almost 90 years later there are some obvious parallels between the challenges Roosevelt faced and those gripping governments today. In the U.S., more than 38 million Americans have filed for unemployment benefits since the COVID-19 lockdown began in March. The unemployment rate hit 14.7 per cent in April, the highest since the Great Depres-

sion, and some economists believe it may have reached 20 per cent in May. Appearing on CNN in April, Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic nominee for president, described the pandemic crisis as "probably the biggest challenge in modern history," adding that "it may not dwarf but eclipse what FDR faced."

Canada is enduring an economic crisis on the same grim scale, with more than three million out of work and the unemployment rate at 13 per cent. In February, prior to the crisis, more than 83 per cent of prime working-age Canadians were employed. Since then that figure has plunged to just 72.6 per cent.

The emergency response from governments and central banks has been historic, in both speed and scale. Since March, governments worldwide have spent more than \$10 trillion to stabilize their locked-down economies, while central banks have deployed trillions more to mitigate a wider financial crisis. Here in Canada, Ottawa and the provinces have so far deployed in excess of \$300 billion in direct and indirect spending as the economy was



The unemployed and homeless line up for food in New York City during the Great Depression

put into deep freeze, including payments to workers, wage subsidies for businesses, loans and tax deferrals.

As astonishing as those dollar figures are, they are but the first step in what is certain to be a gruelling and costly rebuild. With provinces slowly lifting emergency restrictions that were put in place to tame the spread of COVID-19, economists, business leaders and lobbyists are eyeing the stimulus measures that will inevitably follow. And as in Roosevelt's America of the 1930s, many see an opportunity in this crisis to rethink the economy and society.

"We're going to need bold transformative thinking," says Kevin Page, the president and CEO of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy at the University of Ottawa who previously served as Canada's first parliamentary budget officer. "Once you get to

this side of the mountain on that [pandemic] curve, then you've got to launch something that really inspires people and instills confidence, so people can see how you're going to take the economy out of the freezer and get it going again. We could see an enormous outlay that would really transform the way the economy works and the way people live."

'IMAGINE YOU'RE A WAR-RAVAGED ECONOMY. DO YOU REBUILD THE BUILDINGS EXACTLY AS THEY WERE?'

Until now, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has cautioned that the government's attention must stay for the time being on addressing the immediate health crisis. "Right now our focus is on getting Canadians through this," he said

during one of his daily briefings in mid-May. But in the same briefing Trudeau indicated his gaze was turning to what comes next. "One of the things we're very much thinking about is how do we build back better? How do we look at what this pandemic has... highlighted around needs or gaps in Canada, and how do

we look to rebuild and recover in a way that advances us in the right direction."

Pressure is already mounting on Trudeau to lay out his plan. Will it focus on short-term so-called "shovel ready" infrastructure projects alongside more conventional measures to juice industries back to life, or will it seek to begin a more fundamental reimagining of the economy? Just as critical will be questions about what political and fiscal limitations the minority Liberal government will face as it tries to implement its stimulus program. The answers to those questions could determine the direction Canada's economy takes for years, or even decades, to come.

"I look at it this way," says Kevin Milligan, a professor of economics at the University of British Columbia. "Imagine as an extreme example that you're a war-ravaged economy with your physical infrastructure half destroyed, and you're starting to rebuild.

Do you rebuild the buildings exactly as they were, or do you rebuild in a new design of where you want to go in the future?

“When you’re in the rebuilding phase, this is the opportunity to build toward the goals you want to have for the economy.”

THE GREAT UNCERTAINTY hanging over any discussion about what stimulus might look like—indeed the asterisk to all conversations about the economy right now—comes down to how the pandemic unfolds this year and next. In Roosevelt’s inaugural address he could assure Americans that as severe as their common difficulties were, “they concern, thank God, only material things.” The cost of the present crisis—measured in the deaths of 7,300 Canadians and 370,000 more worldwide—goes far beyond material losses. Without a strong handle on testing and contact tracing, let alone a reliable timeline for a vaccine that can be delivered to the masses, all planning is theoretical. And this doesn’t even account for the possibility of a second-wave outbreak, which could force renewed lockdowns across the country. “We are still very much in the emergency phase of this,” Trudeau said in his press briefing on May 27.

Still, that emergency phase, highlighted by the \$40-billion (and counting) Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) payments to workers impacted by the lockdowns, is winding down, says a federal official who spoke with *Maclean’s* on background. Assuming that health outcomes—like case counts and hospital capacity—move in the right direction, the restarting phase will see the first round of stimulus targeted at industries decimated by the crisis. (Economists have stressed none of Ottawa’s actions to date should be thought of as stimulus—they are survival measures meant to ensure there would be something left of the economy after the pandemic passes.)

Among the industries clamouring for support: Canada’s major airlines, who have been forced to reduce their schedules by 95 per cent. Before any money flows, however, the government is conducting a deep dive analysis on various sectors to determine what impediments to growth will exist once they reopen. In early May, Industry Minister Navdeep Bains launched a strategy council “to assess the scope and depth of COVID-19’s impact on industries and inform government’s understanding of specific sectoral pressure.”

As this salvage operation gets under way, it would be a mistake to try to preserve all

the jobs in the industries hit hardest by the pandemic, says Milligan. Sectors like hospitality and airlines could take several years to recover, he notes, while the energy sector will not realistically see new investment any time soon. “You don’t want to put those parts of the economy on ice and lock people in place until this abates,” he says. “We need to rethink how to reemploy that labour in other sectors.”

That rethink will be part of what is expected to be a much more comprehensive stimulus recovery plan aimed at rebuilding Canada’s post-pandemic economy. When it will come is unknown. Federal officials say it’s premature to discuss details given the government has yet to even formally create a team to begin the process of designing it. (Informal strategizing continues apace—several cabinet ministers recently invited Boston Consulting Group, on an unpaid basis, to advise them on what policies other countries are pursuing with an eye to “charting the course for future-forward recovery,” the *Globe and Mail* reported.)

Yet Trudeau’s own comments during his briefings, and elements of his government’s emergency response to date, point to a far more activist stimulus response than we’ve

seen during any downturn in recent decades. In his daily press briefings he has linked stimulus to vaguely expressed policies like “more equality,” “more digital” and “less pollution, greener outcomes.” When Trudeau announced last month a federal loan program for large companies impacted by COVID-19, he included as a condition that recipients must show they are committed to fighting climate change.

That stipulation rankled many Conservatives and oil patch supporters, who instead called for the Trudeau government to abandon its carbon tax as a way to stimulate the energy sector. “This is the exact wrong time to relax carbon pricing,” says Milligan. “When you’re in a rebuilding phase, you want to make sure that the sectors that are pushed to grow coming out of this get us to the goals we want as a society. Canada has set out a goal for 2050 of carbon neutrality. We should keep that goal in mind.”

Clean energy companies and lobbyists are already positioning themselves to be part of the green stimulus windfall. Several groups have formed to push for a massive investment in cleantech as part of the Trudeau government’s plan.



Canada’s major airlines have been forced to reduce their schedules by 95 per cent

The Trudeau government would not necessarily be alone on the world stage if it were to pursue a green stimulus program—in late May, the European Commission proposed a \$1.5-trillion stimulus package, including funding for renewables, electric cars and hydrogen technology that the Bloomberg news agency characterized as “the world’s most climate-ambitious stimulus package.” Likewise the government of South Korea unveiled an \$85-billion “Korean-version New Deal” on June 1 with support for green technologies as well as investment to promote the use of artificial intelligence and fifth generation (5G) wireless networks across the economy.

Others see a post-pandemic opening for sweeping reform of social programs that leads to a national guaranteed minimum-income program. “What the pandemic has done is made us all recognize how precarious the veneer of our lives is,” says Evelyn Forget, a professor of economics at the University of Manitoba and long-time researcher of the basic income concept, which she describes as insurance against job insecurity.

The inadequacy of Canada’s current employment insurance program, which ignores free-

lance and gig workers, became apparent in the early days of the lockdown when Ottawa had to replace it with CERB and its monthly \$2,000 payment to people who lost income due to COVID-19. The opportunity now exists, Forget says, to evolve CERB into a targeted minimum-income program once the pandemic has passed. “There is a will right now,” she says. “I don’t think Canadians are going to be willing to let low-income working people bear the consequences of this pandemic.”

At some point soon, planning must turn to action, says Page, starting with a fiscal update. “[Trudeau] has been ambivalent about that, saying there is too much uncertainty,” he says. “But think of the uncertainty FDR faced and that didn’t stop him.”

AS THE TRUDEAU government’s stimulus plan does take shape, one topic is certain to feature more prominently than all others in the debate. As incoming Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem told Reuters in early April: “I expect there will be economic damage and there will be a need for some more traditional types of stimulus. The top of that list would be infrastructure spending.”

Shortly after, Infrastructure Minister Catherine McKenna told the *Globe* she’d been “reading up” on Roosevelt’s New Deal while hunting for “shovel ready” projects the government could quickly ramp up to stimulate growth.

Building bridges, roads and tunnels is, admittedly, the first thing that comes to mind for most people when they hear the word stimulus. Many will recall the green and blue “Action Plan” signs that blanketed the country after 2009 as the Stephen Harper government rolled out its effort to combat the Great Recession. (Make no mistake—if someone in the Trudeau government isn’t already devising a slogan and brand design for its stimulus scheme, they soon will be.) But “infrastructure” is also a term whose definition politicians have increasingly stretched over the years far beyond the realm of dusty hard hats, and that’s enabled them to fill that spending bucket with whatever projects suit their goals. The Trudeau government’s 12-year, \$188-billion Investing in Canada Plan, launched in 2016, has social, cultural, green and recreational infrastructure components that critics have long complained dwarfed projects that improved Canada’s crumbling trade and transportation systems. Another persistent problem McKenna must fix: the plodding

pace with which the Liberals have been able to get the money out the door.

Regardless of what form new infrastructure takes, it’s an approach welcomed by municipalities that have seen their finances collapse amid the pandemic. Calgary, for instance, faces a \$235-million budget shortfall, while Toronto’s budget gap stands at \$1.5 billion. “Investing directly in Canada’s communities and local infrastructure projects will help get this country back on its feet after COVID-19,” says Bill Karsten, president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities lobby group, who adds the federation is in talks with the government about infrastructure programs. “But the fact is there will be no recovery unless municipalities first get the support they need to get out of this financial crisis.” Some relief came early in June when Ottawa said it would advance \$2.2 billion in gas tax funding to municipalities.

Not everyone is enthused by talk of infrastructure stimulus, to say the least. “A public works program is obviously just dumb,” says Stephen Gordon, an economics professor at Université Laval, who notes there is little excess capacity in the construction industry so it would not absorb many job seekers.

But Gordon points to two more fundamental problems that raise questions about the effectiveness of infrastructure right now. One is that this crisis differs from conventional

downturns, including the Great Depression, which were driven by a collapse in demand that could be reignited through government intervention, like the New Deal. The present crisis instead entails both a crippling of global supply chains and a hit to demand since consumers are either prevented from going out to spend or feel nervous doing so until there’s a vaccine. “The usual tools of a standard recession, paying people to dig ditches and then fill them back in again, that’s not going to solve the problem here,” he says.

The other flaw is that the recession has hit the service sector and women particularly hard, and women shoulder considerably more of the burden of childcare in households. As such, he calls the traditional recession-fighting recipe of infrastructure a “cruel joke.”

Milligan has heard these complaints from his economist colleagues before, but still sees infrastructure as crucial to fighting this crisis, even if it requires a different approach than in the past. For instance, a social infrastructure program could expand and overhaul

‘THE USUAL TOOLS OF A RECESSION, PAYING PEOPLE TO DIG DITCHES, THAT’S NOT GOING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM’





Digging out of a recession usually means infrastructure projects, but supply chains are crippled

daycares so that parents can return to work more easily. The point is, the pandemic will leave a deep and lasting mark on parts of the economy that will require every tool at our disposal. “We’re still in a world with very low interest rates,” he says. “The case for infrastructure is still there.”

LAST MONTH, STEPHEN Harper took to the op-ed pages of the *Wall Street Journal* to dismiss suggestions that the pandemic has ushered in an era necessitating “big, and wise government,” words he attributed to an unnamed “leftist” writer. The opposite will be true, Harper insisted, because the outcome of all this spending today will be sovereign debt crises and austerity tomorrow unless free enterprise and fiscal responsibility are embraced.

That writer, as it turns out, was Margaret O’Mara, a professor of history at the University of Washington who studies Silicon Valley. Apart from her surprise at being labelled a “leftist” by a former world leader, she sees parallels between those pushing back against government efforts to revive the economy and the response in the early 1930s to the Great Depression. “[Then-president] Herbert Hoover believed government’s role was to create an environment where business was free to do what it could do, and that government was an

impediment to economic growth,” she says. “It echoes through the ages”

In the end, as unemployment soared and the end of Hoover’s first term neared, he switched gears and launched a battery of policies to fight the worsening crisis, including a massive public works program. (A member of Roosevelt’s own “brain trust” would later admit that “practically the whole New Deal was extrapolated from programs that Hoover started.”) It was the start of an “epochal shift,” says O’Mara, from the laissez-faire

THE COST OF THIS CRISIS—MEASURED IN CANADIANS’ DEATHS—GOES FAR BEYOND MATERIAL LOSSES

1920s to an era of expanding government involvement in the economy that continued right up until the 1980s, when the mantra of tax cuts and red tape reduction took over. Now, in her estimation, the U.S. could be on the cusp of another

abrupt shift if Biden and the Democrats take power in November. “Crisis is an accelerant to change,” she says.

But Harper’s op-ed was also a reminder that the fiscal and political pressures that largely receded during the first months of the pandemic emergency are re-emerging.

Questions about Canada’s ability to pay its stimulus tab are simpler to address. The federal government entered the crisis in relatively healthy fiscal shape compared to other developed nations, despite Trudeau’s repeated failure to live up to his deficit-reduc-

tion promises. “There is a path out of this that will get us to fiscal sustainability, so I don’t think we’re headed for a sovereign debt crisis in Canada if we are able to do some recovery over the summer,” he says, noting that even if Canada borrowed \$500 billion, the cost to service that debt at such low interest rates is equal to half a point of the goods and services tax (GST). In his most recent report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer Yves Giroux estimates the federal debt will grow by \$277 billion over the 2019/20 and 2020/21 fiscal years to \$962.3 billion—though he’s also said it’s “not unthinkable” Canada’s total debt load could reach \$1 trillion this year.

However all bets are off if jobs don’t begin to recover this summer, or a second-wave pandemic hits, says Milligan. “If we have an L-shaped recovery with 7.5 million people still out of work, that’s going to be an economic and fiscal calamity.”

How quickly the economy recovers will also determine how much political bandwidth the Trudeau government has to borrow and spend. At the moment the Liberals are riding high in the polls and there’s ready acceptance of government efforts to fight the downturn. “The public appetite for stimulus is not unbounded but it’s certainly of a magnitude we haven’t seen in many years,” says Frank Graves, president of Ekos Research. “It’s not like the public is giving the government complete carte blanche, but close to it.”

Still, Trudeau is stuck with a minority government until the next election, a far cry from the remarkable control Roosevelt wielded in 1933, thanks to his landslide election victory and an agreeable Congress. The Liberals’ aborted attempt to give themselves power to tax and spend without oversight until 2022, as they proposed in a draft of their emergency pandemic legislation in March, or even their agreement with the NDP to put Parliament on ice until September, won’t change that.

It makes a New Deal on the scale of what Roosevelt accomplished in his first 100 days in office—14 pieces of major legislation passed, with one bill sent to the president and signed just seven hours after he’d submitted it to Congress—a non-starter.

That doesn’t mean Roosevelt can’t offer Trudeau a lesson if he wants one. In his book *Looking Forward*, Roosevelt argued Americans caught in the economic crisis wanted “bold persistent experimentation” to get them out of it. Sounding almost like a modern technology CEO, he wrote of his New Deal strategy, “It is common sense to take a method and try it; if it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But above all, try something.” ♣

YOUTH

Remapping childhood

The pandemic is having a profound effect on the lives of children, and the changes may linger long after COVID-19 is gone



BY SARMISHTA SUBRAMANIAN · Children adapt quickly. The group headed to school in Beijing one recent May morning seemed to know their new routine. They approached a building whose entrance resembled an odd blend of movie-theatre foyer and airport-security checkpoint: red ropes, barrier posts, bright directional signs painted on the ground. News clips showed them moving efficiently through the stations in two lines, always keeping a six-foot distance: take a squirt of sanitizer, wait; get temperature check with a thermometer gun, wait. And of course they all wore masks. At a different school, they might use a personal thermometer to take their own temperature twice a day. Or a worker in a hazmat suit might spray disinfectant on their shoes and the ground as they entered. Or they might have to show a green code on a smartphone app signalling a low enough risk of infection.

If they were at a school in Hangzhou, in eastern China, they could be wearing special hats, made with three-foot-long poles and designed to encourage social distancing. (One poke in the eye is surely a good enough lesson.) If they were in Taiwan, they might have individual cardboard barriers on their desks at lunch—a “cone of silence” of sorts with a more sinister undertone. If they were nursery schoolers in France, they’d

each be confined within a square drawn in chalk on the ground, six feet or more from the next square. In Denmark, they would wash their hands at least once an hour at specially installed hand-washing stations. And of course, none of them could touch a classmate or friend.

This is what it is to be a child on planet Earth in the spring of 2020. In faraway Canada, where back-to-school is still months away for most—Quebec and now B.C. being the exceptions—the signs of change are less forbidding; ubiquitous hand-coloured rainbows in windows; posters in bubble letters thanking front-line heroes (they are heroes, yet it’s strange to hear war metaphors and public-health jargon trip lightly off the youngest of tongues); and, on one Toronto sidewalk, cheery sidewalk-chalk drawings of coronaviruses, their telltale haloes of tiny crowns rendered in mauves and apple green. Each is a signal of how much the world has changed for children.

Not long after news of a deadly outbreak emerged from China, we learned a surprising, hopeful fact: this novel coronavirus didn’t seem to target kids. In fact, it rarely seemed to sicken them. Of the more than 376,000 global fatalities from COVID-19, few have been minors. So we’ve read obsessively about

testing protocols and how to protect seniors, and flattening the curve; most of us haven’t had to worry as much about kids.

Well, sort of. Kids started the pandemic as part of a group accusingly dubbed “super-spreaders.” They were kept home from school mostly to help flatten the curve. Then, in late April, came reports from New York hospitals of a rare but severe new ailment in kids that caused organ failure and heart complications, sometimes fatal. The mystery illness seemed tied to COVID-19; children with the symptoms either tested positive or had antibodies, meaning they’d had COVID-19 in the past. And it seemed to strike kids who had no underlying health conditions at all. Doctors in Canada are now looking into 47 possible cases of multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children.

As it turns out, we actually don’t understand what the coronavirus does to kids. There isn’t consensus on the most fundamental question: Do children get sick from the coronavirus? The thousands of confirmed children’s cases worldwide would suggest yes; yet it remains true that most children don’t. In late April, Switzerland’s infectious diseases chief announced young kids could now visit and hug their grandparents because, as he put it, they can’t transmit the coronavirus. “They just don’t have the



Children in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Que., use green dots painted on the tarmac to help maintain proper social distancing; schools outside the greater Montreal area began to reopen in mid-May as the COVID-19 pandemic wore on, and children were asked to adapt to new realities

receptors to catch the disease,” Daniel Koch said in a news conference. That’s not science denialism at work; at least one recent study reached this conclusion, although it is in a pre-print stage and has not passed peer review—the benchmark for issuing clinical guidance. Other studies have concluded kids spread the virus less than adults, and still other studies say kids transmit at the same rate as adults. So how much should we worry? In the absence of data and scientific consensus, children remain a kind of black box.

We are, likewise, in the dark about what this crisis might mean for them psychologically and emotionally. How could we not be? We don’t know how long the pandemic will last. We don’t know if normal life—or some form of it—will resume by fall. We don’t know if or when the virus will return with twice the force, as many epidemiologists warn. It’s hard to predict the long-term effect of this period on children, hard to engineer a solution that is stress-proof for them. Keeping kids home indefinitely is hardly an option. The prospect of economic recovery—parents returning to jobs, businesses staying open, supply chains reactivating, money flowing, food on the table—rests on those small shoulders.

Yet resumption of normal life, and a return to school and socializing, brings strange new realities to which they must adapt. The pandemic may have mostly spared kids, but there are few groups whose experience of the world is changing so dramatically as a result.

MOST YEARS, AROUND this time, children across the country are counting down the hours to overnight camp, that Canadian ritual of days spent in the wilderness canoeing, swimming, and bunking with a pack of strangers-cum-best friends-in-waiting. A week at Camp Tamakwa, near Algonquin Park in Ontario, is one of these cherished experiences. Its website suggests business as usual: a countdown clock flips on top of a picture of South Tea Lake’s still, blue waters. There’s a quote from an alum (1986): “This is the place I see when I close my eyes and dream.”

Victoria Flowerday went to Tamakwa last summer. She met her boyfriend there, and was going to be a counsellor this summer, a last stint before heading to university on the East Coast. An athletic 18-year-old, she runs triathlons, swims competitively and plays water polo. Her bedroom (we talked on Zoom) is decorated with camp pennants and her racing tags. But overnight camps are closed in Ontario, and Victoria looked wistful as she counted off the other cancelled events in a milestone year: graduation, prom, the



Flowerday (above, below) missed most of the milestone experiences of her last year of high school; she now has a job as a front-line worker



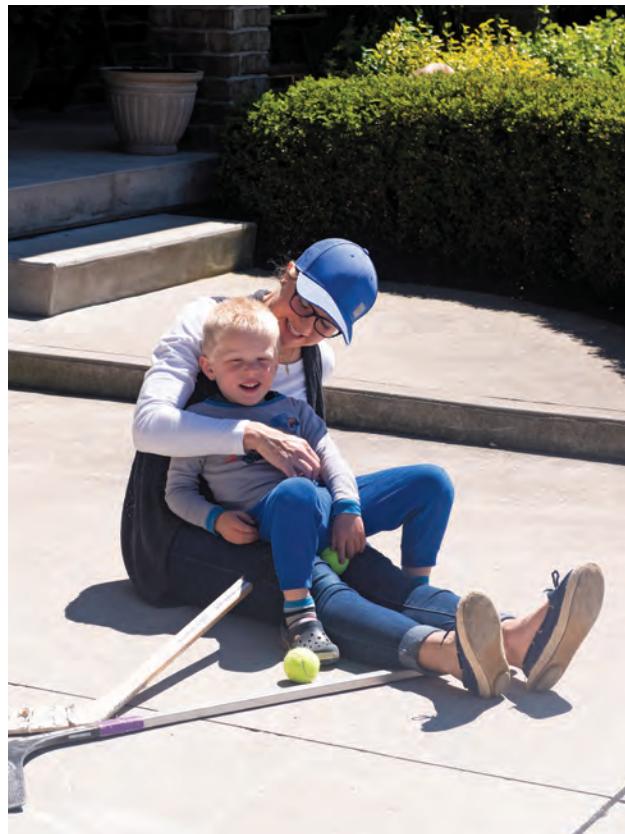
senior trip, triathlons, her lifeguarding job. “It’s really hard,” she said. She can’t see her boyfriend, who lives in Michigan, or her friends. “But I got a job at Sobey’s as a cashier,” she said, “so I’m doing that and saving up some money for university.” In lieu of the last real summer of her childhood, she gets the chance to be a front-line worker.

She worries a little about that. She wears a mask and gloves for fear of bringing the virus home to her large blended family of seven: five siblings, two parents. She worries about school this fall: “I hope they don’t move to online classes.” But there are silver linings. “I’ve become a lot closer with my family,” she said. “I hadn’t spent this much time with them in a really long time. Through all of the negative things that come with this, my parents made sure we make the best of it. I had my 18th birthday in quarantine, and it was my best birthday yet.”

All the kids I spoke with for this story said they miss their friends, school and activities (often in that order). “I miss going to places I haven’t been,” Victoria’s half-brother Evan, age 13, said, capturing succinctly how the pandemic has shrunk the world for all of us. Joshua Miller, an angelic eight-year-old, said, “‘Me time’ is the only time I get alone, but I don’t get ‘me time’ till my brothers go to bed”—again encapsulating a reality for many. We are distancing, but never very far from the people with whom we share our homes.

For the oldest of this cohort, though, there is a poignant added layer. Victoria Flowerday’s parents can work from home, and there is financial security, a huge plus. But that doesn’t take away the sense of loss, the interruption to milestones that bring meaning, the broken transition to a next stage of life. “The developmental tasks young people are supposed to be working on at this age are positive, healthy separation from family, autonomy, spreading their wings, establishing more intense social relationships,” said Joanna Henderson, a senior scientist at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto. COVID-19 has slowed all that. The past 10 weeks don’t feel like a blip to Victoria. “I’m definitely not gonna be the same after this,” she said. “I’ll always think about even the most mundane things differently.”

That wouldn’t surprise Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, who studies generational patterns and differences. “The coronavirus outbreak,” she said, “is equivalent perhaps to World War II in its impact.” At one point, Twenge lived in a neighbourhood with a lot of elderly residents, people who were young in the 1930s.



For some, this is cherished time: (left) Neil Miller plays hockey with his son Joshua; (right) brother Matthew enjoys a hug from mom Beth

She recalls getting a catalogue in her mailbox that was bursting with products aimed at that demographic. “For \$2 you could buy this plastic device for your toothpaste tube that would push the toothpaste all the way to the top so you could get every last drop out. And as a Gen Xer, I remember looking at that and thinking, ‘Why would you spend \$2 on that? Who cares?’” Formative events stay with us.

Twenge wrote the best-seller *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—and What That Means for the Rest of Us*. She argues that pandemic life reinforces some patterns for a generation already more accustomed to virtual life and dealing with higher levels of anxiety, though behaviours could also go the opposite way post-pandemic.

The implications of pandemic life can be dramatic for some. For refugees who have escaped political violence in Latin America or fled domestic abuse in Nigeria, the sense that the world is unsafe again can revive old traumas, said Mariana Martinez Vieyra, a counsellor and coordinator of refugee mental health services in B.C. at the non-profit Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture (VAST). Stay-home guidelines are hard

on everyone, but they are intensely destabilizing for people who were just beginning to make a home. “It ruptures their sense of control,” she said. “They say, ‘I feel as if I’m in jail again.’” At the same time, some parents have got very comfortable staying cocooned. Hiding has been the strategy to survive in the past, so some parents are not letting the children out of the house.”

The kids’ experiences, as in any family, depend on the parents’. For some, this is cherished time together. The counsellors hear often how grateful their clients are to be experiencing this pandemic in Canada. But it’s not an easy time. A number of clients are essential workers, so some kids have been going to daycare. Other kids are stuck indoors with none of the frills that ease life in quarantine. And while they may find comfort in family, said Martinez Vieyra, “one thing that refugee children present is difficulty in moving beyond the family unit and trusting other adults.” Those connections with the outside community are vital to settling, and may now be set back.

Kids who are resettling are not alone in navigating such disruptions. I heard about kids of various ages who don’t want to go outside. One teen stayed home for the first six weeks of the lockdown. A preschooler I came across who loved dogs pre-COVID is now afraid of them—and of bugs. (“I should’ve called it a ‘virus,’ her mom told me.) Suniya Luthar, an American academic whose research for

decades has centred on kids, feels for a generation denied its real-world connections to peers. “It’s just heartbreaking to think of the physical contact, the hugs, time with teammates,” she said. “A lot of their camaraderie and support, not to mention,

for older kids, romance, comes from physical contact and proximity.”

The world is being remapped for children, and the effects may linger. I live with a member of this tribe, a third-grader. Early in May, on the anniversary of the Hindenburg crash, I showed him a short film on the disaster. The Hindenburg was almost as big as the Titanic, we learned, a mammoth reflective balloon launched into the sky. As

In the dreamscapes he describes, nobody touches and there are invisible barriers between people

news cameras lingered on its luxurious interiors, diners clinking their glasses in the dining lounge, my son began flailing his arms. “Mummy!” he squealed. “Pause it. Pause it. All I can think about is why are they all so close to each other? Why on Earth did they pack themselves into that small place?” He was looking at the Hindenburg, and what he saw was a crowded room.

My son shows no signs of anxiety; a talkative kid who loves to draw and make books, he doesn't leave too many thoughts unexpressed. But there are glimpses of a new world inside his head. In the dreams he now recounts, the people are always socially distancing. It's winter, the roads are iced over and we get around on skates; he's in school in Japan, studying art and math and prayer; he and his dad chat with a knife sharpener in the park every night at 10 o'clock. In the most improbable dreamscapes he describes, nobody touches and there are invisible two-metre barriers between people.

WHAT LONGER-TERM EFFECTS will all this have for children? It really depends on which child. The pandemic has created bubbles of personal experience. Every family, every individual, seems to go through it differently. Experiences like this are not automatically traumatic, child psychologist Stacey Schell noted. “Trauma is really about someone's response to an event,” she said. “For some kids this might end up being traumatizing and for others it might not.”

In an effort to capture the variety of experience, and the seismic changes in family life, Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) is launching a project surveying 6,000 children and families over the next nine months. The real-time data-gathering exercise relies on new recruits and subjects from four existing research groups, including the Child and Youth Psychiatry Outpatient Program at SickKids and Spit for Science, a study of the interplay of genes and environment in kids' health. The children will be surveyed monthly on their dietary habits, physical activity, sleep, screen time, and how they feel: Are they sad, irritable, anxious? How is their concentration? (Their parents will be surveyed, too.)

“I'm looking to see how these kids fare over time,” said the project's head, Daphne Korczak, a psychiatrist, researcher and director of the Children's Integrated Mood and Body program at SickKids. “How did they fare on the return to school? Are there differences? How can we understand kids who come in with higher risk vs. kids without known higher risk? And how can we use that information to plan for the future and to support them?”

One factor the SickKids study is tracking is pre-existing anxiety, and how kids with these issues fare over time compared with other kids. Among the children I spoke with, experiences of the pandemic can be worlds apart. The coronavirus isn't a big worry for Joshua, the eight-year-old who craves “me time.” “I just pretend it's not really there and school was just canceled,” he said. Joshua lives in a small town near London, Ont. He misses knocking on his best friend's door, but his family has holed up at the cottage, where they get lots of outside time. He likes the reduced schoolwork, and he and his two younger brothers, four and six, now get to watch movies every day.



Thomas, Evan and Jamie (top to bottom), of the Rockwell Flowerday family, have found that staying home isn't the end of the world

His parents check in with them periodically about how they are feeling, which is hugely beneficial. “We know that trauma is linked to a feeling of being unsafe or at-risk,” Stacey Schell said, “and one of the best protectors from trauma is the space for people to talk about what they're feeling.” Joshua's parents have also shielded the kids from the pandemic's harshest realities, as well as their family's own. In January, his mother, Beth, a fit, active gym teacher, had a hemorrhagic stroke. “At a time when many Canadians are in isolation,” she said, “this has been my norm since January.” She spent a month in

hospital relearning how to walk and write. She has three hours of physical and cognitive therapy a day, plus weekly virtual meetings with her doctors, physiotherapist, occupational therapist, and social worker. Beth shows the calm of someone who has had to recalibrate her goals and expectations, and in the process has stumbled onto a deeper happiness. “My life has already changed so much that I am so happy to be with my family,” she said in May. “I feel among the fortunate in this situation.”

The virus looms larger for 11-year-old Yohan Maramot. His mother, Reyamie, is a nurse at Michael Garron Hospital on Toronto's east side. She often works double shifts, getting home at 7:30 a.m. Lessons about COVID-19 are part of Yohan's schoolwork, and he's alert to misinformation online. “There's a lot of fake news, like people saying it comes from bat soup, and exaggerations,” he said.

He worries his mother will test positive for COVID-19. His mother worries about him. She monitors the COVID-19 case count in their west-end neighbourhood (it was 100 the day we spoke), and they sanitize high-traffic door knobs and light switches at home. Reyamie works in respirology and acute medicine, and sees two to three patients who have tested positive for COVID-19 a day. “I see how quickly patients can deteriorate,” she said.

Yohan misses normal life. His mother, an immigrant from the Philippines, follows the “takes a village” model, and most pre-COVID weekends were spent with close friends. He misses church, “especially the part when church is starting and all of us get to say a brief announcement about our week, and the part after, where we arrange play dates,” he said. These days, hanging out with friends over Roblox games on his iPad and chatting with family makes him happiest.

Not everyone understands the burden shouldered by families of health-care workers, said Indrani Lakheeram, a pediatric anesthesiologist based in Montreal. “It's very hard to

manage the two things: my role as a parent, trying to safeguard my family; and my role as a professional, trying to do what's right for my patients." Lakheeram is the one who's working now, while her husband, Roger LeMoynes, a globetrotting photojournalist, stays home with their two teenaged kids. Anesthesia is a high-risk profession—intubations and managing the airway mean exposure to COVID-19—and when the pandemic started, she found it nerve-racking. "Does my loyalty lie with my patients, and is it worth it for me to get sick and potentially die vs. my loyalty to my kids?" she said. The kids find it hard, too. "They don't like it. I work in pediatrics and they often wonder why somebody else's child is more important than mine."

THERE ARE NOT many modern precedents for these times. A couple of studies, including a survey from 2004 that examined the effects of the SARS quarantine affecting 15,000 Canadians, have found a spike in symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress. But those were adults, and the scale of this shutdown is different.

The news is not all grim. There are indeed troubling spikes in youth anxiety and depressive symptoms in Canada, on top of rising anxiety rates pre-COVID. In an April CAMH survey of youth aged 14 to 27, 68 per cent of youth who had previously sought mental-health help, and four in 10 youth who hadn't, said they've had problems. But there were also signs of hope in the study. Rates of substance abuse dropped, presumably as more kids stayed home. Social connection matters, and eight in 10 said they connected with friends online. "I was surprised by the proportion of young people who reported positive impacts: more time to spend with family, more time with pets, on their hobbies. Some even said they're saving money because they go out less," said Joanna Henderson, the lead researcher and director of the Margaret and Wallace McCain Centre for Child, Youth & Family Mental Health at CAMH.

Anxiety and depression are what Suniya Luthar, the American academic, thought she'd find when she began surveying students about COVID-19. Luthar is an authority on resilience in children. Her ground-breaking research in the 1990s exposed the reality that high-achieving students, often from educated, white-collar families, are among the most vulnerable populations for substance abuse, anxiety and depression, alongside kids who grow up in urban poverty or whose parents have been incarcerated.

Luthar's organization, Authentic Connec-



Being the child of an anesthesiologist can be worrying for some, like Chloe (above); Chloe, Sasha and Lakheeram (left to right) take advantage of a rare opportunity for family movie night



tions, conducts student surveys at schools to identify vulnerabilities in mental health. When COVID-19 struck, the organization pivoted and began running student resilience surveys instead, focusing on anxiety, depression and kids' concerns during the pandemic. They've administered the surveys to kids at 25 schools so far, and what they found was startling: rates of clinically significant depression and anxiety were consistently lower than in 2019.

"This is why we do research," Luthar said. "You stop to think about it, and it adds up.

The oppressions that these children experienced have by default become less. They're not running from pillar to post with multiple extracurricular activities." Absent an early school start, kids are sleeping in—a great boon to adolescent bodies, which want to wake later. And most are carrying a lighter load at school. "Everything is not crammed, and in most cases teachers are being understanding," she said. "So I imagine that there is some sense of relief: 'my God, I can breathe now.'" Gone, too, are the social dynamics of school. "Nobody is going to feel left out

because they're not at the popular kids' lunch table," Luthar offered.

Some of these were motifs in conversations I had with kids. Jaime Rockwell, 15, is happy she doesn't have to go to overnight camp, as is her brother Evan. An introvert by nature, Evan seems to enjoy the reprieve from social gatherings; both have actually made new friends in quarantine through online social apps or games. Their half-sister Julia Flowerday, 13, told me she too likes elements of the new normal, including the fact they now eat all their meals together; before, they were too busy with activities.

Some younger children prefer this time. "I'm doing great," said Thridev Chandramouliswar, a sweetly impish eight-year-old who lives in a Toronto high-rise with his parents, his two-month-old-sister and, for now, his grandparents, who came to visit from India not long before borders closed in March. An athletic kid, Thridev loves the sorts of activities the pandemic has made difficult. But he has virtual art and music lessons and, somehow, basketball coaching. He does a lot less schoolwork. And he has a grandmother who loves to bake, and time with his parents, who are now both home. A molecular biologist by training, his mother, Jayantasri, is on mat leave, and intrigued by the pandemic rather than worried—a coolness that her son seems to have picked up.

What the pandemic has given Thridev's family is connection. Until two years ago, when his parents immigrated, all five lived as a joint family in a sprawling Chennai homestead with his cousins, and aunt and uncle. So this is familiar, if at closer quarters. "Actually, the social isolation period was when we first moved here," Jayantasri said with a laugh.

That ties in with a theme in Luthar's decades-long research: resilience rests on relationships. Close relationships with parents are a big predictor of resilience in adulthood, and can compensate for dire risk factors. Research from Cornell University found that higher environmental risk—from poverty, overcrowding, even family stress—was mediated by a mother's responsiveness. "If your mom was particularly sensitive to your emotional state during a game of Jenga . . ." Paul Tough wrote in the book *How Children Succeed*, "all the bad stuff you faced in life had little to no effect on your allostatic load"—meaning blood pressure, stress-hormone levels, and so on.

How, then, are parents doing? In another CAMH survey, nearly a third reported being more anxious vs. only a quarter of people without kids. (How could we not be?) In a joint Italian-Spanish study from April of the

effects of COVID-19 on kids, parents who were more stressed turned out to have kids who were more anxious, worried or argumentative. Yet the increase in family time also affords many more of those ordinary opportunities for parents, even stressed-out ones, to be responsive to kids. It's a tremendously reassuring thought.

Ensuring a child's well-being also means ensuring the well-being of those caregivers. For parents, as for kids, Luthar believes the answer lies in meaningful relationships. It's not the easiest time to nurture adult friendships, but busy or not, parents must make time for connection. "Just as we learned to put on our masks and distance and wash our hands," said Luthar, "we have to learn to do this. It's not optional."

THE OTHER CRITICAL component of children's lives is, of course, school. Reopening schools isn't just a necessary step in restoring the economy; it's also something kids themselves desperately need, for structure, for social connection. The question is when and how to do it safely. As Reyamie Maramot, the Toronto nurse, put it, "We want our kids to be happy, and we want them to be safe. How can we choose?"

Since kids generally have mild or no symptoms when they have COVID-19, they don't get tested. "We don't have very good information on what proportion of kids may have been infected," explained Amy Greer, the Canada Research Chair in Population Disease Modelling at the University of Guelph, who's working on mathematical modelling of COVID-19 transmission at summer camps. Greer said it concerned her that discussions of relaxing guidelines in Quebec in early May were taking place in the absence of this data, while cases were still high. Schools reopened on May 11; by month's end, 44 students and 34 staff at several schools had tested positive.

Greer believes we will have more data in the coming months with which to make policy decisions about schools. Several studies are under way examining transmission by children within households for clues to how SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) spreads. There should also be data out of other countries soon, where schools have been open for a while.

All roads seem to lead to testing and contact tracing. "There is still time for us to get our testing and tracing house in order," Greer

said. "If we can drive cases down over the course of the summer, if we can ramp up testing and tracing such that we're able to really understand what we're dealing with, then we can make better decisions."

Reopening will bring its own challenges. A common mantra in these times is that kids are resilient. "Yes, kids are resilient," said Stacey Schell, the Toronto child psychologist, "but not all kids are equally resilient. And I worry that we will underestimate the challenges for some." Daphne Korczak of SickKids pointed out that for high-achieving kids or anxious kids who enjoyed a reprieve during the pandemic, anxiety may return. There will also likely be much variation in kids' academic levels when they go back. "It'll be important for schools to have the capacity to address different educational needs effectively," she said.

Then there are the day-to-day realities. "As a parent, sending your kid back to school and wanting to ensure that they're safe is one

thing. But the other thing is, what is the experience like?" mused Greer, who is also a mother. Other parents, such as anesthesiologist Indrani Lakheeram, aren't counting on a normal school year. "I'm expecting them to have to be at home at

Close relationships with parents are a big predictor of resilience, and can compensate for dire risk factors

some point," Lakheeram admitted. "I don't really know how we're going to manage. I just hope schools have really thought about how to educate people in this digital age. I feel it's going to come back to that."

For now, those realities seem an eternity away. As I took an evening walk in late May, though, there were signs of change. Packs of kids were out together on bicycles or playing. In a kindergarten playground, a teen hang-out was under way. And on some sidewalks, in place of drawings of rainbows and cheerful thank-yous, were a new set of chalk slogans: "Black Lives Matter"; "Silence is Violence"; "Justice for George Floyd." I was reminded of walking into my child's school one afternoon last fall. It was the day of the climate strikes, during Greta Thunberg's visit to New York, eons ago now. The yard was covered with chalk drawings and writing: "Save the Turtles"; "HELP! We don't want to be extinct in 30 years!"; "Earth is burning!" I imagine there were school yards like it all over the country. It struck me that night that, to this cohort of children, a pandemic may not seem insurmountable. They were already facing worse. Maybe, in the words of the old song, they will be all right. ♣



SCIENCE

Saving the right

As North Atlantic right whales migrate north for summer feeding, pandemic restrictions may hamper critical research—but they might also help keep them alive

WHEN A WHALE dies in the Maritime region, Tonya Wimmer, director of Halifax's Marine Animal Response Society, organizes a group of up to two dozen veterinarians and researchers to carry out a complete scientific dissection. For hours or even days, team members work waist-deep in the blood and viscera of a 50-ton whale, enduring the stench of rotting flesh to gather vital biological samples. The process is messy, exhausting and emotional.

It's an especially grim task when the necropsy (or autopsy) is on a North Atlantic right whale. Now numbering around 400, these animals are being struck by ships and getting tangled in fishing ropes faster than they can

reproduce. Necropsies provide scientists with critical information, says Wimmer, such as blubber thickness and hormone levels, which helps them understand more about the health of the population. They also reveal the cause of death, which is almost always related to human industry.

In the United States, travel restrictions and social distancing have already hampered research cruises and survey flights, which are both crucial to right whale recovery. It's likely there will be fewer eyes on the whales in Canadian waters as well.

As right whales migrate north to their summer feeding grounds, Wimmer's group is pre-

paring for potential mortalities. Coronavirus measures will make necropsies difficult, but not impossible. Team members can maintain physical distance while manoeuvring around a 60-foot whale, and they already use copious personal protective equipment. "If we have the means to do it and it can be done safely, then we need to do it," says Wimmer.

And the pandemic may have a silver lining. Lobster fishing seasons have shifted, cruise ships aren't sailing and global shipping has slowed. That all makes the ocean a safer place for North Atlantic right whales. "Maybe this is the reprieve that these animals need," says Wimmer. **TOM CHENEY**



Wolverine, a right whale known to researchers by the boat-propeller scars on his back, was found dead and pulled ashore for study in June 2019



(above and below) A North Atlantic right whale in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence struggles to free itself from fishing ropes; getting caught in this kind of fishing gear is a leading cause of death for right whales; currently, there are only approximately 400 of this endangered species remaining



THIS SPREAD AND PREVIOUS: NICK HAWKINS



(above) Researchers use a ladder to examine the body of Punctuation, a female right whale they've tracked since 1981 who gave birth to eight calves; her injuries suggest she was hit by a ship; (below) Wolverine's body is studied by a team of more than two dozen biologists and veterinarians



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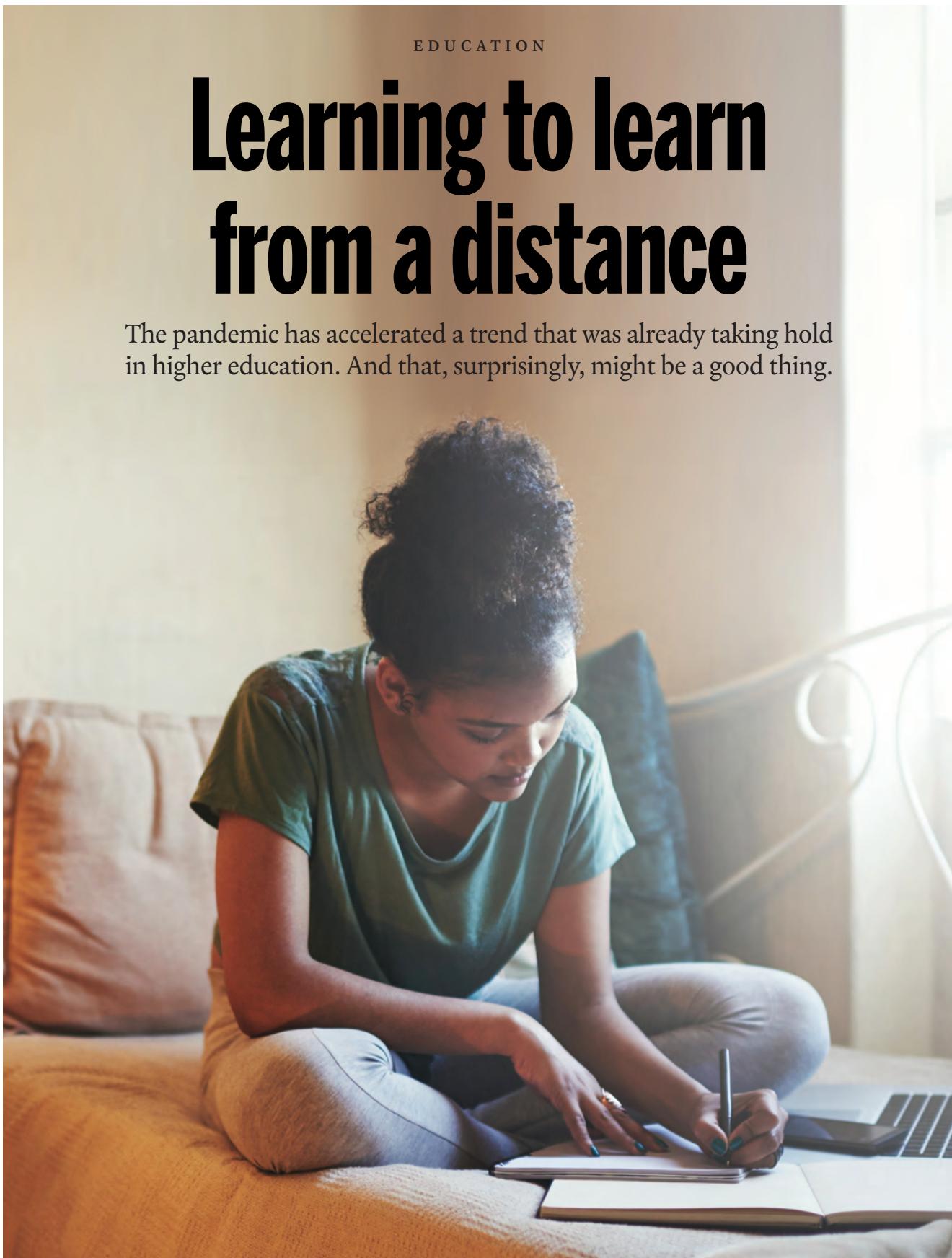


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EDUCATION

Learning to learn from a distance

The pandemic has accelerated a trend that was already taking hold in higher education. And that, surprisingly, might be a good thing.



BY STACY LEE KONG · If your only experience with distance education has been the sudden pivot to Zoom or Google Hangout classes during the pandemic, it's understandable that you might doubt its effectiveness in comparison to traditional learning. But the data on distance learning is actually pretty clear: it can be just as good as its in-person counterpart, provided the course is well-designed. In fact, some experts say distance ed can even outperform traditional classroom set-ups, especially for students whose first language isn't English, whose families experience poverty, or who have learning disabilities.

“Studies that have been conducted comparing the two generally show that distance education is as effective as in-person education,” says George Veletsianos, a professor in the school of education and technology at Royal Roads University and Canada Research Chair in Innovative Learning and Technology. Some studies find one or the other is better, he says, “but the meta-analyses have found outcomes between the two are generally the same. If there's any sort of difference, it tends to favour blended courses.” (That is, classes that utilize both online and in-person elements.)

In fact, Veletsianos says, the success of any course, in-person or online, comes down to the way it's designed, and that requires instructors to rethink how they teach and how they understand learning. One pedagogical philosophy applied to online education has its roots in the work of American philosopher and educator John Dewey, who believed that children should not be passive vessels for knowledge. In Dewey's view, learning should be experiential, rather than focused on rote memorization—a radical idea in the 1890s. A hundred years later, Matthew Lipman drew on Dewey's work and that of Dewey's contemporary, Charles Sanders Peirce, to develop his idea of “community of inquiry” (now often referred to as COI), which champions dialogue between teacher and students and encourages students to critically evaluate the information they receive. “We can now speak of ‘converting the classroom into a community of inquiry’ in which students listen to one another with respect, build on one another's ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another's assumptions,” Lipman wrote in his 1991 book, *Thinking in Education*.

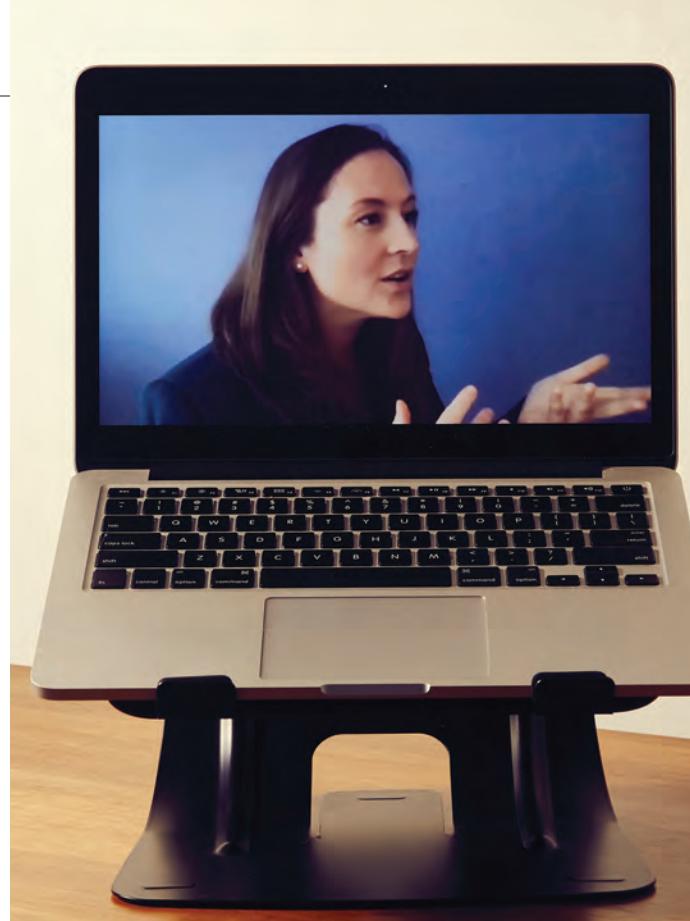
In 2000, a group of University of Alberta researchers—D. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson and Walter Archer—adapted the COI philosophy for online learning. Their framework

was built on the relatively new ability to have text-based group discussions via the internet, an important point of departure from traditional distance education, in which students worked independently of one another. Technology at the time didn't allow for synchronous (or “real-time”) communication, but this new framework ameliorated one major pitfall in distance learning: the lack of social interaction.

More recent studies have found that, as technology improves, there are many more opportunities to apply the COI philosophy to online courses. For example, wikis—web pages with open editing systems, like Wikipedia—can be used to house course documents such as mini research projects or a list of relevant terms or definitions, or they can function as an online portfolio of student work. A community of inquiry can even be built into massive open online courses (MOOCs), which have unlimited capacity and therefore more closely resemble a class in a huge lecture hall, but also allow students the agency to consume educational content according to their own preferences. And better technology, from video conferencing (like, yes, Zoom) to virtual reality worlds, make it easier for students to communicate and collaborate.

“Social engagement is an important foundation for a satisfying, engaging learning experience,” says Marti Cleveland-Innes, program director in the Centre for Distance Education at Athabasca University and a professor at the school. According to a 2009 study published in *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, the most effective and satisfying courses for students have a synchronous element, ideally via video, so they can benefit from non-verbal communication. (That being said, electronic-communication cues, such as emoticons, punctuation choices, short replies in message threads or even neglecting to reply to a message, do exist in text-based communication.)

Another key factor in online learning is how students are assessed. Instructors have to be clear on learning outcomes, Veletsianos says, and their assessments must be developed for online environments. Cleveland-Innes agrees.



“Nothing scares or hinders learning more for students than assignments that don't make sense, or that aren't well-aligned to material,” she says. Is a multiple-choice quiz the best way to test students' knowledge? According to Cleveland-Innes, presentations or creative projects like graphics or videos can be as good, if not better. Students should be able to easily understand what they're being asked to do in an assignment, she says, and what part of the curriculum the assignment relates to.

That said, there *are* barriers to online learning. Contemporary distance learning is highly dependent on reliable access to the internet, which some students across Canada just don't have. Only 40.8 per cent of rural communities in Canada have what are considered standard internet speeds: at least 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload. And across the country, less than two-thirds of the lowest-income households have any sort of internet at home.

Students with disabilities may have difficulty accessing distance education, and students with family, social or economic disadvantages also tend to struggle in online learning environments. In Veletsianos's new book, *Learning Online: The Student Experience*, he cites a 2014 study in *The Journal of Higher Education* that found “younger students, African-Americans, Latinos, males, students with lower levels of academic skill and part-time students are all likely to perform



For her research on distance ed, UBC's Lyon (left) talks with students like Munisha Bhandal

able to interact with professors and peers, but also said that while virtual meetings have a sense of normalcy, recorded lectures provided flexibility over where, when and how students accessed course materials. (They could still learn despite work schedules or time zones, for example.)

Students also reported that flexibility around assessments, including assignment deadlines and even which assignments and tests they completed, was beneficial to their learning and well-being. Interestingly, this wasn't about cheating the system; it was about negotiating a timeline or workload that felt achievable, and then sticking to that decision. "They're still going to end up doing the same amount of work," Lyon says. "It just is organized around their holistic experience of learning."

Lastly, students said they appreciated regular check-ins from instructors.

"We have an open lounge area in our online class, and if they send me a message, within a few minutes we just meet in there and talk about their questions, which is actually more communication and access than if you're on campus and you have to walk 20 minutes to get to my office, and you don't know if I'm even going to be there," says Lyon. "Digital office hours are one thing I'm definitely going to take away from this."

Veletsianos thinks the increased emphasis on "caring for students and being flexible to their needs" seen during the pandemic may be best achieved in the long term through a learning environment that includes elements of both in-person and distance learning. Cleveland-Innes agrees, though she'd prefer we stop thinking about them as opposing approaches, and instead see all learning as multi-modal (that is, involving different sensory systems and modes of learning) and multi-access (meaning it can happen in several different spaces, both physical and virtual).

That aligns with what students seem to want. In his book, Veletsianos cites a 2018 survey of 65,000 American undergrads, which found that 55 per cent of students "prefer a blended learning environment over purely face-to-face or online environments."

And that's a good thing, because we are likely to see a long-term shift toward remote work. "All of our students need experience working in remote-learning environments, because it is going to be part of our digital society, and our digital economy," Cleveland-Innes says. ♣

markedly worse in online courses than in traditional ones," which implies online learning platforms "may also reflect and perpetuate a number of inequities." But, Veletsianos says, "paying more attention to the circumstances and needs of individual students may offer recourse to this problem."

The recent pivot to remote learning during the pandemic was ad hoc, inconsistent and happened during a time of great emotional upheaval for students—Cleveland-Innes describes it as "emergency remote teaching and learning, which is a distant cousin to distance learning." But there are already lessons that can be applied to education in general going forward, and many of them align with research on best practices for online learning. For example, Veletsianos has long advocated for the kind of increased flexibility and compassion that was seen in the way post-secondary institutions and instructors related to students after the pandemic set in. He says accommodating students' lives makes accessing high-quality education easier for those who have to work, who have children, or who are ill themselves or caring for an ill family member.

Katherine Lyon, an instructor in the University of British Columbia's department of sociol-

ogy, and Siobhán McPhee, a senior instructor in the school's department of geography, are currently researching how good course design can improve student experience and increase their capacity to meet learning outcomes during the pandemic. So far, they've surveyed 576 students who are enrolled in UBC distance courses about their learning and well-being. Respondents span 11 faculties and all year levels, and one in four are international students.

The 'emergency remote teaching' brought about by the pandemic is a 'distant cousin to distance learning'

Unsurprisingly, 75 per cent of students reported having difficulty focusing on their studies due to non-academic challenges, such as being in quarantine, caring for sick family members, working to cover parents' lost wages or even just not being in the same time zone as their instructor. "We came to the conclusion that as educators, we can't resolve these systemic barriers that students are facing," Lyon says. "But we *can* indirectly help students manage these daily struggles and continue their studies by designing courses that fit their lives."

There are several important findings around flexibility and choice in this study, including the fact that 54 per cent of students said they preferred a combination of synchronous and asynchronous course design. They liked being

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Scarpazza, 26, was working as a paramedic when he decided he wanted to become a doctor

FIRST PERSON

How to be in two places at once

Online school allowed Edward Scarpazza to work on his undergrad while getting experience in the field

I GRADUATED FROM paramedic school in 2014. The diploma was a great fit for me, since I love working with people and I love medicine. I decided that I wanted to go as far as I could in the medical field and become a physician. I had to figure out a way to work as a paramedic while building my future as a physician, and I knew I needed an undergraduate degree.

My course coordinator at paramedic school told me that I could bridge my college program over to a degree program at Athabasca University in Alberta, which specializes in online education. And then it clicked—online school was how I was going to work on my undergrad while getting experience in the field.

As a paramedic, you see a lot of traumatic things on the road. The shifts are long, and they don't just affect you physically—seeing people who are sick or in pain, who are dying or dead, affects you emotionally. It definitely affected my schoolwork in the first year or two. But with experience and time, I got used to separating what happened at work from my studies.

At Athabasca, the education is really self-directed. They give you a study guide and say, okay, this is the material you should be looking at, these are the readings and objectives for certain units, and so on. The rest is really up to you, including how you schedule your exams, which are normally run in-person at a testing centre. I've always been independent

and self-motivated, so making my own schedule works really well for me, especially given my job, where the shifts can be all over the place.

Sure, there are some things you miss. The biggest drawback of online study is that it can get kind of lonely, even if you're good at studying on your own. But there are ways to work around it. For one thing, there are so many social media groups dedicated to Athabasca students, and through those, I've met some other students in my area. We get together to study sometimes. Also, Athabasca offers resources to connect students, like classroom discussion forums.

Clarifying concepts isn't always easy when you don't interact with professors in person, but each class has an assigned tutor, like a TA, who's responsible for answering questions about the material. You send them an email, and they always answer really quickly. In one of my organic chemistry courses, I asked a tutor to clarify a difficult concept and we ended up chatting on the phone. In that one discussion, she clarified a bunch of related concepts and made the rest of the course so much easier.

For some of my courses, like microbiology, I had to travel to Athabasca (from my home in Kingston, Ont.) to participate in in-person labs. The school provided a list of places to stay, including with local alumni, and I ended up staying with one of them. She offered lodging to myself and two other students, cooked dinner for us and showed us around. It was really amazing.

Professors have office hours, just like at any other university. Some professors spend a great deal of time clarifying concepts in difficult courses, which has really made a world of difference. They often provide their phone numbers. That's one thing that I really appreciate—it feels like the professors want you to succeed.

Right now, I'm working directly with COVID-19-positive or suspected positive patients as a paramedic, and that's been quite stressful—especially since I live with my grandparents. Not much has changed for me in terms of my schooling, except that I don't know if I'll be able to write my MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) in September. I don't want to say that the pandemic has any benefits, but at least it's showing that online university is a valuable way to get an education. That said, I'm eager for the prospect of returning to in-person studies at medical school. I miss the experience, knowledge and perspectives of classmates and professors. Also, I miss the shared passion for a field of study that motivated me to pursue further academic and professional goals. **AS TOLD TO LIZA AGRBA**

SCIENCE

An ocean of hope

One of the world's most famous marine ecologists dials back his doomsday predictions and tries optimism

BY ALANNA MITCHELL · A few years ago, discouraged by the mess the ocean is in, Boris Worm took a trip to the coral reefs of West Papua, Indonesia.

He expected the worst. Those reefs, where marine life congregates like nowhere else on earth, had been hammered by people doing a spate of awful things: dynamiting for fish, slicing fins off live sharks, poaching turtles, catching way too many fish. Not to mention the dearth of government policies to protect this exceptionally rich part of the ocean.

Instead, Worm, a professor in marine conservation biology at Dalhousie University in Halifax, got a shock. Despite the problems, marine life was returning to the reef. When he dug into the reasons, Worm discovered one key catalyst for the change: a program to teach kids in West Papua how to care for ocean life, delivered by boat to every community.

"It really made me believe in people again," he says from his home on the Atlantic Ocean near Halifax. "We're not inherently destructive."

It was an epiphany. Worm, one of the world's most famous marine ecologists, has

spent a career chronicling the manifold ways humanity is harming the ocean. His most sensational paper, which he still refers to as "the crazy paper," explained for the first time in 2006 that fishing practices all over the world were endangering the ability of the ocean to support life. If those practices kept up, he and his co-authors prophesied, fisheries would collapse by 2048.

The paper led to mentions on late-night talk shows, op-eds in more than 100 newspapers and the overwhelming public sense that the ocean was doomed. It also caused controversy. Worm's response was to work with some of his most vociferous critics to produce a blueprint in 2009 showing how to rebuild fisheries around the world.

Then he and other marine scientists began chronicling more ocean success stories. They thought: Why not see what it would take to restore the whole ocean to health? The result is a study perhaps more shocking than any other he has been involved in: a paper published in April that says the global ocean can heal by 2050. The caveat: humanity must quickly implement a suite of carefully thought-out actions.

"We really do have the capacity to bring the ocean back to life," Worm says. "The ocean has greater resilience, inherently, than we thought."

Restoration has happened before. Worm and his co-authors tracked how fish came back to the seas during WWI and WWII, when fishermen had to leave their boats at dock, as well as the astonishing rejuvenation of corals in the Marshall Islands after dozens of nuclear tests ended in 1958, and the dramatic recovery of the vast dead zones in the Black and Adriatic seas once the Soviet Union collapsed and no longer supplied crop fertilizers that caused algal blooms to suck breath from the waters.

But it's not just happenstance that leads to recovery. Some encouraging signs are the direct result of policies and conservation measures. Humpback whales, no longer hunted for oil, are having a baby boom. Northern elephant seals, those floppy-nosed bellows once down to a handful of breeding pairs, are on the rebound now that they're protected.

In Eastern Canada, grey seals, rare after commercial sealing in the 20th century slashed their numbers, are back in force. And Canadian marine protected areas, uncommon when Worm's "crazy paper" came out, now cover 14 per cent of ocean waters. That figure is on track to more than double by 2030.

"If you look at the data, the successes are becoming clearer and clearer," says Nancy Knowlton, emerita scientist at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. She researches coral ecology and is a co-author on the 2050 recovery paper. But even as successes mounted, public anguish over the state of the ocean did, too. This paper, she says, is an attempt to shape a more hopeful narrative of the sea.

The paper came out just as the pandemic was beginning—and was written long before—yet tentative indications of how the ocean could heal are emerging as so much human activity screeches to a halt.

For example, daily carbon emissions have fallen off sharply—at least for now. A recent study by Corinne Le Quéré of the University of East Anglia in the U.K. put the drop at 17 per cent by early April compared to last year's average. Roughly half of that dip came from reduced transportation. Overall, emissions are likely to be up to seven per cent lower this year than last, Le Quéré found.

Marine scientists are keenly monitoring that trend. The growing carbon load in the atmosphere from burning fossil fuels is the biggest threat to the health of the ocean. Carbon heats the ocean, drives out its dissolved



In 2006, Worm co-authored a paper on biodiversity loss in the ocean that stirred up controversy



On a trip to West Papua a few years ago, Worm was shocked to find life returning to the coral reefs; a key catalyst was an ocean-care program for kids

oxygen and acidifies the water. That triumvirate is deadly, making it difficult for creatures to rear young, find food, escape predators and make shells. And even as daily emissions fall, the overall concentration of carbon in the atmosphere recently reached a new modern high of 418 parts per million, compared to the normal 280.

“Climate change is the critical backdrop against which all future rebuilding efforts will play out,” the paper says.

The pandemic has also stalled the fishery in parts of the world, keeping marine life in the water.

“We can see where this is going. It’s good for fish in the short term,” says Rashid Sumaila, an economist who is a professor at the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries at the University of British Columbia.

But what’s good for fish can also be painful for those who depend on fishing them. In Canada, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau recently implored citizens to enjoy a fish fry or savour a lobster dinner to shore up the struggling industry. In South Africa, out-of-work fishermen are taking it on the chin, Sumaila says. And it’s unclear what will happen once fishing resumes. Fishermen in some parts of the world may demand bigger boats to make up for lost time, he says.

“It all depends on what lessons we learn from this,” Sumaila says.

Plastics, for example, long seen as the scourge of the sea, have had a public rela-

tions upgrade during the pandemic. Now, single-use plastics are cherished as life-saving personal protective equipment. Even plastic shopping bags are back in vogue.

For now, though, the ocean is quieter, a bonus for marine animals, Worm says, citing underwater listening studies. And Knowlton says anecdotal evidence is that animals, typically afraid of humans, are swimming closer to shore these days, allowing us to see them for the first time. Endangered sea turtles may be on track for a bumper nesting year, too, as humans stay off the beaches.

“They may have a window of opportunity to boost their numbers,” she says, adding that the tragic human fallout from the pandemic overshadows any possible silver lining for the ocean. “This can’t be the solution.”

She points out that as scientific researchers are forced to stay home, it’s hard to know exactly how the pandemic is affecting marine life. Scientists are seeing projects postponed that have been years in the planning. Some ocean-bound studies that collect ocean data every season will simply miss out this year, leaving gaps in the numbers.

Still, neither the hopeful road map of the 2050 paper nor the small improvements in the ocean’s health during the pandemic mean the marine sphere is out of trouble. The paper

makes clear that humanity will need to make immediate, far-ranging changes if marine life is to recover.

And spend money. The study puts annual costs at up to US\$20 billion to restore habitat and extend protection measures across more of the ocean. But it says this “grand challenge for science and society” will produce 10 times more in financial returns and generate about a million jobs. Rebuilding the fisheries alone

stands to increase profits in the global seafood industry by US\$53 billion a year.

In the meantime, Worm has taken a page out of West Papua’s book. When he returned home after his fateful first voyage there in 2010, he launched Ocean

School in concert with the National Film Board. The program takes students on virtual reality voyages of discovery deep into the mysteries of the ocean, teaching them about marine life and conservation. Worm reasoned that if Indonesian children can help save the ocean, children of other nations can, too.

“I thought, why the hell aren’t we doing something like that in Canada?” he says.

In November, Worm was in West Papua once again. He got another surprise. Despite all the assaults humans had thrown at it, the reef had rebounded even further. Large fish were back. And so were turtles and sharks. It was, he says, flourishing. ♣

THE PANDEMIC HAS STALLED THE FISHERY IN PARTS OF THE WORLD, KEEPING MARINE LIFE IN THE WATER

SCIENCE

YOU'VE BEEN BREATHING ALL WRONG

Hey mouth-breathers! Use your nose to boost immunity—and mood.

BY DAFNA IZENBERG • It almost feels like foreshadowing when, early in his new book, *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art*, James Nestor describes having a long implement stuck deep into his nasal cavity for the purpose of extracting a culture. Today, many readers will have had a similar experience, or can expect to in the near future. But two years ago, Nestor wasn't being tested for COVID-19; he was part of an experiment at Stanford University looking at how much damage might be caused if a person were to breathe exclusively through their mouth for 10 days (after the snot was procured, Nestor's nose was sealed tight with silicone plugs and surgical tape). The abridged version of the study's results: quite a lot. Nestor's blood pressure rose by an average of 13 points, he had 25 apnea events (which amount to mini-choking episodes) while sleeping and a diphtheroid *Corynebacterium* (which can lead to infection and disease) had settled into his face. And he felt and looked like . . . well, you know.

This is the book's biggest takeaway: Breathe through your nose. Nasal breathing boosts our immune system, our circulation, our mood and even our sexual functioning. It triggers the sinuses to release nitric oxide, a molecule that plays an essential role in delivering oxygen to our cells—we can absorb 18 per cent more oxygen breathing nasally than we do by breathing orally. And yet, Nestor writes, “around half of us are habitual mouth-breathers” on account of the ways the human skull has evolved over the last 300,000—and especially the last 500—years. This, says Nestor, was the biggest surprise in his research: how our jaws and teeth went into semi-retirement when processed food became the staple of our diet with the onset of the industrial age. Essentially, our faces caved in: our mouths shrunk, our nasal passages became more constricted and our airways suffered the shortfall. “Even if we want

to breathe properly, so many of us are so messed up anatomically now that it's a real struggle,” Nestor says in a phone conversation from his home in San Francisco.

He should know. About 10 years ago, the author was in rough shape, respiratorily and otherwise. “I had a job that was completely stressing me out. There were some relationship issues I was dealing with, and I had bought a house that was built in 1885 and basically falling apart.” At one point, he was washing dishes in his bathtub. He was also

coming down with repeated bouts of pneumonia and bronchitis. On the advice of his doctor, he enrolled in a breathing class and found himself sitting cross-legged on the floor of a dusty, drafty old Victorian—a place “that looked like something out of Amityville.” A voice on a cassette tape instructed him and three or four other participants to inhale and exhale slowly through their noses, over and over and over. Though he was skeptical, Nestor settled into the exercise, and when the tape ended, he was drenched with



ALEXANDER FORD/GETTY IMAGES

Easy-to-chew processed foods have evolved our skulls so that nasal breathing is a challenge

sweat. Over the next few days, his sleep improved and his stress level went down.

As a journalist, Nestor's curiosity was piqued. He filed the experience away until he travelled to Greece a few years later to report on the world of freediving (which he wrote about in his first book, *Deep: Freediving, Renegade Science, and What the Ocean Tells Us About Ourselves*). "I remember sitting on the bow of a boat a mile off the coast and watching [a diver] take a breath, completely disappear into the water and come back five minutes later," says Nestor. The divers described having practised breathing techniques to train their lungs so they could submerge 300 or 400 feet underwater for minutes at time. "All of these people had these huge chests, huge lung capacity," he says. "And I just thought, 'Wow, what else can we use this ability for?'"

Thus began his project. Nestor read reams of scientific studies; he surveyed ancient Chinese texts; he followed anonymous "cataphiles" into unsanctioned rooms in the tombs below Paris; he travelled all the way to São Paulo to learn about ancient Yōga (pronounced yooga) breathing techniques. He offered himself up as a subject numerous times, the most dramatic of which found him in a tiny windowless laboratory in Tulsa, Okla., huffing carbon dioxide from a foil bag attached to a "beat-up yellow cylinder that [looked] like a Cold War-era Russian missile," feeling like his throat was closing. This type of therapy has historically been used to treat people who suffer from severe disorders such as panic attacks, epilepsy, schizophrenia and anorexia. It is not among the breathing techniques that Nestor recommends trying at home.

Nestor did not set out to write a guide to breathing; he was more interested in discovering what happens physiologically when we alter our breathing. Still, the titles of several chapters read almost like shorthand instructions: Exhale. Slow. Chew. Hold It. And Nestor skilfully explains both science and method: why breathing deeply puts less stress on the heart; why humming is good for you (also, gum); why inhaling for 5½ seconds and then exhaling for 5½ seconds might just be respiration's magic metric. He challenges Western medicine's philosophy of breathing. "[It is] looking at pathologies associated with breathing—lung conditions, emphysema, cancer—not healthy, optimum breathing," says Nestor. "The thinking is, get breath into our bodies, and our bodies are going to fig-

ure it out from there. You don't need to pay attention to how much is coming in or how often. And what I found in talking with various leaders in the field is that is completely wrong. How we breathe is as important as what we eat, how much we exercise, whatever genes we inherit. It's that vital."

The book features a coterie of what Nestor calls "pulmonauts"—people (mostly non-medical) who "stumbled on the powers of breathing" while trying to help themselves or others. Some of their stories strain the reader's credulity: Katharina Schroth, for example, a German teenager diagnosed with scoliosis at the turn of the 20th century who developed a complex method of breathing and stretching through which she effectively "breathed her spine straight again," Nestor writes. Or Carl Stough, an American choir conductor who, in the 1950s and '60s, used his insight into the mechanics of the diaphragm to treat emphysema patients with unconventional techniques such as massaging a patient's neck and throat while having them repeatedly count to five.

Or Konstantin Pavlovich Buteyko, a Ukrainian physician who, after being diagnosed at age 29 with such a severe case of hypertension that doctors gave him a year to live, developed a protocol called "Voluntary Elimination of Deep Breathing," which included taping tennis balls to pneumonia patients' backs so they would lie on their sides. All were accused of quackery; all eventually saw their work embraced by the medical community.

Nestor also delved into what he calls "the outer limits of breathing," spending time with disciples of an ancient Buddhist practice known as Tummo, or inner fire meditation. This involves a system of heavy hyperventilation for several minutes followed by a sequence of holding the breath for 15 seconds at a time, as well as periodic exposure to cold. It has something of a global profile thanks to Dutch extreme athlete and Tummo devotee Wim Hof, who has set records for swimming under ice and running barefoot on snow. The idea is to trigger the sympathetic nervous system, which puts you on high alert. "It purposely stresses your body out," Nestor says. "You are controlling the knob on your own body. You breathe like crazy for 20 minutes. You're just going for it. You're holding your breath and then you're doing it again. But then the other 23½ hours of the day you're so completely relaxed." We need to reset this balance because modern life has our nervous

systems confused, Nestor explains. We're not running from lions and tigers and bears anymore, but neither do we ever quite relax, not sleeping well at night, not settling into focused work during the day.

Nestor's Tummo instructor, Chuck McGee III, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes in his 30s and soon began suffering from chronic back pain, anxiety, depression and high blood pressure. He was on a cocktail of medications that included Valium and four or five ibuprofen a day, but nothing seemed to help. But after trying Tummo, McGee was able to wean off his hypertension medicine, went down to one or two ibuprofen a week and reduced his insulin intake by 80 per cent. "Doctors say this is more pseudoscience than science, and there's no way any of this can be true," McGee is quoted as saying in Nestor's book. But thousands of people describe similar improvements. And it goes beyond reporting an alleviation of symptoms, Nestor points out: they have blood work showing that their C-reactive proteins—an inflamma-

tory marker that reflects the severity of conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis and eczema—dropped 40-fold within two weeks of adopting the breathing exercises and cold exposure that comprise the Tummo method. Nestor himself

still practises, participating in McGee's free online weekly sessions.

Breathing techniques have their limits. They can't dissolve a blood clot in the lung or kill cancer cells. They can't stop a pathogen from infiltrating our respiratory tracts. When asked whether they might help a person fight the coronavirus, Nestor demurs. "I do not want to get into that too much. I don't know the particulars of it," he says. "What I do know is that the stronger your respiratory health is, the better you're going to be able to fight this thing." Nestor has watched with interest as treatments that mirror those he studied—increasing nitric oxide delivery to the body's cells (which is achieved through nasal breathing) or laying people on their sides rather than their backs—are being adopted in an effort to treat patients with COVID-19. And he's talking to his pulmonaut friends more than he did even while writing the book. "I got really deep into this world. I became a little obsessed about it," he says. "But it continues on. And I'm loving these conversations, and putting all these pieces together. I'll probably revise the paperback with the science of what's happening now." ♣

'HOW WE BREATHE IS AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT WE EAT, HOW MUCH WE EXERCISE, WHATEVER GENES WE INHERIT'

Public Health



An Ounce of Prevention: Why Investments in Public Health Are Essential

Ian Culbert
Executive Director,
Canadian Public Health Association

The current COVID-19 global pandemic has shone a spotlight on federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal public health services. Efforts to control infectious diseases are an essential public health responsibility, but they're only one aspect of what public health professionals do every day to help improve your overall health and well-being.

The primary focus of public health is protecting and improving communities' health. This population health approach identifies and reduces health threats through policies on issues such as infection control, food safety, support for children, poverty, housing, sanitation, substance use, and the environment.

Public health isn't the same as the publicly-funded health care system. While public health focuses on keeping people healthy, it typically receives less than 10 percent of the total health care budget. As the current pandemic has shown us, when public health is underfunded and unable to respond at full capacity, the economic, human, and political costs are enormous.

Public health is the frontline defence for your health and well-being at the local, provincial/territorial, and federal levels. If you value your health and well-being, then tell your elected officials to invest in public health. ■

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RNA vaccines are emerging as the most promising approach for vaccine development, enabling a rapid response to COVID-19 and future pandemics. Precision NanoSystems (PNI) is a leading provider of technologies for the development of RNA vaccines and medicines, and works with over 200 drug development companies and academic institutions. PNI and many of its partners are now developing vaccine candidates for COVID-19.

RNA vaccines work by providing the code and instructions to your cells to produce representative but harmless parts of the virus. Your immune system uses these virus parts to train itself to defend against

future infections. RNA vaccines are a disruptive technology as they're significantly faster and easier to develop and manufacture than existing vaccine technologies. Through PNI's platform, RNA vaccines can be rapidly produced, manufactured in-country, and evolved to respond to new or changing viruses.

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Social Change During COVID-19: How One Community Became Canada's Social Innovation Sandbox



Dr. Alina Turner
CEO &
Co-Founder,
HelpSeeker

Medicine Hat, AB, became well-known as the first city to end homelessness in 2015. In practical terms, it means this community has a response in place that prevents homelessness, and rehuses those who fall through the cracks within 10 days. Never ones to rest on their laurels, Medicine Hatters took on a new challenge to embrace social and technology innovations that tackled root causes to homelessness, including poverty, a lack of affordable housing, and domestic violence.



Jaime Rogers
Medicine Hat
Community
Housing
Society

Building on this energy, local organizations partnered with tech social enterprise HelpSeeker to develop game-changing ideas, the first being the Help Navigator app, which

connects people with the supports closest to them in 22 languages. Since the launch of the app, these have spread to 200 communities across Canada, giving people a way to access almost 140,000 services, and growing everyday. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, this digital network immediately mobilized to support those impacted who were struggling with mental health, domestic violence, or basic needs, generating over 100,000 interactions monthly on the platform at the height of the pandemic.

"I think of Medicine Hat as this perfect innovation sandbox: the community embraces change and doing better and it's not afraid of failing forward," says HelpSeeker CEO and Co-Founder, Dr. Alina Turner. "Seeing this idea develop locally and then spread so quickly inspires us to take on new challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need for innovation rather than halting it," adds Jaime Rogers of the Medicine Hat Community Housing Society.

What's next for Medicine Hat? Rogers has



convened a local group of movers and shakers to partner with HelpSeeker on a significant systems transformation initiative through a national housing strategy solution lab funded by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). The initiative aims to restructure the local social sector using concepts like digital ID, blockchain technology, and machine learning. "These aren't common terms used in the social realm, but we believe the application of these types of emerging technologies can create significant value in the delivery of social services, in our case, affordable housing," says Steffan Jones, Vice President of Innovation at CMHC. ■



For more information, visit helpseeker.org.

This article was supported by **Help Seeker** and the **Medicine Hat Community Housing Society**.



Leadership and Efficient Data Management Help Manage COVID-19 Response and Recovery

Michele Sponagle

The COVID-19 pandemic has put health care in the spotlight. It has brought health care's strengths and weaknesses to the forefront, especially in the way patient data is managed. Patient data is a critical issue that underscores the need for innovative solutions.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted critical challenges with our health care delivery system," says Sonia Pagliaroli, Chief Nursing Officer at Cerner Canada. "The single common thread in all of them is data. When we're dealing with a pandemic such as COVID-19, it's imperative that everyone have access to clinical data across all venues to protect our health care workers and provide the best care to patients."

For 40 years, Cerner has worked at the intersection of health care and information technology. It has sparked the creation of tools to support hospitals and health care systems. Its underlying philosophy is that data delivers insight, insight triggers action, and action produces outcomes. It's a fitting approach for addressing current challenges like information

integration, capacity, and volume management within health care systems.

"There was recognition that a centralized way of getting data was needed to manage COVID-19 issues like staffing and testing," says Michael Billanti, Director of Population Health at Cerner Canada. "It's all about open, interoperable sharing." Health and social information from multiple sources are needed for both research and supporting medical decisions. On a wider scale, findings should be applied across entire health care systems.

It's an effective strategy. Island Health, Vancouver Island's local health authority, uses Cerner technology as its single electronic health records (EHRs) across venues on the island including acute care, ambulatory care, primary care, long-term care, community health, and public health. The company's Cerner Millennium® and patient portal HealthLifeSM digital platforms were integral in providing one-stop access to vital information to health care providers and public health workers.

It's an approach that will continue not only through the COVID-19 recovery phase but beyond as health care shifts from a reactive to proactive focus. Data technology will help lead the way. ■

This article was sponsored by **Cerner**.

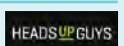


Immediate Action Needed to Prevent Male Suicides During COVID-19 Crisis

Dr. John Ogrodniczuk
Founder,
HeadsUpGuys

In this stressful period, which is unprecedented in our lifetime, it's critical that the public be made aware of free mental health resources. The last economic crisis in 2008 to 2009 saw a significant increase in male suicides, setting a frightening precedent that has clear implications for our current situation. Based out of the University of British Columbia, HeadsUpGuys is a leading global resource that tackles depression and suicide among men. Maintaining mental health during this time is going to require extra effort, but we can and will get through this together. For health strategies for managing and preventing depression, or to donate, visit headsupteguys.org. ■

This article was supported by **HeadsUpGuys**.



Not All Hand Sanitizers Are Created Equal

Hand sanitizers have been essential in the battle against COVID-19 — and they're here to stay. Find the right sanitizer with these tips:

1 Look at the percentage of alcohol.

The most effective hand sanitizers consist of 60 to 85 percent alcohol by volume. Water content improves penetration and slows down evaporation.

2 Choose the right type of alcohol.

Ethanol is more effective than isopropanol alcohol (on its own) against viruses, is less toxic, and has less odor.

3 Opt for helpful extra ingredients.

Moisturizers like aloe and vitamin E help reduce the dry feeling of alcohol.

4 Ensure proper application.

1. Clean dirt and grease from hands. 2. Apply a dime-size amount to the palm of one hand. 3. Rub your hands together, covering all surfaces of both hands for at least 20 seconds until dry. Do not wipe off hand sanitizer before it dries. Allow it to dry on your hands. ■

For more information, visit zytegermbuster.ca.

Made in Canada
Trusted Since 2004
Look for products approved by Health Canada. Check the label before purchasing.



This article was sponsored by **Citron Hygiene**.



How to Welcome Employees to a Safe and Healthy Workplace

Anne Pappmehl

After months of lockdown, businesses are eager to resume operations. “COVID-19 has heralded an unprecedented awareness around hygiene, and businesses are focused on reopening safely in the next few weeks,” says Peter Farrell, President and CEO of Citron Hygiene, an international hygiene services company with its head office in Markham, ON. Similarly, employees are concerned and want to know their workplaces are safe.

Historically, building design has focused on maximizing the number of employees in an office, and personal desks were replaced with “hotel”-type work stations. The new, post-COVID workplace requires that employers invest in increasing personal space and improving office hygiene.

Because the virus that causes COVID-19 can contaminate surfaces for up to 72 hours, a touch-free environment is key to employee safety. “The biggest challenge is knowing where to start. We partner with our customers through virtual meetings and facility surveys to make sure they’re set up for a successful return to work,” says Katy Baker, Citron Hygiene’s Director of Marketing.

Citron Hygiene’s service recommenda-



Peter Farrell
President & CEO,
Citron Hygiene



Alison Mahoney
Executive Vice
President Sales
& Marketing,
Citron Hygiene



Katy Baker
Director of
Marketing,
Citron Hygiene

tions include proper disposal of personal protective equipment, professional disinfection across all surfaces, and providing a completely touch-free washroom.

Along with these measures come educational signage, up-to-date COVID-19 information, and specially-trained hygiene consultants. “We’re ready and look forward to being a trusted advisor as Canadian businesses prepare to reopen,” says Alison Mahoney, Citron Hygiene’s Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing. ■

Learn more about how Citron Hygiene can help your business become compliant with COVID-19 safety measures at citronhygiene.com or **1-800-643-6922**.

This article was sponsored by **ServiceMaster Clean**.



How to Keep Workplaces Clean After COVID-19 Closures



As municipalities are relaxing restrictions and allowing non-essential businesses to reopen, the main question on everyone’s mind is: what does the “new normal” look like on the other side of the lockdown?

Returning to work requires businesses to adopt protocols that limit the likelihood of virus transmission within their walls in order to protect the health and safety of workers. Some of these protocols include:

1 Physical distancing to maintain a two-metre distance from others. For those that have reopened or are about to, this means a rethink of how office meetings will be conducted and how collaborative spaces will be used.

2 Adjusting office layouts to ensure proper physical distancing.

3 Ensuring employees and visitors practise healthy hand hygiene.

4 Frequent cleaning and disinfecting of high-touch surfaces.

5 A declutter policy that may include depersonalizing work areas to allow cleaning staff full access to clean and disinfect properly.

Long-term solutions for healthy workplaces

Facility managers will need to work with their commercial cleaning suppliers to adopt new cleaning protocols to ensure the safety of workplace occupants. Cleaning

and disinfecting are more important than ever, but they’re only short-term solutions. The truth of the matter is that once a surface has been cleaned and disinfected, all that work can easily be undone by a passerby who re-contaminates the surface by simply touching it. Therefore, long-term protection is critical to keeping employees healthy and providing them with some peace of mind.

So, what do we mean by long-term protection? A cleaning plan that consists of cleaning, disinfecting, and a solution that inhibits microbial growth between cleaning and disinfecting services. These three steps work together to help ensure that surfaces — and workplaces — are clean 24/7. ■

ServiceMaster Clean Canada delivers janitorial, commercial carpet cleaning, and specialty cleaning services from coast to coast. To find out more, visit servicemasterclean.ca.



Gavin Bajin
National
Director,
ServiceMaster
Clean



Seek the Latest Advice From Your Health Care Professional Before Travelling

Michele Sponagle

After months of staying at home because of COVID-19, many Canadians are keen to start planning their future travels. While we're likely to see new protocols introduced by airlines like pre-boarding screening, contactless check-ins, and wearing masks in transit, the focus on staying healthy hasn't changed. It remains a priority — even more so as awareness around the spread of the disease has increased.

While there will always be some risk of exposure to disease with travel, the

key is to take preventative steps. “Unless you're going to live in a bubble and never leave your home, you're exposing yourself to risk,” says Ajit Johal,

a pharmacist and Clinical Director of Vancouver-based TravelRx. “That's not going to change. People will just have to find ways to mitigate it.”

Reduce risk by being prepared

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Johal points out that people will want to be extra diligent once they start globe-trotting. “It's interesting because all government websites say, ‘See a health care provider before you take any trips abroad.’ Now that's going to happen much more,” he says. “Being prepared is not only crucial for travellers' health, but also for

our health care system at home. When people don't immunize themselves when they travel, they can become asymptomatic carriers and spread certain diseases at home when they return.”

Travellers taking international trips need to understand the importance of staying safe. “Over the last couple of years, I've seen more and more people electing to get vaccinated before they travel,” says Johal. “Vaccination is still the best public health intervention. I'm a huge proponent.”

That means making sure your immunizations are up to date and being diligent about general hygiene practices, from thorough handwashing — a skill many have perfected during the COVID-19 pandemic — to wiping down surfaces on airplanes and at hotels and restaurants with disinfectant. Johal also suggests travellers be careful about what they eat (boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it) and about preventing insect bites, especially from mosquitoes, which can carry a range of diseases.

When it comes to planning a trip, choose destinations carefully as countries are still grappling with COVID-19. “Ideally, you'll want to ensure that where you're headed has low infection and death rates,” notes Dr. Brian Aw, Medical Director at the Ultimate Health Medical Centre in Richmond Hill, ON. “It's irresponsible to go somewhere where cases are rising. And you'll also need to be aware of — and respect — local quarantine laws.”

Stay safe abroad through immunization

Preparing for a trip also means minimizing the chances of having any kind of medical intervention abroad, which may increase your risk of being infected in a hospital or clinic, Dr. Aw notes. “Given that COVID-19 can give a traveller multiple symptoms including fever, cough, shortness of breath and diarrhea, you want to avoid any comorbidity that could cause you to have serious complications from the virus,” he explains. So before you go, he recommends getting your flu shot, getting the necessary vaccinations for the areas visited, and taking measures to prevent traveller's diarrhea, an illness that affects 30 to 50 percent of travellers during a two-week trip overseas. As well, people planning trips should consider other vaccines available and appropriate to their health status.

The good news is that we will travel again. As both experts agree, exploring the world is possible to do safely by adopting risk-mitigating measures. In the meantime, look to reputable sites for credible information and consult a health care professional at least four to six weeks prior to departure to get the best and most up-to-date advice on best practices for staying healthy at home and abroad. ■

This article was made possible with support from **Valneva**.

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“
The good news is that we will travel again. Exploring the world is possible to do safely by adopting risk-mitigating measures.”

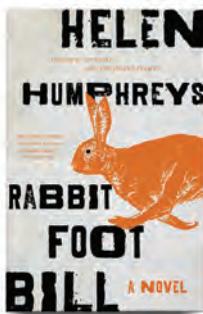
GREAT SUMMER READS

Here are 20 new works of fiction and non-fiction, recently published or upcoming, to engage and delight readers in the sun

IN 1947 IN Canwood, Sask., 12-year-old Leonard Flint witnessed a murder, an act described by Helen Humphreys in prose so quiet that the act simultaneously presents as shocking and mundane. In 1959, Flint—now a psychiatrist fresh out of med school and the untrustworthy narrator of this arresting novel—arrives at Weyburn Mental Hospital, 100 km southeast of Regina. There he finds Machiavellian hospital head Luke Christiansen and the rest of his new colleagues committed to a dubious treatment protocol reliant on LSD, a drug the psychiatrists take themselves, the better to empathize with their patients.

Flint also finds at Weyburn—to his declared surprise—the killer, Rabbit Foot Bill, a local tramp he had idolized during his unhappy childhood years in Canwood. Flint, whose mental fragility is on a par with that of the patients in his care, immediately rekindles his childhood obsession with Bill and neglects his other charges. By training and personal experience, the psychiatrist knows a lot about the stories people tell about themselves, and can sometimes see the contours of his own. Mid-novel, Flint pauses to tell whomever he imagines is paying attention that there was

a happy-ending moment in his reunion with Bill, “if the story had only stopped there.” It doesn’t, of course. Flint’s obsession, its roots and the dangerous drug so easily available at Weyburn inexorably lead to tragedy. But also to resolution, by peeling off thick layers of personal and social secrecy stretching back to the Second World War, Humphreys’ prime fictional landscape throughout her career.



RABBIT FOOT BILL
Helen Humphreys
Available Aug. 18

Her explorations of the wartime setting helped make Humphreys one of the most popular literary novelists in Canada, and her readership has stayed with her since she began crafting her distinct hybrids, as she calls her newer mixtures of fiction, nonfiction and author’s intrusions. For the most part the seams of Humphreys’ books, however tightly stitched, are clearly visible. In her biographical novel *Machine Without Horses* (2018), the first half

consists of the author ruminating on how best to fictionally depict a real-life person, with the second half featuring the result. This time, Humphreys does begin in familiar, “based-on-a-true-story” historical fiction territory. There really was such a murder in Canwood in 1947, and the man convicted was known as Rabbit Foot Bill. But on the

whole, the story is more true to the fragile human mind than to history.

Weyburn Mental Hospital itself, the place where the word “psychedelic” was coined, is only a ghostly presence in the novel, despite its outsized role in the history of mental illness treatment in Canada. (In *Rabbit Foot Bill*, it mostly serves as a source of irony—every generation of psychiatrists evidently despises the practices of its predecessors—and humour: a circle of respectable ’50s doctors on acid sounds a lot like stoned undergrads circa 1971.) As well, in her concluding author’s note, Humphreys disavows any need to be “faithful” to the historical record. Her aim, she writes, was to adhere “to the memory of one Hugh Lafave,” referencing a prominent psychiatrist who was a superintendent at Weyburn, and before that, a Canwood boy who had known Rabbit Foot Bill before the murder. Whether that fidelity refers to Lafave’s recollection of events in Canwood or Weyburn, when neither Flint nor Christiansen is a plausible stand-in for him, or to a kind of in memoriam tribute to his life’s work, is left unclear.

No matter. The ambiguities and uncertainties, paralleling her protagonist’s own, may mean a new level of hybridization for the author. But they make *Rabbit Foot Bill* all the more alluring for her readers, a quintessentially Humphreys story as beguiling as ever. **BRIAN BETHUNE**

MOST ANTICIPATED



THE PULL OF THE STARS

Emma Donoghue, Available July 21

Another pandemic book finished months before our current situation, Emma Donoghue’s 11th novel takes place in a Dublin hospital during the deadly second wave of the Spanish flu. Over three endless days as the Great War grinds to its end, nurse (and narrator) Julia Power, volunteer Bridie Sweeney and physician Kathleen Lynn (a real-life figure) profoundly affect one another’s lives as they struggle in a makeshift and flu-ravaged maternity ward. Donoghue, a first-rate historical novelist, skillfully weaves the era’s primitive medical understanding and social prejudices into her moving story of three caregivers with little but loving care to give. —B.B.



In *Humankind*, Bregman concludes that humans are 'deeply inclined to be good to each other'

IF THERE'S SUCH a thing as a beach read for brainiacs, this might be the one for socially distanced 2020. Its hopeful message could not be better timed. On an epic quest for a solid answer to an eternal question, whether human nature "is essentially good—or bad," Dutch polymath, TED Talks wunderkind and self-described "preacher's kid" Rutger Bregman doesn't struggle long before arriving at a decision. He concludes that humans are "deeply inclined to be good to each other." It's how we've evolved.

Sensing that for a cynical, suspicious and fearful era, such a stance might seem counterintuitive (or sadly naive), he marshals an army of research findings as support. In essence, Bregman aligns himself with primatologist Frans de Waal, who coined the term "veneer theory" to describe an enduring but deeply flawed view of human nature associated with the 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes—that our civilized behaviour amounts to "a cultural overlay, a thin veneer hiding an otherwise selfish and brutish nature."

As Bregman turns adroitly from Neanderthal brains and Russian silver foxes to communal reactions to the Blitz of 1941, he returns to Hobbes/veneer theory on a regular basis. And as the pages of *Humankind* progress, Hobbes' leviathan of a viewpoint takes on the appearance of cantankerous opinion rather than verifiable fact. Bregman never denies human darkness, only that it's essential to our very nature. Cannily, he understands that any reader will immediately hold up any number of historical

events that appear to prove we're not inclined to be good to each other. He revisits several, offering fresh ways to interpret them.

Evidently an avid reader and researcher, Bregman skips from idea to idea—Machiavellianism, the Golem effect, "pluralistic ignorance," "broken windows' theory"—while also touching on Dawkins's selfish gene, Arendt's "banality of evil," Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (not to mention jihadists, bullying, Donald Trump, Easter Island, oxytocin, Jane Goodall, Norwegian prisons, and many, many experiments using student volunteers or lab rats). It's a dazzling performance.

As impressive as Bregman's arguments are, he's a gifted storyteller, transforming discussions of "contact hypothesis" and "extrinsic incentives bias" into riveting food for thought. Picture an animated, multi-directional lecture by a charismatic professor, and you're at *Humankind*.

The argument now supported to his satisfaction, Bregman subsequently outlines a "new realism," an approach for seeing ourselves as we truly are. And a final chapter, "Ten Rules to Live By," gives readers some species-wide self-help. Though the seventh rule ("Avoid the news": it "only skews your view of the world") may rub many people the wrong way, others (including "Don't punch Nazis" and "Come out of the closet: Don't be ashamed to do good") have the merit of being buoyant and doable. "Cut yourself some slack," Bregman seems to tell humanity. That's welcome advice. **BRETT JOSEF GRUBISIC**

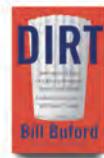


**HUMANKIND:
A HOPEFUL HISTORY**
Rutger Bregman
Available now



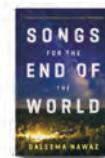
SORRY FOR YOUR TROUBLE
Richard Ford, Available now

Richard Ford is primarily known for the elegant, inward narrative sprawl of his Frank Bascombe novels. And yet he's equally good, some say better, at the short story, and at fiction's oft-neglected middle child, the novella. This latest collection finds the author, like the rest of us, in an elegiac mood: loss runs through these nine tales, with their casts of widows and widowers, like a red thread. Emotional intelligence is as ever Ford's tent pole; he's a master, especially, of dialogue's slippery chemistry: its fleeting highs, misfiring signals and crashing lows. —**Emily Donaldson**



DIRT
Bill Buford, Available now

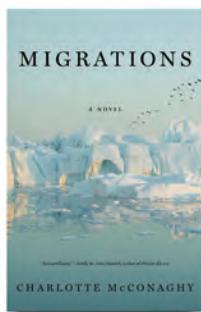
Bill Buford learned Italian cooking in his last memoir, *Heat*. For *Dirt*, the ex-literary editor gets himself a job at a Michelin-starred French kitchen in Lyon. Tense humour abounds as Buford subjects himself to successive humiliations, but as he perseveres, his narrative transcends its fish-out-of-water premise. He digs into the violent history and peculiar social dynamics of this city at the heart of French gastronomy. "French food is built on making opposites work," he tells us, and in this often hilarious, unabashedly nerdy and unexpectedly poignant book, he does just that. —**Mike Doherty**



SONGS FOR THE END OF THE WORLD
Saleema Nawaz, Ebook available now

Rushed out as an ebook months before its August print release, *Songs* is already famous for how prescient a pandemic novel it is, the way its epidemiological issues, from the rush to put unproven treatments into use to the pressure to reopen economically too soon, mirror our own. But it's also a haunting and ultimately hopeful story, told by a half-dozen intricately linked characters who struggle to face down panic and despair, about the fragility of human connection and the lengths to which even ordinary people will go to keep it alive. —**B.B.**

MOST ANTICIPATED



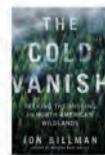
MIGRATIONS

Charlotte McConaghy, Available Aug. 4

It's the near future, and the Sixth Great Extinction is roaring to its end, decimating the planet's wildlife. Franny Stone, who has always found balm for her losses in her love of birds, is obsessed by the thought of their extinction. She heads to Greenland to track the last flock of Arctic terns on what she believes will be their final migration to Antarctica. After she affixes tracking devices to three of the flock, Franny talks her way onto a desperate fishing boat, convincing the captain and crew of the Pequod-like Saghani that the terns will lead them to their own white whale, one last haul of disappearing fish. On the journey south, one shard at a time, the secrets of Franny's violence-shattered life—and the danger her past poses to everyone on board—start to emerge, in an exceptional novel that is both an elegy to a vanishing world and a page-turning thriller. —*B.B.*

IN APRIL 2017, Jacob Gray abandoned his bicycle in Washington state's Olympic National Park and vanished. The search for the 22-year-old forms the narrative spine of this compassionate and riveting non-fiction dive into wilderness disappearances. One of the many volunteer searchers involved, Jon Billman became close with Gray's father, Randy, a man willing to "liquidate his world in order to find his son." The two scoured and rescoured the park, the nearby river and then—in case Jacob had run away to a new life—went further afield, from northern California to Vancouver Island. Everywhere, they encountered bureaucratic roadblocks, good-hearted psychics, conspiracy theorists pinning disappearances on alien or Bigfoot abductions, and dead ends—and other searchers crying out for information about their lost ones.

Although precise numbers are hard to find, the author writes, the "vanish-without-a-trace incidents happen a lot more than almost anyone thinks." So, everywhere, too, are the families, stuck in a world shrunk to "two awful gerunds, missing and searching." Billman, a short story author making his first foray into non-fiction,



THE COLD VANISH

Jon Billman

Available July 7

writes beautifully about the anguish of uncertainty, including the way it literally mirrors Alzheimer's, where the vanished are still visible, but their loss just as mysterious. In the North American cases that Billman discusses, some families abandon the effort while some never flag. Randy Gray didn't, right up until the day, 16 months after his son vanished, when marine biologists found Jacob's wallet halfway up a mountain 25 km from where he had left his bike, and park rangers then recovered his remains.

Most of the lost are quickly found, but the "cold vanished" have varying fates: some walk out on their own many days later, others seem destined to be eternal enigmas, and even the eventually found leave tormenting questions. Jacob Gray still trails an enduring mystery behind him. Randy Gray no longer puzzles over the where of his son's story but the why—what could he have been thinking to abandon his bike trip to march up the side of a mountain? If there's a moral to Billman's haunting story, it's don't go into the woods alone—it can be murderous for everyone. **B.B.**

GINA RAE LA Cerva's debut book interrogates not only what it means to eat "wild" food but also the environmental, economic and societal impacts of doing so. With fearless drive and a talent for tactile description, the geographer and environmental anthropologist treks through Poland's remaining primeval forests, hunts moose in Sweden, follows the illegal game-meat trade from DR Congo to Paris, and traces the multi-billion-dollar fetish for swiftlet birds' nests to Borneo and Malaysia. The book zings when she digs into historical context—for instance, the roots of European conserva-

tion in the preservation of hunting grounds for royalty—as well as issues of race, class and gender. Less compelling are the episodes when she herself becomes the story, and at times the writing feels overdone and her observations undercooked: "Our appetites—whether as rich tourist or poor refugee—have driven us around the world." Elsewhere, she's perceptive. Regarding zoonoses—diseases that travel from animal to human—she asks why we consider poultry and pork less risky than bush meat: "Perhaps it simply comes down to racism." There's a lot to chew on here. **M.D.**

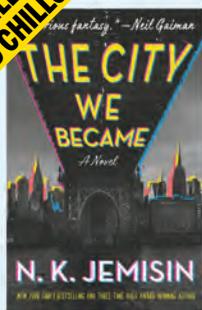


FEASTING WILD

Gina Rae La Cerva

Available now

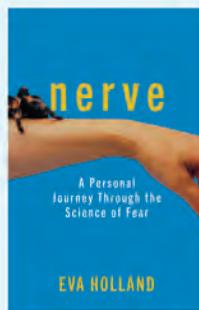
THRILLS
AND CHILLS



THE CITY WE BECAME

N.K. Jemisin, Available now

In this novel, an epidemic afflicts New Yorkers—but this one turns them into bigots. A diverse group of characters is called to save the city from the kind of "fascist dudebros" who, in real life, have hurled abuse at N.K. Jemisin for being a Black woman writing speculative fiction. They're controlled by an alien presence that spawns wriggling tentacles and can only be overcome by iconic New York practices, from battle-rap to aggressive driving. A perfectly timed romp about resilience. —**M.D.**



NERVE

Eva Holland, Available now

Despite a lifetime of being afraid, Eva Holland never considered fear as a human phenomenon or confronted her own, until her worst fear—the sudden death of her mother—was realized in 2015. After her grief and panic faded, the Whitehorse-based writer decided to face her fears and learn about everyone else's. *Nerve's* smooth interweaving of memoir and science—the human ability to smell fear is explored during Holland's account of her skydiving experience—is what makes it so compelling. —**B.B.**



Thammavongsa's characters, many of whom are refugees in Canada, wield power where they can

SHORT FICTION

THE CHARACTERS IN Souvankham Thammavongsa's debut short-fiction collection—many of whom are, like her, Lao refugees living in Canada—hold typical newcomer jobs: they work in nail salons and factories, or as cleaners and labourers. But Thammavongsa, who's also a poet, isn't interested in a documentary-style literature of hardship. Instead, she elevates each of these spare, unflashy tales into something captivating and unpredictable. Often, generational roles are reversed, with children becoming their parents' protectors. In the title story, a young girl decides not to correct her father's hard-K pronunciation of "knife,"

even after she's teased about it at school. In another, the narrator confesses: "I didn't tell my mother they don't wear uniforms in college here. I wanted her to have her dreams."

In "Randy Travis," a man scrimps and saves so his wife can see her idol in concert. When they get there, however, they're so far away that the singer's face is "the size of a pin." You can take that as a metaphor for minorities being relegated to the back seat of their adopted culture; and yet, it's also a rite of passage in that very culture: who hasn't suffered the nose-

bleeds just to be in the presence of their hero? Over-interpret Thammavongsa at your own peril. She never panders or resorts to outsider clichés. At a factory Christmas party, the owner's wife wears clothes "in fabric no one else's clothes were made out of." If that's envy, the narrator's not coping to it.

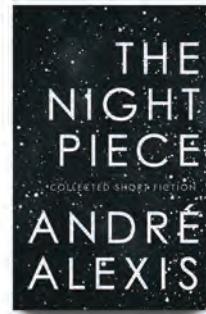


HOW TO PRONOUNCE KNIFE
Souvankham Thammavongsa
Available now

These characters might be at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder but they find, and wield, power where they see it. In the final story—a miniature tour de force—a teen Lao girl, hoping to shake off a well-intentioned guy in her class who clearly likes her, gets him a job worm-picking with her and her mother, only to see

him promoted to manager, a position he performs effortlessly and with cold detachment. Her revenge comes when she refuses to answer her door the night of the school dance, reducing him to a pathetic, sobbing mess.

That spirit—doughty yet mischievous—runs through *Knife*, though it's perhaps best captured by the two girls in "A Far Distant Thing," who like to take turns pushing each other into an apartment garbage chute: "not too hard. Just enough for us to feel the fear and then let it go." **E.D.**



THE NIGHT PIECE
André Alexis, Available Aug. 4

The stories here, a mix of new and previously published that span André Alexis's career, showcase not just his storytelling talent but his dab hand with genre. A satirical element—and numerous laugh-out-loud moments—runs through them all, even as it often takes readers to more complex and darker places. In the title story, a young man, Trinidadian-born like Alexis, spins a tale about a soucouyant, an evil spirit that sheds its daytime disguise as an old woman to consume the life force of her victims by night. (It's not unreasonable to believe, the teller concludes, that "your employer sucked your blood by night.") But that sly Guy de Maupassant-style account opens up to other, subtler tales of skin-shedding and soul-sucking more metaphorical and frightening, making "The Night Piece" one of the gems of a compulsively readable collection. **—B.B.**

SHORT FICTION



THE COYOTES OF CARTHAGE
Steven Wright, Available now

Crackling prose and a deeply cynical attitude make for an extraordinary novel from a former U.S. federal prosecutor. Political consultant Dre Ross is hired to manipulate Carthage County, S.C., voters into allowing miners to trash their rainforest. Dre has the dark money he needs for social media attacks—victory is "about getting voters to hate others," he says—although the story turns on whether he still has the stomach for it. Steven Wright simply eviscerates American politics in his entertaining thriller. **—B.B.**



PARASITE
Bong Joon Ho, Available now

The director of the celebrated Oscar-winning movie caps his achievement with an extraordinary graphic work featuring his personally drawn storyboards. Bong Joon Ho never films without those precise boards, he writes—they assure him and his crew that the original vision is being followed. But spontaneity and creativity still erupt daily on the set, Bong admits, and fans already happy to be able to focus on just what he meant to convey in a scene can also catch fascinating "small differences" between boards and film. **—B.B.**



The current U.S. administration and the old Soviet state share a key feature, writes Gessen: ‘a monomaniacal focus on pleasing the leader’

MORE GREAT READS

BORN IN MOSCOW, Masha Gessen, 53, came to the United States when they—Gessen uses non-binary pronouns—were 14. A decade later, they were back in Russia, as a journalist, advocate for sexual minorities and prominent critic of the country’s slide into authoritarian rule under Vladimir Putin. Amid a rising tide of officially sanctioned homophobia, Gessen moved their family to New York in 2014. There, Gessen’s political focus soon turned to the rise of Donald Trump, a political figure they found far too similar to Putin. Two days after Trump’s 2016 election, Gessen’s essay “Autocracy: Rules for Survival” went viral. Now expanded to book length, it offers a unique perspective—the legacy of a Soviet childhood and stints of Putin- and Trump-watching—on what Gessen identifies as a rising tide of autocracy.

Gessen pays as much attention to Trump’s speech as his acts. And not just his words, but

those of his enablers. One key feature of the autocratic style that the current U.S. administration and the old Soviet state share, Gessen writes, is “a monomaniacal focus on pleasing the leader, to make him appear unerring and all-powerful.” Trump himself has a “gift” for words in his ability to obliterate their true sense, Gessen adds. He has been aided in making political speech meaningless by an effectively complicit media committed to a neutral tone on any presidential statement. In the future, writes Gessen, journalists must openly acknowledge that media is inherently political: “To state directly what they are seeing, journalists will have to reveal where they stand.”

Trumpian language has inexorably corrupted American political discourse, in Gessen’s opinion, although not yet nearly as profoundly as “the century-long decimation of Russian [language] under totalitarianism

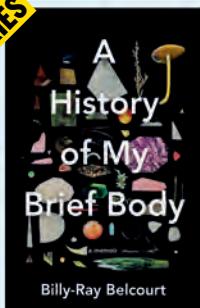
and Putinism.” As a caravan of asylum seekers approached the southern border in 2018, with Trump’s rhetoric swirling about invasion and walls, even liberal media like MSNBC were soon asking what could “deter” the caravan, using language from criminal law to discuss people with a legal right to seek asylum. “The circle of us,” the core of functioning politics, writes Gessen, continues to shrink in America. The coronavirus pandemic has reduced it further, with Trump and his allies more concerned with wealth than lives.

To reverse Trump’s aspirational autocracy, Gessen concludes in this sharply observed and passionate work, will require moral aspiration from Americans—a desire to make America a country of all its people. There’s no going back to a pre-Trump “normalcy,” they warn. The nation will need new politicians, new institutions, new economic thinking and a new definition of what it means to be a democracy, “if that is indeed what we choose to be.” **B.B.**

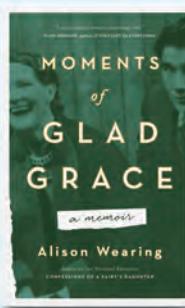


SURVIVING AUTOCRACY
Masha Gessen
Available July 28

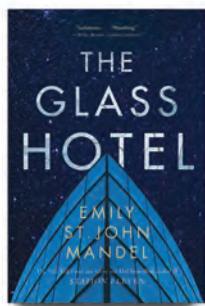
PERSONAL STORIES



A HISTORY OF MY BRIEF BODY
Billy-Ray Belcourt, Available Aug. 25
Within this genre-blending work is an exquisite description of the “function” of a novel: “to whisper, to grab a reader by the throat with an invisible hand.” That’s why Billy-Ray Belcourt—Driftpile Cree Nation member, winner of the Griffin Poetry Prize, Rhodes Scholar, 24 years old—prefers a poet’s approach. “My provocations will be bare-faced,” he writes, and so they are, beautifully shaped sentences that begin (but do not remain) in personal memory—his body, his queerness, his Native heritage—written with joy because “joy is art is an ethics of resistance.” **—B.B.**



MOMENTS OF GLAD GRACE
Alison Wearing, Available now
The author has written about her father before, in the bestselling—and equally witty—2013 memoir *Confessions of a Fairy’s Daughter*. Now, Joseph Wearing, on the cusp of his 80th birthday, is heading to Ireland for genealogical research, with his daughter as assistant, despite zero interest in the subject. There are raw moments of memory and clashing meaning, as in all family memoirs, but the prevailing tone is good-humoured, propelled by a sweetly expressed awareness of how brief a life we share with our loved ones. **—B.B.**



THE GLASS HOTEL

Emily St. John Mandel, Available now

The words “Begin at the end,” and the thoughts of a woman named Vincent as she tumbles from an ocean freighter in 2018, open Emily St. John Mandel’s exquisitely written fifth novel. (Vincent’s mother named her daughter after the American writer Edna St. Vincent Millay, whose appearance in an Emily St. John Mandel novel seems whimsically inevitable.) The multi-voice story—which, like 2014’s *Station Eleven*, shows an unusually nuanced gradation between major and minor characters—soon shifts its focus to a luxury hotel on Vancouver Island, a glass-walled financial tower in Manhattan and the 2008 financial crisis. There’s also an enormous Ponzi scheme, as obvious in retrospect as Bernie Madoff’s, along with crushed lives and curses involving swallowing broken glass. Music and water have substantial presences in Mandel’s understated prose because her characters drift, physically, emotionally and temporally. They swim through memories and new situations, puzzling over how they ended up with the lives they have. They are proof, in an utterly absorbing story of weakness, greed and deceit, especially self-deceit, of what one of them declares in court: “It’s possible to both know and not know something.” —*B.B.*

BRIAN BLANCO/GETTY IMAGES; TAYLOR ROADES/STOCKSY; PREVIOUS SPREAD: NAM PHI DANG

HUMANS ARE BORN to wander, or so argues this absorbing exploration of the intersection of neuroscience and geography. British science writer Michael Bond delves into all the quirks of our wanderlust, including statistically significant gender differences in giving directions, a descriptive “go past the church, turn left at the florist...” from women vs. the male “go two kilometres south then west for 500 m.” The gender split explains why men do better on navigational tests than women do—such tests favour those who use math to orientate themselves—while women do better than men in remembering where objects are located.

The long-standing evolutionary explanation for this difference in finding our way—early *Homo sapiens* males ranging far to hunt, females sticking close to home for foraging—no longer holds up, and researchers are increasingly inclined to a cultural explanation. Girls have never been allowed to roam as far or as freely as boys, limiting their chances to build the step-by-step mental maps that give children confidence in their directional sense. Studies show that eight-year-olds bussed to school are more inclined to display anxiety when away from home than those who walk to class. For that reason, experts Bond spoke with are alarmed by the way parental fear—of traffic and strangers—has shrunk modern childhood’s range. (The author saves his most provocative issue for the epilogue, however: if the heavy lifting of

cognitive mapping has been crucial to human life as we know it, just what is GPS technology, that ultimate shortcut, doing to us?)

Our mental maps are the primary reason humans manage to get anywhere, given how hopeless we are at dead reckoning. Lost without landmarks—in forest, fog or desert—it is impossible to avoid travelling in circles. Yet setting out blindly is what panic induces: a study of 800 search operations in Nova Scotia found only two lost people who had stayed put, one of them an 11-year-old boy who had taken a “Hug a Tree and Survive” course at school. Where the lay of the land is visible, though,

we have always used its features to make mental maps through a series of specialized cells clustered in or around the brain’s hippocampus, including the boundary cells discovered in 2009. They perform the crucial function of indicating our distance and direction from an edge or a wall, or even a change of colour or texture.

Our internal maps once found external expression as toponyms (descriptive place names). In the Arctic, Inuit toponyms handily beat British explorers’ place names as locators: Tallurutiup Imanga, “water surrounding land resembling facial tattoos on the chin,” versus Sir James Lancaster Sound. It takes a lot of effort and neurons to make those maps, but the more spatially engaged we are, researchers note, the more confident we feel about our literal—and metaphorical—place in the world. **B.B.**



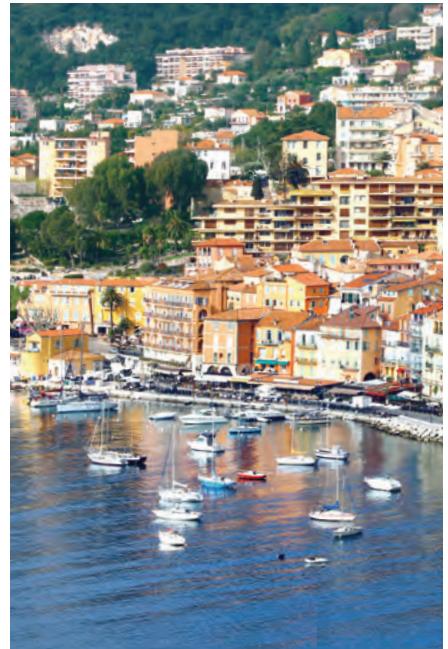
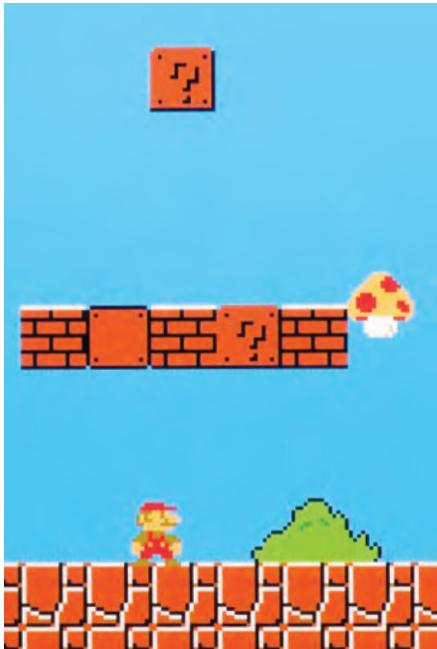
FROM HERE TO THERE

Michael Bond
Available now



The safest thing to do when you’re lost in the woods is to stay put, but humans almost never do

MORE GREAT READS



CHALLENGE

The Quiz

This month, we test your trivia skills on everything from Jumpman to Johnny Carson

Round 1: Honour roll

1. An insect known scientifically as *Vespa mandarinia*, which has recently been in the news, has been given what nickname?
2. Campobello Island, which was the childhood summer retreat of Franklin Roosevelt, is located in which Canadian province?
3. Opened in the early 1970s, Pacha, Privilege (formerly Ku), Amnesia and Es Paradis are the four original nightclubs found in what tourist destination?
4. What is the oldest professional sports team in Florida?
5. What is the provincial bird of Alberta?
6. Long Island Sound separates the state of New York from which other state?
7. Before inventing what he is most known for, what British inventor created the ballbarrow, trolleyball and the wheelboat in the early '70s?
8. What country did Japan annex on Dec. 8, 1941, 10 hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor?
9. First appearing in 1981 as Jumpman in *Donkey Kong*, what occupation did the character

Mario originally have before becoming a plumber in the 1983 *Mario Bros.* game?

10. What fashion designer became well-known for her “Essentials” line in the mid 1980s?

Round 2: Prodigy

1. What term for a young child comes from the Latin meaning “one unable to speak”?
2. What kind of rodent lives in a nest known as a drey?
3. What is the English name for the soft drink known in Quebec as *racinette*?
4. What two-time NBA Finals MVP is nicknamed “the Claw”?
5. What information can you get in Canada by dialing 511?
6. A fleshy type of pine cone known as a galbulus comes from what type of tree?
7. What Sanskrit word is used to refer to a coloured mark worn in the middle of the forehead?
8. What Tony Award-winning composer wrote the 1990 Oscar-winning song *Sooner or Later (I Always Get My Man)*, performed by Madonna on the *Dick Tracy* soundtrack?

9. What is the brand name of the medication known medically as bismuth subsalicylate?
10. According to the biblical account, who brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem?

Round 3: Rhodes Scholar

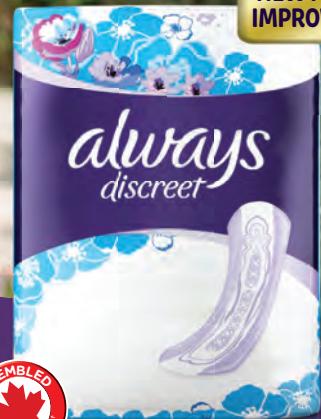
1. What European country is known by the two-letter international abbreviation CH?
2. What genre of dance music, which came out of Chicago in the early '80s, is believed to have started with the 1984 track *On and On* by Jesse Saunders and Vince Lawrence?
3. What is the only modern Canadian province to have been completely located in what was known as Rupert's Land from 1670 to 1870?
4. What university, opened in Burnaby in 1965, is the only school outside the U.S. to compete in the NCAA?
5. What is the English name for the area known in French as the Côte d'Azur?
6. What popular series of young adult novels, which lasted 181 books, began in 1983 with a novel called *Double Love*?
7. In Greek mythology, the titans Cronus and Rhea had three sons. Zeus, Poseidon and whom?
8. For what role did actor David Harbour receive his first Emmy nomination in 2018?
9. What French term described first a carriage, then a model of car that contained an open-topped driver's position and an enclosed compartment for passengers?
10. On May 13, 1994, Johnny Carson made his last television appearance on what show? **TERRANCE BALAZO**

ROUND 1: 1. Murder hornet 2. New Brunswick 3. Ibiza 4. Miami Dolphins 5. Great horned owl 6. Connecticut 7. James Dyson 8. The Philippines 9. Carpenter 10. Donna Karan ROUND 2: 1. Infant 2. Squirrel 3. Root beer 4. Kawhi Leonard 5. Weather and travel 6. Cypress or juniper 7. Bird 8. Stephen Sondheim 9. Pepto-Bismol 10. King David ROUND 3: 1. Switzerland 2. House 3. Mantoba 4. Simon Fraser University 5. French Riviera 6. Sweet Valley High 7. Hades 8. Jim Hopper in *Stranger Things* 9. Coupé de ville 10. Late Show with David Letterman

PUMPKIN/ALAMY; SUNSET/BOULEVARD/CORBIS/GETTY IMAGES; MAX LABELLE/ISTOCK



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Dear man of the crows...

Alec Bruce apologizes to the neighbour he scolded for feeding the crows, after realizing that we all need to be ‘in this together’

I MET YOU only once, and that was to complain after you tossed bread from the balcony of your second-floor apartment. I live in the house across the street, and I watched you dump dozens of baguettes onto the pavement for a murder of crows.

It was late April in the north end of Halifax, on garbage day, around the time Nova Scotia’s premier Stephen McNeil told everyone to “stay the blazes home.” I remember thinking, *Yeah, and he didn’t say feed the birds.*

But there you were, baiting the animals. In no time, the birds discovered other delights—bacon-soaked bits of paper towel, pasta-encrusted chunks of tinfoil—they could pull from the flimsy plastic bags other neighbours had deposited for curbside pickup.

This was the only time I’d actually seen you and the birds together. But for three weeks, from my living room window, I’d observed the half-eaten buns and the rest of the muck littering the sidewalk and known that someone was playing Pied Piper to scavengers during plague times. *Who does that?* I thought. *Aren’t we all supposed to be “in this together?”*

I imagined that whoever was feeding the crows must be lonely and without a family and acquaintances to be cordial with. Maybe he was just another “broken man on a Halifax pier,” like the lyrics from the old Stan Rogers sea shanty. Or maybe an ex-con, like the Birdman of Alcatraz lovingly tending his feathered flock, who simply preferred the company of crows from the woods around the nearby Sisters of Charity motherhouse. Who knows? But on this one garbage day, I’d had enough. I approached you. *Do you remember?*

“Excuse me,” I said, from a socially safe distance on my front lawn. “Would you consider not doing that anymore?”

You looked at me blankly. “I mean, the birds don’t need any food. They come here, s-t and squawk, and throw garbage all over the place.”

You raised an eyebrow. “There’ve been complaints,” I lied.

You turned and went into your flat where, on TV, the news of the world was going from awful to slightly less awful.

I’d been feeling raw since self-isolation began in mid-March. My work as a freelance writer had effectively evaporated and, to make matters worse, I hadn’t seen my daughter, her husband, and their kids in six weeks. Two years ago, my wife and I had moved back to Halifax, after decades of living and working in New Brunswick, to

be closer to them. Now, we couldn’t be farther away if we’d been bivouacking on a beach in Vanuatu.

In confronting you, I thought I’d done something to improve my small, benighted corner of the planet. I’d performed my civic duty, at least. I imagined that you were insulted and angry with me; that you thought I was a crank. I was sure of it... until I read your note.

“I’m sorry,” you’d written on a pink Post-it fixed to a leftover Christmas card, which my next-door neighbour saw you drop into my mailbox the following day. “And thank you.”

I was astonished, humbled and chagrined. Here, while nursing the psychic injuries I believed COVID-19 had caused me, I’d decided to inflict a few of my own wounds upon a perfect stranger, who then had the grace to thank me for it.

I wanted to tell you not to worry; that I was wrong. I looked for you, but you’d vanished. I even shouted questions to your neighbours across your building’s parking lot. Did they know where you’d gone? When would you be around next?

I found someone, who said she was your cousin. I learned you were visiting from another country and that you were staying with friends and family at various places, including this one, in Halifax. She said you’d be back. She told me you were the kind of person who believed that nothing—not even a single crow—should go hungry.

Maybe I could make amends. I pulled out an old family recipe and baked a cornbread. I’d present it the

next time I saw you; the next time you fed the birds. It’s still in the back of my freezer.

I like to think the next time I appropriate a handy catchphrase, only to unwittingly demonstrate how clearly *I am not* “all in this together,” I’ll take a moment to think about the person who’s standing right in front of me and get to know him, and his perspective, just a little.

According to the National Audubon Society, “Crows are thought to be among our most intelligent birds, and [their] success in adapting to civilization would seem to confirm this, despite past attempts to exterminate them.”

If I hadn’t met you, I probably wouldn’t know that. So if you’re out there, I just want to say thank you. And I’m sorry. ♣



It’s worth taking the time to understand other perspectives

To submit your own story to Before You Go write to letters@macleans.ca.

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