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THIS

PROGRESSIVE POLITICS, IDEAS & CULTURE

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CONTENTS

THIS & THAT

FEATURES

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY PATERSON HODGSON

ARTS & IDEAS

THIS

EDITOR Sarah Ratchford
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NEWS EDITOR Tegwyn Hughes
ARTS EDITOR Ashlynn Chand
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BEN BURNETT is a freelance writer and publicist based in Menahqesk/Saint John, where they previously worked in radio and community journalism. As a lifelong maritimer, they proudly mispronounce the word bagel. Their writing focuses on queer issues and sex.

PATERSON HODGSON is a queer illustrator, comic maker and musician living in Toronto, Ontario. Focusing on autobiography and non-fiction, her art centers around working class life, grass-roots organizing, freedom, anarchy, self-discovery and the great unknown with a special interest in intuition building practices like reading tarot and dream interpretation.

MADDY MAHONEY is a freelance journalist who's interested in queer storytelling, subcultures, and weird internet trends. Her writing can be found at *Xtra*, *Toronto Life*, CBC Arts, and elsewhere. She is the co-editor of *The Otter*, a scrappy online magazine for narrative journalism, and was formerly the production editor of *The Review of Journalism* and an editorial intern at *Maisonneuve.*

TOBIN NG is a journalist and fact-checker based in Ottawa. Their first magazine byline was in *This*, and they've since written for *Xtra*, *Maclean's*, and *Broadview*, among other publications. Their stories centre care and creativity in 2SLGBTQ+ and BIPOC communities, exploring how culture and identity shape access to spaces and services.

ROWAN RED SKY (member of Oneida Nation of the Thames) graduated from the publications program at OCAD University in 2015. Her illustrations draw from the oral tradition of her Indigenous culture and personal experiences. Maps, the animacy of the land and the performance of stories inspire her work. She is working toward her PhD in art history at the University of Toronto.

LILIAN SIM is an illustrator and designer from Toronto. She works primarily in watercolour, gouache, and ink but is constantly experimenting with different art mediums in her spare time. She is the recipient of the 2020 Illustration Medal from OCAD University.

Inside *This*

WE ARE SO EXCITED TO WELCOME *THIS MAGAZINE*'S NEW EDITOR Sarah Ratchford. Sarah is a writer and editor living in Menahqesk/Menagoesg (Saint John). Their work has appeared in *Hazlitt*, *The Walrus*, *VICE*, and elsewhere. Their first book, *Fired Up about Consent*, was published in 2021, and they were shortlisted for the Landsberg Award for feminist journalism last year. They're working on their second book, a memoir-in-essays about recovery. They're coming to *This* from *Maisonneuve* magazine, where they've worked as an editor for the past two years.

This is Sarah's first issue, and we can't wait to see all the great things they're going to do with the magazine. We would also like to thank Interim Editor Valerie Howes for all her wonderful work on the last few issues. We really appreciate Valerie stepping in to help us while we searched for our new Editor. Thank you so much, Valerie!

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Proudly presenting

EVEN WHEN I STILL IDENTIFIED AS A STRAIGHT CISGENDER PERSON, Pride Month was my favourite time of year. Going to drag shows and parades made me feel more free, more joyous, and more alive than anything else did. Everyone seemed to be so entirely themselves. You could see in their faces how at ease they were just to be in each other's company, and that nothing was going to get in the way of their fun.

Now, I understand that my love of these spaces is likely because I'm non-binary and also a little gay. I didn't know these things about myself early in life, even if I felt them, because I didn't know that departing from the gender binary was an option. Also, bi erasure is real. Learning who I really was took being part of a wider family of queer people who showed me the way.

It's for reasons like these that we decided to make a Queer Issue this Pride season. As Ottawa drag queen Deca Thlon says in Erin Gee's profile of her on page 5, representation matters.

For themed issues at *This*, the only part of the magazine that needs to be on theme is our features. When I got in touch with the section editors to see what they wanted to run, though, every single one of them delivered moving stories from talented writers and reporters about 2SLGBTQ+ people.

But actually getting to a point where we can "come out" and be part of this wider network can still be a major challenge, as Yannick Mutombo and Ben Burnett point out on pages 11 and 18 respectively. Mutombo dissects the ways in which colonization and religion prevent people from showing true acceptance, and Burnett investigates how businesses are making it hard for people to be out at work.

On page 14, Maddy Mahoney reports on the reality of Canadian Blood Services' supposedly lifted ban against donations from gay men, and the ways in which many, especially sex workers and Black queer people, are still not able to interact with the organization. In her story on page 26, Jenny Heijun Wills also sheds light on how the health-care system mistreats racialized queer people.

Stories like these have a profound impact on community members. But this issue also has a lot of happiness in it: drag queens across the country are flourishing despite bigots' protests against their reading stories to children, queers are starting their own athletic leagues, and disabled 2SLGBTQ+ folks are creating their own ideas of what masculinity means, as Tobin Ng discovers in their Q&A on page 22.

We hope you enjoy reading these stories, and we wish you a happy Pride!

—SARAH RATCHFORD
editor@this.org

PROFILE

Clearing hurdles

Ottawa drag performer's scholarship fund is an homage to her childhood

BY ERIN GEE

PHOTO BY KAITIE ZEILSTRA PHOTOGRAPHY

WHEN DEREK BROUGHAM WAS a member of the University of Ottawa's varsity track and field team, they regularly searched for scholarships for queer athletes. No matter how hard they tried, they couldn't find a single one.

Brougham, who uses both he and they pronouns, is no longer on the team. "I never felt like I quite fit in. No one was ever rude to me, but there was a certain sense that I was being tolerated rather than accepted and celebrated."

Retirement is one of the most difficult things an athlete can experience. Unlike an office job, an athletic career can become someone's social life, form of exercise, job and escape. So what happens when athletes no longer compete? "[Track] was really such a huge part of my identity for so long that when I retired I wasn't fully ready to give it up," Brougham says.

Post-retirement, athletes must bridge the divide between who they were while playing sports and who they are without sports. For Brougham, this period of seeking led to his eventual foray into drag. "Representation is one of the most important and impactful ways to make change," he says. "To me, drag is just the queerest part of queer culture, so I thought it made sense to do that and bring it to sport."

Brougham brought drag "to sport" by merging their love of track with their interest in drag. They named their alter ego Deca Thlon, an ode to their chosen track event. Thlon made her debut as a drag performer in June 2022, during Pride Month.

After years of being out and encouraging various organizations to support and engage with Pride, Brougham decided it was time to do something about the utter lack of support they were seeing for queer athletes. So in her first month of work, Thlon collected all of her booking fees and tips to put toward a queer athletic scholarship. "I decided that I really wanted to make that change and offer that to someone," Brougham says.

It was their first month doing drag,

PHOTOS BY KAITIE ZEILSTRA PHOTOGRAPHY

and they didn't know how much they'd make. Their goal was to raise $500. They ended up exceeding their own expectations and making enough for two scholarships of $1,250 and $500 respectively. Those were awarded to Johnathan Frampton, a Nordic skier at Queen's University, and Sienna MacDonald, a combined-events athlete in track at the University of Calgary.

Brougham plans to award scholarships again during this year's Pride Month. June 2023 will be Thlon's one-year anniversary as a performer, so she wants to throw a big celebration with the proceeds going toward her scholarship fund.

To Brougham, this marriage of interests represents taking up space and serving as a beacon for other queer athletes. Growing up, they remember seeing very few openly 2SLGBTQ+ athletes to look up to. "I can't think of a single queer, gay or lesbian athlete that I could point out," he recalls. "I always found myself relating to women athletes more because it's more about talent than just the brute strength in men's athletics, which is not something I always associated with."

Deca Thlon's drag balances strength and femininity. She loves performing to Taylor Swift songs and even hosted a four-and-a-half-hour T. Swift-inspired show in the lead-up to the artist's latest album release. Thlon also makes costumes for herself and other queens in the city, incorporating her love of sewing into her newfound art.

But the culmination of Deca Thlon's mix of athleticism and drag, aside from her scholarship, is the monthly show she hosts at a local rock climbing gym, where Thlon scales climbing walls while performing songs like Miley Cyrus's "The Climb."

"[The] rock climbing drag is just the coolest thing in my mind—it just feels perfect because of what my drag is and what I'm trying to do," Brougham says.

Moving forward, he hopes to encourage others to find themselves in similar ways by offering bigger scholarships to queer student athletes and increasing the number of scholarships available.

BY THE NUMBERS

Queer count

Gender diversity is higher among younger Canadians and residents living in urban areas

BY SARAH GRISHPUL

CANADA IS HOME TO AN ESTIMATED ONE MILLION 2SLGBTQ+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS, and one in every 300 Canadians over the age of 15 is transgender or non-binary.

The 2021 edition of the Canadian census, the results of which were released last spring, was the first to ask Canadians about their gender identities as well as the sex they were assigned at birth. Respondents were asked whether they identified as a transgender woman, cisgender woman, transgender man, cisgender man or non-binary person.

The census revealed most 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians are located in highly concentrated urban areas, with the population skewing younger in age. Here's a closer look at the numbers.

CANADA'S MOST GENDER-DIVERSE REGIONS

Nearly two in five of all trans and non-binary Canadians live in Ontario, Canada's most populous province, making for 0.28 percent of the province's population. The queer quotient varies by region, with the next-highest populations of trans and non-binary people living in Nova Scotia (0.48 percent of the population), Yukon (0.47 percent) and British Columbia (0.44 percent).

Quebec and Saskatchewan have the smallest number of transgender and non-binary residents. Quebec's population includes 0.23 percent transgender and non-binary people, while Saskatchewan's transgender and non-binary communities fall at 0.28 percent. These numbers are compared to the national average of 0.33 percent.

THE URBAN-RURAL GENDER DIVIDE

The census discovered that the majority of transgender and non-binary people live in urban areas, particularly on the East and West Coasts. The urban centres with the most gender diversity are Victoria, B.C. (0.75 percent), Halifax, Nova Scotia (0.66 percent), and Fredericton, New Brunswick (0.60 percent).

About 15.5 percent of non-binary people aged 15 and over reportedly live in the downtown area of cities, more than twice the percentage of transgender people (7 percent) and cisgender residents (4.7 percent).

Several universities and colleges are located in these downtown areas, which the census report attributes as one of the reasons for the high presence of younger 2SLGBTQ+ people in those urban locations.

YOUNG 2SLGBTQ+ CANADIANS COME FORWARD

Overall, young adults were shown to identify as transgender and non-binary more often than those in other age groups. Of Generation Z (people born between 1997 and 2006), 0.79 percent of the population identified as trans or non-binary, compared with 0.33 percent of Canada's total population over the age of 15. That number was 0.51 percent for millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996). Among people ages 15 to 34, Nova Scotia was shown to reflect the highest gender diversity out of the provinces and territories, with 1.17 percent of the province's residents in that age group identifying as transgender and non-binary.

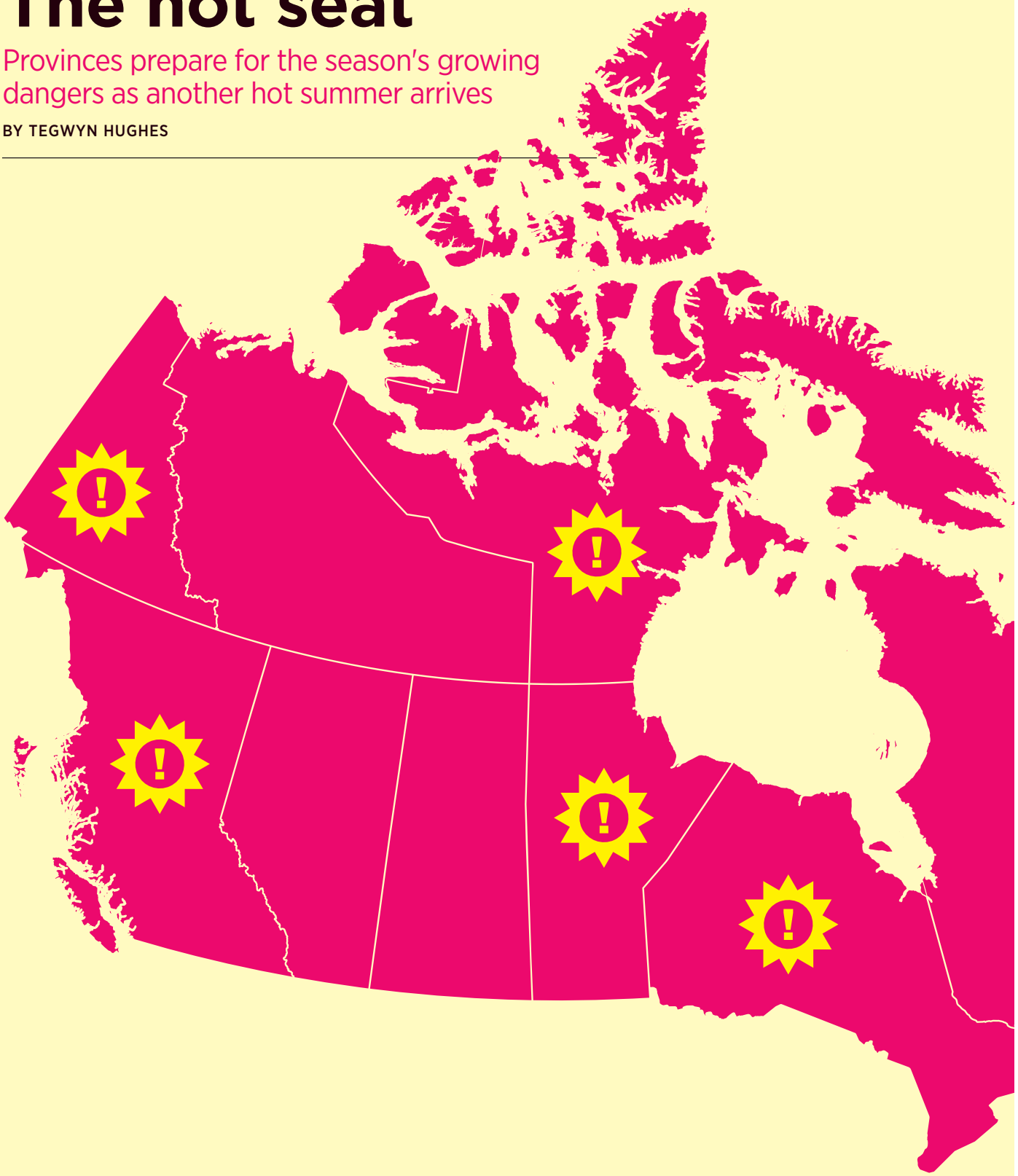
While there remains a presence of transgender and non-binary people within older generations, there's a significantly smaller number of them compared to generations of younger Canadians. Among Generation X (those born from 1966 to 1980), 0.19 percent of the population is trans or non-binary, and that number is 0.15 for baby boomers (born from 1946 to 1965). According to Statistics Canada, this gap can be attributed to the growth in understanding of gender and sexual diversity, as well as social and legislative efforts in recent years to recognize gender identity as fluid.

MAPPING CANADA

The hot seat

Provinces prepare for the season's growing dangers as another hot summer arrives

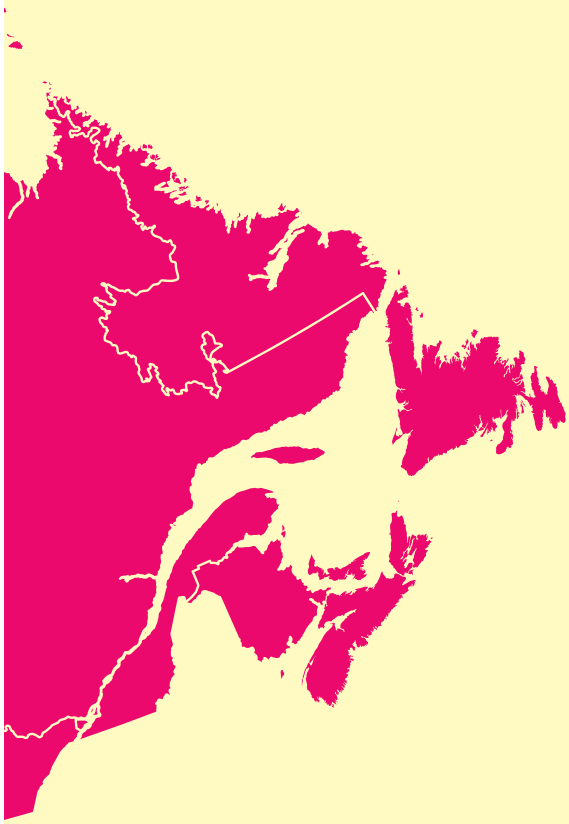
BY TEGWYN HUGHES



AS THE DOG DAYS OF SUMMER approach, people across Canada are likely looking forward to long lazy days at the beach, hazy afternoons at the cottage, and bright mornings outdoors. But scientists are already predicting yet another worryingly hot season in 2023.

The Climate Atlas of Canada warns that as global temperatures continue to rise, extreme heat events will become more likely and will continue to have repercussions on people's health. Summer 2022 broke heat records across Canada and was the country's third-hottest summer in history.

With that in mind, here's a rundown of last summer's temperature records and what governments in different regions are doing (or not doing) to mitigate the harms of hot weather.



ONTARIO

People living in Ontario are used to extreme heat in the summer months, but the frequency and duration of hot weather in the province is steadily increasing over time. August 2022 saw average maximum temperatures of 27.8 degrees Celsius in Toronto.

Despite new legislation requiring Ontario long-term care homes to install air conditioning in all rooms by June 2022, residents in 90 facilities still had no bedroom cooling after that deadline came and went.

MANITOBA

This prairie province beat 21 heat records on June 19, 2022, with the town of Emerson seeing temperatures as high as 38 degrees Celsius. The previous record for that date in Emerson was 34.5, recorded in 1995.

Winnipeg saw its own record-setting high of 37 degrees Celsius on the same day. Advocates in the city appealed to Winnipeg officials to increase the number of water fountains, public washrooms and cooling stations available.

Earlier that summer, Winnipeg installed three "hydration stations" throughout the city where people could fill water bottles as a pilot project in response to summer heat.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

A nine-day-long heat wave lasting from July 26 to August 3, 2022 saw 16 confirmed heat-related deaths, according to the B.C. Coroners Service. The time period was marked by record-shattering heat across the province, with some regions seeing temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius.

In 2021, 619 people died in the 2021 B.C. heat dome, marking the deadliest weather event in Canadian history.

The resulting investigation found that a coordinated heat-alert response system, increased support for vulnerable populations during heat events and long-term mitigation strategies—like cooling centres and air conditioning for those vulnerable to heat—were needed to avoid another heat-related mass casualty event.

NUNAVUT

Canada's three territories weren't exempt from extreme heat in 2022—even regions around the Arctic Circle had never-before-seen temperatures. Over the course of the summer, 166 temperature records were set, with nearly 100 of them taking place in Nunavut.

Taloyoak, Nunavut, which usually sees an average temperature of nine degrees Celsius in July, hit an all-time high of 25.4 degrees on July 14, 2022.

YUKON

In Yukon, the number of wildfires doubled from the previous year as extreme heat dried out forests and made them susceptible to lightning-induced fires.

In response to the growing number of wildfires, territory officials are partnering with communities to develop wildfire protection plans while also conducting mitigation efforts like prescribed burns in high-risk areas.

SPOTLIGHT

Sweeping the nation

Across Canada, the number of curling leagues for 2SLGBTQ+ communities is on the rise

PHOTO BY KARA GEBHARDT

CURLING ROCKS AND SEQUINED shoes slid along the ice at the kick-off of the first 2SLGBTQ+ curling league in London, Ontario.

Almost all of the 40 participants were brand-new to the sport. They were there to curl, but what really drew them in was the opportunity to make friends and build connections within their local 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Run by the Forest City Sport and Social Club (FCSSC), the league came to life last fall after the club received a request from a community member asking them to start a gay curling league for the upcoming season.

"We learned from FCSSC members who are also members of the local 2SLGBTQ+ community that leagues organized just for individuals who identify as 2SLGBTQ+ would feel more welcoming ... and would make connection to new friends easier," says Kyla Woodcock, founder of FCSSC. "That's all we needed to hear."

The league began in October 2022, with the first two weeks spent on learning sessions led by volunteer instructors. After that, members played in a hat league, where teams swapped every week to give people a chance to meet one another.

Prizes were awarded for categories like Most Encouraging to Others, Didn't Give Up!, and Best Dressed.

Members of the curling league "loved the sense of camaraderie and community that they experienced on Sunday nights," Woodcock says. "We loved hearing about the new friendships that were built."

The London league, which is the newest of many 2SLGBTQ+ curling leagues across Canada, is winding down for the season. In total, 14 leagues exist in 12 cities across Canada.

Kevin Jesus, secretary of Edmonton's Curling with Pride, says the organization started 25 years ago as an opportunity for community members to be themselves and have fun. He's been with Curling with Pride for about 10 years, after joining to get involved with sports and the community. Jesus says the organization is all about providing people with a place to meet new people where it feels inclusive and safe. "That's why I joined," he says.

"It's a safe space," Jesus says. "People don't have to worry about [whether] other athletes or other management types at the curling rink [are] going to judge us for who we are ... If you want to show up in drag, show up in drag."

"People just want to feel comfortable," he adds. "Let's face it, in life we don't have that opportunity."

Jesus estimates the league has about 100 members who represent a wide range of ages, groups and communities. The oldest person in the league is close to 70 years old. "It's like a family," he says.

Beyond helping 2SLGBTQ+ curlers make new friends, organizations like Curling with Pride are ensuring members live active lifestyles without fear of harassment.

2SLGBTQ+ people face numerous barriers in sports starting at a young age. One study from the University of British Columbia found that gay, lesbian and bisexual teens in B.C. are half as likely to play sports as straight youth, and this gap only tends to grow wider over time. Homophobia persists in sporting culture, both in the playing atmosphere and for spectators, with those who have been targeted reporting verbal slurs, threats and physical assault. According to the 2022 True Sport Report, 81 percent of Canadians have witnessed or experienced homophobia in sport.

2SLGBTQ+ sports leagues work to counteract that by creating an inclusive place to play. They offer, as Jesus says, a safe space, where participants can make friends in the community and enjoy all the benefits of sport without fear.

"It's about more than curling," Jesus says. "It's about coming together and being yourself."

—CAELAN BEARD

MEMOIR

Mission statement

Coming out did not go well, but it wasn't entirely my parents' fault

I fiend for all beats, like girls jump for dicks
Don't salt the next man, keep that Lindbergh shit
*Up in the cut, like gay n***** in butt*
I'm Black with Indian, my race should be mutt

Timbaland and Magoo, Up Jumps Da' Boogie

NOÉ LEÓN'S PAINTING MISIONERO COMIDO POR TIGRE (Missionary being eaten by jaguar) brings me a sense of bitter comfort not unlike the scent of boiled pineapple skins.

You see, when King Leopold II wrote to Belgian missionaries in 1883, he instructed them to subdue the Congolese people by teaching them "to interpret the gospel in the way it will be the best to protect your interests in that part of the world." This meant teaching the Congolese not to aspire toward wealth, to devalue the profit-making potential of natural resources cultivated for Belgian interests, for only the poor would see heaven. In exchange for our abundance of rubber, we were given the New Testament, though it's difficult for me to imagine anyone having much time or capacity to read when most days were spent performing slave labour. It generally takes two hands to hold a book and turn its pages, and many had lost one or both as punishment for not meeting the rubber harvest quota.

León's painting came in 1967, seven years after the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) gained its independence from Belgium. By then my maternal grandmother, born in the DRC in 1955, was a budding adolescent and, after being raised Catholic, likely had no understanding of poetic justice beyond what was ingrained in her through the Beatitudes.

My grandmother did not raise my mother to take pleasure in other people's demise. Despite this, we were instilled with the notion that pain and pleasure go hand-in-hand, that fasting was a virtue. Hence why my mother would supplement the solid foods she ate with the warm residual liquid of boiled pineapple skins whenever she tried to lose weight. It never seemed to work quite like she intended; yet into my early twenties she consumed her supposedly magic elixir, regardless of its pungent inefficiency. By then I had also learned not to point out the obvious shortcomings within my family home—not to wake the elephants which frequented our modest rooms. My lineage felt like a savannah, and truth was our greatest predator.

When I was 18 or 19 and hadn't fully grasped the extent of our charade, I had thought maybe—just maybe—I could lay down my defenses. My mother had caught me smoking weed out of my bedroom window for the umpteenth time, a habit I adopted to dissociate from the inner turmoil which often kept me up at night when I attempted to go to bed sober.

And so, like the remorseful Christian I pretended to be on Sundays, and in an effort to help them understand, I admitted to my parents that I was queer.

After he said he still loved me, my father responded to my confession with some choice verses, harvested from Romans and Galatians, about the abhorrent and condemning nature of queerness. My mother, arms crossed and eyebrows supporting each other's vexed mood, nodded in solemn agreement. Heartbroken and humiliated, I skulked away from the living room and back to my bedroom.

Are ghouls capable of repentance? I wonder—once the missionary depicted in León's painting got ripped to shreds and his soul escaped his body, could he see, from whatever angle (be it up above or far below) the monstrosity which lived in his veins, and not in the jaguar's savagery?

There is no moral failing quite like envy, the kind of resentment which permeates the walls of my adolescent bedroom. Some nights were so stifling, I remember, my dreams would saturate with vivid fantasies of reprisal. I imagined an existence unafflicted by Christianity or colonization, one where Congolese parents could choose to cherish their dejected offspring, unrestricted by fears of being cheated out of everlasting life.

It's been over a year since I first moved out. My parents and I don't speak about my "coming out," or my queerness in general. When I come over, my mother appreciates the meticulousness with which I dispose of dirty dishes, for I, too, devour missionaries, sink them if you will. Shoulders back, wrist bent, my current self is confident yet meek, masculine, if a little fruity. I prefer my pineapple minus the skin.

—YANNICK MUTOMBO

NOÉ LEÓN'S MISIONERO COMIDO POR TIGRE

ILLUSTRATION BY DIANA BOLTON

MEMOIR

Capsule comment

I wasn't in pursuit of minimalism, but a smaller wardrobe helped me find my style

I WAS DEEP IN PLANNING MODE FOR MY FIRST solo European trip to London, Budapest, and Porto when I discovered capsule wardrobes. To save money, I'd decided to travel with carry-on baggage only, so I got really invested in packing tutorials by travel vloggers on YouTube. I found the idea of having a small collection of interchangeable items that coordinated with one another to be groundbreaking. I didn't care about wearing the same shirt in pictures; I just wanted to avoid baggage fees and know that whatever ensemble I put together at the last minute would be an assurable hit.

Until that point, my style was based on comfort and affordability and didn't dare reflect the version of myself I saw in my mind. I bought items that felt safe, and when I did buy coveted pieces, I never had the courage to actually wear them. Part of the reason was that I was afraid to stray too far from whatever was trendy. I have this long brown fur coat that reminds me of Penny Lane from my favourite film, *Almost Famous*. I bought it at a thrift store at Queen and Dufferin in Toronto years ago for $30, but I'm ashamed to say I've only worn it twice. Last year, I wrote a piece for *This* about a faux-leather purse I loved but didn't buy because it was not in style. It's ridiculous that that purse became a member of my fantasy wardrobe rather than an actual possession (until we reunited years later and I finally bought it).

But my interest in capsule wardrobes changed me. I grew obsessed with bingeing @BackpackingBananas videos on how to pack efficiently and @bestdressed videos on how to create capsule wardrobes. I quickly got bored, however, by the monotonous ensembles I was seeing on YouTube, which always seemed to be some version of supposedly "timeless" items like a tucked-in white or black shirt, a pair of waist-cinching trousers or jeans, and a beige wool coat for the colder seasons. My boredom signified a departure, a craving for something that didn't feel safe. And when my trip was cancelled by the lockdowns of March 2020, I had reached my breaking point. The trip was supposed to be an adventure that launched me outside my comfort zone, and I refused to give that mission up. I inadvertently channelled this passion into remodelling my

identity: I finally felt ready to invest in and regularly wear my most coveted pieces.

Moving forward, my shopping had to be intentional. This meant no more aspirational purchases. I realized that buying clothes for a body I hoped to have rather than owning the one I actually lived in was a waste of money and creatively limiting. As I researched personal style advice, I started to question the intentions behind "dressing for your body type" if it meant concealing "unflattering" features and alluding to an hourglass silhouette. I'm still exploring my relationship with fatphobia. That's why I give every change room experience and online shopping cart a limbo period where I interrogate how I feel, emotionally and physically, about how confidently I'll wear something. It's also a moment to ask myself, "Do I really like this, or do I just think it's cute because I've seen it so many times?"

By now it should be obvious that I'm an impressionable person. Despite hating skinny jeans all through middle school, I'll never forget how I succumbed to them and bought five pairs in various colours at Stitches by the time I was in high school. But that's the thing about trends: when they're the only items on the shelves and you don't know what you like, it's hard not to give in to what's presented to you, ultimately creating a wardrobe that doesn't quite reflect who you are. On Twitter, Cora Harrington (@lingerie_addict) and Carla Rockmore (@carlarockmore) have been great supports during my transition to intentional shopping. Harrington's knowledge of fabric and tailoring and Rockmore's whimsical videos of herself getting ready constantly remind me about the consideration that goes into cultivating a personal style. As Rockmore concluded in one of her videos where she showed the oldest item in her closet, "It's not the ones that are expensive that I treasure the most, it's the ones that speak to my history, to my heart...they never go out of style."

We're going through a shift when it comes to the concept of trends. On TikTok, people are using the term deinfluencing to describe a method that's meant to discourage overconsumption. While some influencers are using it as a way to suggest cheaper alternatives to overhyped products (thus turning the trend into another marketing tactic to redirect people's money), others are sharing how they're gravitating toward more thoughtful and frugal shopping habits. Jessica Clifton (@impactforgood_) says she's been doing the latter for years. In one deinfluencing video, she shares the minimal skin care products she uses and the rule she follows to keep her collection that way: "I cannot buy new products unless I have used up all the rest. The days of half-used skincare bottles are over." The tide is turning on hauling—an overstimulating practice that sees people accumulate many items at once and rushes its participants through the curation process—and people are becoming more interested in crafting signature, sustainable looks with compact makeup kits, hair-care practices, scents and closets. In an effort to save both money and the earth and carve out an identity (for their own benefit or to stand out to viewers), people, including myself, are gravitating toward a slower and more intimate approach to personal style.

So what's on my vision board? I like to start by checking in with how my inner self dresses: like an amalgamation of characters from 1990s and 2000s TV shows. They have the high-low sensibility of Carrie Bradshaw and the wide selection of clutches from CW's *Girlfriends*. They like clothes that clash and bawdy items, like Praying's Father, Son, Holy Spirit bikini set that got Addison Rae in trouble. There's this tight pink skirt with a pegasus and rainbow print that Carrie wears in "The Chicken Dance" that I've wanted for years. Despite Google Lens, I've yet to find it, but I've tried to imitate the embellished-skirt-white-tank-top combo with my own purchase of a $115 lace-trimmed skirt from Cyka that can change in length with the pull of a string. And the clutches! I'm impatiently waiting for oversized and colourful clutches to return to stores so that I, too, can navigate a busy restaurant deep in conversation with one tucked under my arm.

I feel that I save more when I invest in pieces I connect with for whatever reason, be it a $10 bootleg Nike visor from Creeps or a $90 USD black Praying purse that says "Give Girls Money" to finalize my handbag collection—at least for the moment. I agree with many capsule wardrobe proponents that buying high-quality products is a prudent move. But, while I know nothing (yet) on the rules of fabric, longevity is also about how well you take care of something and how often you wear it. It's important not to conflate brands with quality. Volkan Yilmaz (@tanner.leatherstein), a leather expert on TikTok who literally dissects brand name purses to determine the quality of the material and if it's over or underpriced, said in an interview with *The Cut* that "Leather is not cheap but never astronomically expensive either. If you see a very high price, then know that it is for the status, not the leather."

While my Euro trip was cancelled (I went to Jamaica in 2021 instead), my interest in capsule wardrobes continued and eventually morphed. Attempting the capsule wardrobe method forced me to prioritize clothing that, when combined, creates outfits that bring the person I see in my daydreams to the surface. Before this, I was playing it safe, settling for tragic replicas of what I really wanted or buying objectively classic pieces, like a "good blazer," that I didn't see myself caring about long term. But now, if I can see myself wearing something through countless trend cycles because it reflects my inner self, then that's what makes an item timeless to me.

Deviating from what influencers pass off as objectively "classic" and focusing more on what I consider to be staple items ended my susceptibility to trends, and there's been something empowering about redefining fashion for myself in this way. It's led me to a place where, instead of conjuring up a fantasy wardrobe of items I'm too afraid to buy or wear, the fits I wear in my daydreams consist of items I actually own. It wasn't through collecting every little thing I was told to want, but by narrowing down my options that I've found and grown to trust my personal style.

—JODY ANDERSON

PHOTO BY DIETER MEYRL

LAST SPRING, PRIME MINISTER JUSTIN TRUDEAU and six other suited-up politicians held a press conference, announcing a long-awaited change to Canada's blood donation system. Given that the change they were making—eliminating the blood donor screening question that deferred men who'd had sex with other men in the last three months—was really a matter of a few words, six people trading places at the microphone for nearly half an hour may have seemed like overkill. Those words, though, had both a long history and far-reaching implications. Forty-three years prior, they had emerged in their first iteration as a lifetime ban on blood donations from "men who have sex with men" or, in its most reductive but more common phrasing, "MSM." The Canadian Red Cross, which was responsible for the blood supply at the time, imposed the ban when fears around the newly discovered HIV, which was spreading rapidly in Canada, were colliding with pre-existing stigmas. While the myth of HIV as a "gay disease" had been debunked by then, the "blood ban" remained in place when Canadian Blood Services (CBS) took over Canada's donation system in 1998.

Over the years, many queer activists spoke against the policy, saying it was unscientific and blatantly targeted the queer community. Students at universities across the country played a major role, writing letters and petitions and protesting Héma-Québec blood drives, and 2SLGBTQ+ organizations called for CBS to re-evaluate. In 2013, CBS changed the policy to a five-year ban. In 2016, Christopher Karas, a gay man, brought a complaint about the policy before the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Eventually, the ban was lowered to one year, and then three months.

Now, finally, the question that had historically excluded many gay and bisexual men, as well as trans women, would be replaced with a set of gender-neutral questions about sexual behaviour. It was Seamus O'Regan, Canada's minister of labour, who described the change in the most grandiose terms. "Now each of us are afforded the benefit of the doubt," he said, "and each of us must answer to the same questions."

The move to gender-neutral questioning around sexual behaviour is inarguably a significant milestone. However, a closer examination of CBS's donation policies suggests that O'Regan's sweeping declaration of equality is premature. Beyond lingering issues with how current sexual behaviour screening affects queer people, it would be a mistake to think that the removal of a single question could fundamentally change a system that has historically excluded the most marginalized within the queer community. Stepping back from the MSM question, it becomes clear that CBS needs to continue addressing how its past and present policies have stigmatized

"The straight person who isn't taking nearly as many precautions to protect their sexual health is able to donate, whereas queer and trans folks who are taking so many precautions are not able to donate," Boyce says

not just gay and bisexual men, but trans people, Black queer people, and 2SLGBTQ+ sex workers. Until that happens, no ban will have been lifted.

WHAT WAS ANNOUNCED ON THAT DAY IN APRIL, and went into effect in September, was the removal of one line of questioning from CBS's blood donor screening questionnaire, and the addition of a series of replacement questions. A change like this can only happen when CBS applies to its regulator, Health Canada, and gets their approval. However, CBS must initiate and gather the required research to support any changes—so while Health Canada gets the final say, CBS sets the agenda. After Health Canada approved the change, all potential donors, regardless of their gender, are now asked if they've had new or multiple sexual partners in the last three months and then, if yes, whether they've had anal sex in that period. If they answer yes to that, they are ineligible to donate. Health Canada and the Canadian government both framed it as a historic move away from singling out the queer community.

On the surface, this policy no longer excludes gay and bisexual men. However, Trevor Hart, the director of the HIV Prevention Lab at Toronto Metropolitan University, says that it's unclear how many queer men actually became eligible. "What it ends up doing is excluding anybody who had anal sex," says Hart, with the notable exception of gay and bisexual men in monogamous relationships. Still, says Hart, "that is a big chunk of men who have sex with men anyway." The three-month deferral period is also a barrier, possibly a bigger one than the science warrants. It's widely acknowledged that there is a window of time where a newly acquired HIV infection may not be detected by tests, and would therefore go unnoticed. However, the CBS itself says that window only lasts about nine or 10 days after the initial infection.

And while the focus on anal sex does have its basis in research—anal sex carries the highest risk for HIV transmission—Hart notes that there's a limit to this distinction. The current policy screens exclusively for anal sex, which means that donors with unlimited new vaginal sex partners are eligible, but donors with a single new anal sex partner are not. "That's not consistent with the science," says Hart. "We know women engaging in heterosexual vaginal sex, for example, are contracting HIV."

There are also two major advancements in HIV prevention and treatment that current CBS policy does not account for. The first is the development and availability of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a highly effective medication taken to preemptively lower one's chances of contracting HIV. Right now, CBS chooses to defer donors who have taken PrEP in the last four months, saying it interferes with their ability to detect the presence of HIV in blood. "Well, yes, it probably would," says Hart, "because it prevents somebody from contracting HIV." Secondly, anyone who has a sexual partner who lives with HIV is also deferred from donating for 12 months. It's a policy that ignores antiretroviral treatment, which allows many people living with HIV to have undetectable viral loads. Antiretroviral therapy, in the form of a daily medication, can prevent the virus from making copies of itself—when taken as prescribed, a patient's viral load (the amount of HIV in their blood) becomes so low that standard tests cannot detect it. It is globally recognized that when this is the case, HIV would not be transmitted through sexual intercourse, which would prevent someone with HIV from passing it on to a sexual partner.

Since gay and bisexual men still account for the majority of new AIDS cases in Canada, these questions are likely to disproportionately affect queer people while also having a dubious scientific basis. "The straight person who isn't taking nearly as many precautions to protect their sexual health is able to donate, whereas queer and trans folks who are taking so many precautions are not able to donate," says Tyler Boyce, who, after years working in HIV care, is now the executive director of Enchanté Network, a 2SLGBTQ+ advocacy organization. "To me, that doesn't sound like a blood ban has been lifted."

Boyce's own first interaction with the blood donation system was accompanying his mother to an appointment when he was about 10. On the way to their local CBS in Ottawa, she explained to him how one person's blood could save another person's life. He was surprised, then, when she came out of her appointment in a hurry, visibly offended. Later, he would learn that she did not donate at all that day—in fact, she was turned away due to the lifetime ban on donors born in Africa. Boyce left CBS feeling small and disempowered, and with the knowledge that he would have to navigate the blood donation system as not only a queer person, but as a Black queer person. "You're pushed into a situation of advocacy," he says.

Conversations around a "blood ban" in Canada often revolve exclusively around the sexual behaviour screening questions, but this laser-focus reveals how narrow our understanding of the queer community can be. If we step back and look at the CBS donor questionnaire as a whole, it becomes clear that there are other significant barriers, past and present, that further discriminate against the most marginalized

members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

Like queerness, Blackness has long been associated with stigma around HIV and AIDS, and that's been borne out in CBS policy. From 2005 until 2015, CBS asked if people were born or had lived in Africa since 1977, and whether they'd had sex with someone or received blood products from any African country since then. This question unscientifically lumped together the rates of HIV in all 54 African countries. While that policy was removed, the effects have been lasting—just last year, CBS faced critical shortages, in part due to a lack of racialized donors. "We would be really naive to think that just because you removed the question, the systemic discrimination and anti-Blackness also disappears," says Boyce.

CBS also has a long history of policies that target people who do sex work, something that, in Canada, trans and non-binary people are more likely to engage in than their cisgender counterparts. From 1977 until last year, there was a lifetime ban on anyone who had "taken drugs or money for sex." CBS says that this is one of the policies that is undergoing an "incremental shortening of duration," and it's since been changed to a 12 month deferral. However, this is still notably longer than the three month deferral for other groups identified as high risk for HIV. Hart says the exclusion of these populations is problematic. "Does the virus work differently in people that are sex workers versus people who are not sex workers?" asks Hart. "I would question that scientific rationale."

And, zooming out from the donor questionnaire itself, the policies behind simply registering as a donor also have implications for the queer community. Until 2016, trans donors had to register in the CBS system under their sex assigned at birth, unless they had undergone lower body gender-affirming surgery. While that policy has been eliminated, non-binary donors still have to register as either "male" or "female." "It's a form of discrimination and violence to radically shift your perception of yourself in that way," says Cat Haines, the executive director of JusticeTrans, an organization that focuses on improving access to justice for two-spirit, trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people in Canada. While CBS says it is looking into changes to the registration system, that's not the only issue. "Beyond that," Haines says, "we see at some CBS facilities a lack of gender-neutral restrooms or gender-neutral facilities."

OmiSoore Dryden is the James R. Johnston endowed Chair in Black Canadian Studies at Dalhousie University's faculty of medicine, and she studies blood donation and the experiences of Black queer and trans communities. She says the idea that a blood ban for queer people has been lifted reflects a limited and inaccurate view of queer life. "How is it a success that this question was removed when the systemic barriers to donation still remain," she asks, "when no substantive apology or accountability has been made, and when sex workers and others have been sacrificed for this inclusion?"

HAINES USED TO DONATE BLOOD REGULARLY, but after she transitioned and had partners who were also trans women, she found herself barred from donation because of the MSM policy and her unwillingness to register using her correct gender. While the screening questions have since changed, the damage done means she no longer wants to interact with CBS. "I was at a point of like, I just will never donate blood again," she says.

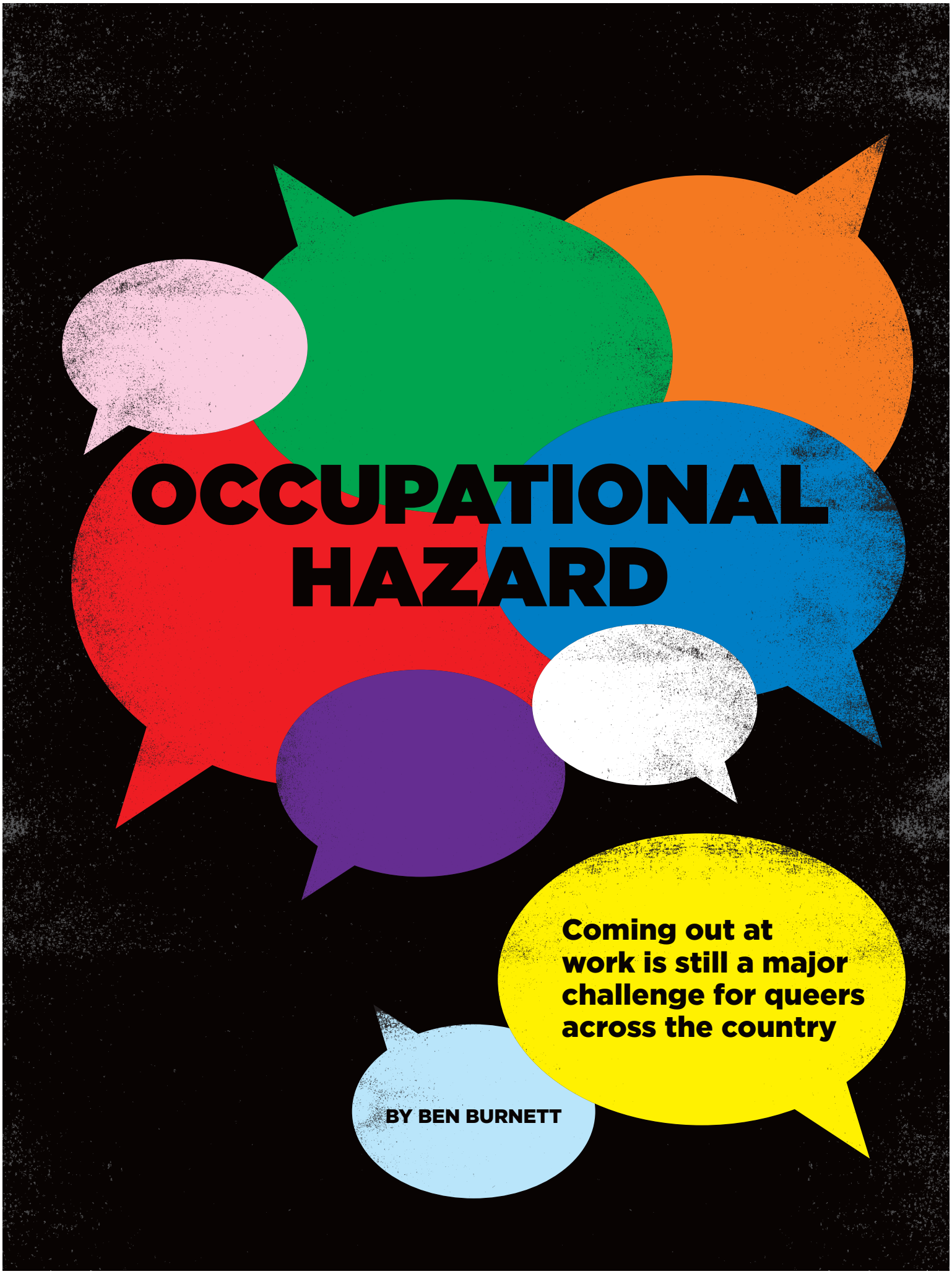
When it was created in 1998, CBS was charged with safely collecting and distributing blood donations—but that wasn't all. It was also tasked with educating the public about what a safe blood supply looks like. By enforcing policies that unfairly discriminate against queer people, CBS has perpetuated stigma that it has not, in the eyes of many, sufficiently addressed. "What happened historically has shaped the public view," says Nathan Lachowsky, the research director at the Community-Based Research Centre, a non-profit that specializes in queer and gender-diverse people's health. "The system should be accountable to the harm that's been done."

Dryden says that the removal of bans on African and MSM donors is the bare minimum. It does not, Dryden says, take the place of removing unnecessary barriers for trans people and sex workers, nor does it take the place of a public acknowledgement of anti-Black racism and anti-Black homophobia in the CBS. (While CBS says it is working to increase participation from Black and otherwise racialized potential donors through critical engagement, no such statement has yet been given.)

Boyce says that bans on PrEP users and those living with undetectable viral loads of HIV remain in place because of long-standing stigma. "Science can only go as far as we let it," he says. If diverse voices aren't heard in the research process, the kinds of projects needed to make blood donation equitable won't even be on the table. "Stigma is a huge barrier to the kind of science that we need to move towards an effective, low-barrier blood donation system in Canada and a strong, well-contributed-to, safe blood supply."

CBS has initiated some of this work. They are seeking studies on the effects of PrEP on HIV testing and are in the midst of consulting with the trans community on registration software that accommodates a wider range of gender identities.

But the results remain to be seen. Given the decades of advocacy that took place before CBS removed the MSM policy, it's unclear how long queer people will have to wait. "I would love for us to be innovators and really create inclusive spaces," says Haines. "I would love to be able to go donate blood again. But with things where they're at in this particular moment, it doesn't feel safe."


OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD
Coming out at work is still a major challenge for queers across the country
BY BEN BURNETT

WHEN SARAH MACLEOD STARTED WORKING FOR A software company in Charlottetown, P.E.I., they weren't sure if they wanted to come out to their colleagues. As a member of a small team, they mostly worked independently, and felt comfortable keeping their queerness relatively private. At that point, about 10 years ago, the company wasn't focused on diversity and inclusion initiatives. The workplace culture was likely familiar to anyone who's worked for a smaller company: the managers loved to refer to employees as part of the family.

"I used to be a lot more quiet and shy than I am today," MacLeod says. "So I was happy to isolate a little bit and not have to worry about that stuff."

After receiving a promotion, MacLeod started to buy into the "family" culture. As people got to know them better, they felt more comfortable coming out. While opening up to their colleagues felt good, it also had drawbacks.

MacLeod noticed their colleagues coming to them more and more to discuss queer issues, or to ask them about the 2SLGBTQ+ community. For a maritimer, the experience of coworkers or acquaintances being in your business isn't particularly uncommon, and MacLeod didn't always detest the attention, or the opportunity to get to know their coworkers.

However, at times, being the de facto queer resource would turn MacLeod's workspace into a makeshift water cooler. If a discussion relating to queerness arose in the office, MacLeod noticed their colleagues would sometimes gather around their desk to hear what they had to say.

"You become more interesting in a way that can be both good and bad," MacLeod says. "You can feel like you're in a fish tank. But it also makes you a little cooler, as long as people aren't outright homophobes, right? For better or for worse, it felt like kind of a social currency."

In the summer of 2020, as social justice movements spurred by Black Lives Matter protests went global, the company began developing a diversity and inclusion policy. It wasn't long before MacLeod's managers looked to them as a resource to help develop its initiatives.

MacLeod felt a sense of obligation to help their team as a representative voice. But that soon led to uncomfortable situations. At one point near the end of their employment, despite not being Indigenous, MacLeod's bosses asked them for advice on how the company could approach two-spirit issues.

"Once you come out as queer generally, you are now the spokesperson for every part of [the community]," they say.

Not only was MacLeod being looked to as a voice for all marginalized identities, they were performing work outside of their job description. But they also felt a responsibility to speak up for other members of the queer community, even if they didn't always know what to say.

Eventually, MacLeod chose to leave that job, and came to see clearly just how toxic the family dynamic can be when it leads employees to put the companies they work for above their own mental health.

Their experience in the software industry typifies just one of the many ways that 2SLGBTQ+ community members are made to feel othered at work, or asked to go above and beyond their assigned role compared to straight employees.

For many queer workers in Canada, coming out creates additional barriers to employment, career advancement, and access to benefits and healthcare. These potential pitfalls often cause anxiety about whether to publicly identify as queer at all.

THE CHALLENGES FOR QUEER EMPLOYEES ARE multi-faceted. Egale Canada found in 2019 that despite Canada's perception as a progressive country and a shift in workplace inclusion, their colleagues regularly discriminate against 2SLGBTQ+ Canadians, particularly trans and non-binary people. Ultimately, Canada's workplace and human rights frameworks are failing the community.

Meg MacKay, a queer comedian and television writer, says they feel more welcome in writers' rooms than in previous jobs they've held in the service industry. But, when they divulge their queer identity at work, they report being put in situations like MacLeod's, where they are often asked to speak for all queer people. In addition to being asked to take on queer assignments, MacKay says there are also moments when their queerness makes them feel othered socially.

"If I'm talking about people I'm seeing, if I'm seeing a guy, [those] conversations don't make people stiffen, but if I'm talking about an ex-girlfriend or an ex partner who is a non-binary person, you can see people's body language changes a bit," they say.

Jade Pichette is the director of programs for Pride at Work Canada. The organization works with Canadian employers to promote inclusivity in the workplace and build safer spaces for employees with diverse gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations. Pichette says they have heard from queer employees who were asked questions that would be inappropriate in any work environment, including questions about their sex lives or even their genitalia.

"I've heard people talk about how they were asked to remove a photo of their partner from their desk, or [being told] even talking about their partner is somehow talking about sex in the workplace, while their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts are not experiencing the same thing," Pichette says.

This causes queer employees to shy away from networking opportunities and shelter their personal lives from their colleagues, putting them at a disadvantage when meeting new people, trying to make friends with coworkers, or competing for promotion and advancement against their straight colleagues.

Tom Barker is a gay man who performs drag as Birthday Girl and owns Salutè, a cocktail bar in Okotoks, Alberta. Prior to working full-time in the entertainment and service industry, he worked a number of jobs in retail, media, and corporate spaces. Barker felt the pressure varied across each industry.

It was in media where Barker was othered the most. Working as a radio personality, a manager once asked him to be "less flowery" on the air. On another occasion, a manager was

circulating the office shaking hands with all of the employees, before offering Barker, the only visibly queer person in the room, a fist bump.

As a queer person in a small, rural town, Barker says he's often approached by younger members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community for advice on how to navigate their workplaces. He says he typically encourages younger queers to be true to themselves when deciding whether being out in the workplace is the right decision for them.

"To put it simply: it's a pivotal thing that you have to figure out where you stand," he says.

THIS CONVERSATION MATTERS NOT ONLY IN relation to people's emotional well-being at work, but also because queer and trans people are chronically underpaid and underemployed. In 2022, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation reported that the average heterosexual man in Canada makes almost $56,000 annually, while heterosexual women average around $40,000. Meanwhile, bisexual men and women average around $32,000 and $25,000 respectively. The average incomes for queer-identified people who are also racialized, disabled, or come from non-traditional backgrounds are even lower.

In 2019, Trans Pulse Canada conducted a survey and found that nearly half of trans people in Canada over the age of 25 make under $30,000 per year, making them roughly three times more likely to be low-income than the general population. For non-binary people, that number rises to 54 percent.

Across many Canadian industries, queer employees report generally better working conditions and improved acceptance over time. But navigating people's responses to their queer identities means these workers are still in the challenging position of having to constantly worry about whether they are safe to come out, furthering a systemic divide between cisgender and heterosexual Canadians and their queer colleagues. Data from the Williams Institute out of the University of California, Los Angeles school of law released in 2021 found that employees of all orientations, across all sectors of the workforce, reported high levels of discrimination and harassment of 2SLGBTQ+ employees in the workplace.

While we're beginning to have more data about life for queer employees in Canada, Mathias Memmel, president of Start Proud, a nonprofit organization that helps queer students and young professionals with networking and transitioning into the workforce, says there are limitations to the conclusions we can draw from the available research. Because of his work with Start Proud, Memmel says he regularly hears from young queer workers who opt out of chasing after their preferred profession, or decide not to pursue further education, because of a lack of queer representation at higher levels.

"It's very difficult to quantify how many queer students are themselves opting out of recruitment processes," he says. "Even in law school or med school, do [queer youth] see themselves reflected in that position?"

"At many different ages, we've heard from students actually self-selecting out of the process, where they have said no before a potential employer has. That's really heart-breaking."

Companies may value the expertise queer employees bring them—or they may want to appear that way—but that doesn't mean they know how to value their employees. Not only are queer workers often asked to speak on behalf of the entire community, they also regularly face barriers to accessing their companies' health-care and benefits packages. Critical medications, including gender-affirming hormone therapy, are often unavailable through generic health plans.

Memmel says that he's heard from queer employees who have to specifically request their hormone therapy medication be added to the approved prescription list, leaving some trans folks with no choice but to out themselves to their employers against their will. "It diminishes and takes away from people's presence in the workforce," Memmel says. "That's a loss to both the individual and the organization."

"You should be able to be queer and not be out in order to access care or your employment plan. Employers need to have policies and plans in place that give agency to trans folks, so by default they don't have to seek it out themselves."

Job-seeking students have told Memmel that when choosing where they want to work, they're looking for accommodations that, for some reason, remain controversial to some: gender-neutral washrooms, universal parental leave for parents of all genders, trans and queer-inclusive healthcare coverage, and therapy and mental health coverage.

Start Proud advocates for all companies to make simple, smaller changes like normalizing pronoun identification in email signatures, using gender-inclusive language like "partner," and offering diversity and inclusion training for all employees. Memmel also advocates for low-barrier health plans for queer people in the workplace, including integrating benefits so queer couples receive the same type of support as hetero couples when, for example, they are looking to adopt a child.

"Each of these barriers stack over time, and that leads to people exiting the workforce. It leads to them feeling unwelcome and [feeling] anxiety. That's part of why we see the rates of mental health concerns among queer folks being so much higher than the average for the rest of the population."

Statistics Canada found that the rate of people who identify as a sexual minority and report having "poor or fair" mental health is nearly three times higher than it is for heterosexuals. Queer Canadians are similarly more likely to have considered suicide during their lifetimes (40 percent versus 15 percent of heterosexual Canadians), and the ratio of those diagnosed with a mood or anxiety disorder is nearly the same. These issues can be compounded for queer people who are also racialized, have disabilities, or are from immigrant families.

Despite the anxiety and uncertainty that can be felt due to the pressure of coming out, there are plenty of positives that come from it, too. Being out means people can stop working to hide their orientation or gender identity, and sharing about their lives at work can bring them closer to colleagues. It also creates role models for others. The *Harvard Business Review* found that queer workers who are out stood a better

chance at advancement, and were more likely to remain with the company.

SO WHERE IS IT SAFEST TO BE "OUT"?

Both Start Proud and Pride at Work Canada report working with companies that are keen to improve circumstances for their queer employees. From what they've seen, larger employers, including banks and law firms, have historically tended to exhibit more queer-friendly working conditions. Memmel says there has definitely been a shift across Bay Street over the last 25 to 30 years. But he also sees industries with unspoken "don't ask, don't tell" cultures.

Pichette credits organizing by 2SLGBTQ+ employee-resource groups in banking, telecoms, and the legal industry in the early 2000s for creating more equitable environments for employees in those fields. (Pride At Work Canada was founded in 2008 by 12 organizations, including CIBC, Deloitte, Scotiabank, and TD.)

"Because the organizations are so large, there is a significant number of people that are able to come together, work together, and really affect change in their industries," Pichette says.

While the corporatization of Pride regularly meets with due criticism for not supporting the community's most marginalized members, these larger employers are often able to offer more comprehensive benefit plans and have the advantage of legal and training departments to draft more progressive policies. They also tend to be more compliant with labour laws. That doesn't mean, of course, that everyone within these often conservative industries is going to be on board.

That's also true of small and medium-sized employers, where most people in Canada work. These companies face higher barriers to making their cultures queer-friendly, largely due to a lack of both comparable resources and time available to work on these issues.

One sector that is particularly important to the Canadian economy and continues to struggle with retaining and helping marginalized employees feel safe is skilled trades. "The trades in Canada will only continue to grow in importance, and yet, it is the industry that is having some serious challenges in terms of labour and access to labour," Pichette says. "Part of that is because they have historically not been inclusive environments for anybody who, frankly, is not a white man."

Memmel cites retention as one of the core pieces that creates inequality between queer employees and their colleagues. He says queer youth are often unsure whether they'll actually be able to build a career when starting at a new job, as they wonder whether employees from diverse backgrounds will be protected, or if companies are more interested in recruiting them in order to attain a better public image.

For many in the community, particularly trans people, the uncertainty and anxieties surrounding the decision of whether it's safe to come out may sound more like a luxury than their reality. Not everybody has the ability to make this choice, Pichette says.

"Whether we're public or not, we get read as queer or trans, and we still experience those forms of discrimination as a result without even being formally 'out' out...One could argue many of us come out repeatedly, many times in our lives, because people make assumptions without knowledge of our actual identities."

With a rise in alt-right politics, protests against queerness are growing, too. Anti-trans legislation is ramping up in parts of the United States, with restrictions on gender-affirming care and bans on drag shows. The *New York Times* came under fire this winter for what advocates called its repeated anti-trans, and there has also been a rise in anti-trans protests outside drag events across Canada and the U.S.

Barker, who often works in trans spaces, says his trans colleagues feel increasingly unsafe. He says he regularly hears from drag performers who fear that just getting on the stage could be a matter of life or death.

The biggest fear among drag performers is the possibility of a massacre like the mass shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, when a 29 year-old man killed 49 people and injured 53 more in 2016. At Club Q in Colorado Springs, another five people were killed in November 2022.

"Drag right now is an extremely volatile place to be based on the rise of hate," Barker says. "I was talking to a trans friend last weekend who told me, 'we just don't want to be here right now, because we don't want to be the one on stage when it happens here.'"

One positive that Barker notes amid the increased protests against drag performances is an increase in allyship and counter-protests. "Allyship in Canada seems to really be rocketing," he says, citing a recent protest in Calgary where a handful of anti-drag protesters were greatly outnumbered by queer folks and allies. "It doesn't mean the work is done, and there's still a lot more to do. Drag and love and trans communities will prevail inevitably... But it's a question of how bad is it going to get?"

MacKay says they feel grateful for how much better things have gotten for them as a queer person, even in the past 10 years.

"I came out as bi in high school and lost a huge chunk of my friends," says MacKay, who grew up in Cornwall, P.E.I. "I'm old now and I live in Toronto, and I have nothing to fear here."

"One year I worked for a queer film festival and the only thing I had to worry about there was having hooked up with too many people that worked there."

MacLeod left their job at the software firm a few years ago, and now spends their days taking care of a family member. They've been offered lucrative opportunities to return to their former industry, but are not tempted to give up the freedom to present how they feel most comfortable.

While being out in their last job wasn't a universally positive experience, they credit their learned experience for helping them become more self-assured.

"I am no longer this quiet, demure queer person that's palatable," they say. "And I think that is the major thing: that I don't even know that corporations would want me anymore, because I am going to push back on stuff."

CRIPPING THE SCRIPT

Queer and disabled people are changing the narrative around masculinity—and making it their own

BY TOBIN NG

FASHION SPACES HAVE LONG EXCLUDED PEOPLE WHO AREN'T STRAIGHT, white, cisgender, able-bodied men. But for many disabled folks, the field also represents opportunity—a place where it's possible to crip, or challenge through a disability justice lens, dominant understandings of disability and gender.

A new project called Cripping Masculinity explores how disabled men and masculine people build and reimagine their identities through fashion. The project team, which consists of researchers from Toronto Metropolitan University, the University of Alberta, and Parsons School of Design in New York, invited disabled folks to participate in interviews about clothing, outfit creation workshops and a fashion exhibition in Toronto earlier this spring. By interpreting participants' everyday experiences of dressing as a form of worldbuilding, the project centres the creativity and wisdom of disabled folks as they use fashion to create the communities they want to see.

Tobin Ng caught up with three Cripping Masculinity participants—Sean Lee, Pree Rehal and CX—about notions of masculinity, what a crip utopia might look like, and more.

TOBIN NG: What does cripping the idea of masculinity mean to you?

SEAN LEE: As somebody who grew up visibly disabled and came into their queerness, thinking about crip as a reclaimed term that centres disability made me reevaluate my relationship with my body and my masculinity. Fashion played a big part in how I thought about the ways my body does or doesn't conform to the ideals and standards that are often emphasized in queer communities, specifically in mainstream gay media. Because I'm queer, disabled and racialized, there are many ways in which my body doesn't get represented in mainstream fashion.

I really resonate with the way queer and crip folks hack their fashion. They found a way to embrace fashion and own the stares that people give to bodies that don't conform. I think of it as a form of crip drag or casual guerilla activism. It's a way to question how bodily difference is taken, accepted or rejected by the mainstream.

PREE REHAL: Gender is fake, but our socially constructed ideas of masculinity are limited to a very small set of characteristics, especially in the West. Being big and strong and able-bodied is really central to what that looks like. So challenging masculinity is inherently tied to transness and gender diversity. It's being our authentic selves, and really breaking away from white supremacist ideas of how we're supposed to look and act.

For me, it's also really connected to my inner child. What did I want to wear when I was being told what I had to wear? What did I wish I had when I didn't have a concept of money, or when I wasn't able to buy things for myself?

CX: I'm excited by the concept of cripping masculinity. I love fashion, l love clothes, and I love expressing myself as a crip masculine person. Crip masculinity really speaks to my femme guy style and the ways in which being a femme, transgender non-binary, disabled guy can disrupt and challenge masculinity.

When it comes to fashion, it's my way of not giving a fuck. It's about protecting my body, making my body feel well in navigating the world.

TN: What does cripping masculinity look like in your everyday dress?

CX: I've started wearing wigs and exploring makeup. I love wearing lots of colour, and that doesn't feel binary to me—it doesn't feel masculine or feminine, it feels celebratory. It feels like an expression of myself as a crip person, as a queer person, and as an artist.

As someone who's read, and sometimes mistreated, as a queer crip guy in the world, I use fashion as a protective force and as a way to express my resilience and fabulousness.

PR: I crip masculinity through the simple act of being. As someone who is autistic, my concept of gender is very loose. I don't really understand the value of that kind of categorization for myself, and it's the same thing with

CX:
GARMENT BY CX AND JONATHAN DUMITRA · MANNEQUIN BY THE DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY LAB AT TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

PREE:
GARMENT BY PREE REHAL AND ALEXIS DE VILLA
MANNEQUIN BY THE DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY LAB AT TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

sexuality. I self-identify as being trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming, agender, a demiboy—my experiences fall into a lot of different things under the trans umbrella. So anything I do is cripping masculinity, because I'm crip, disabled and transmasc. A lot of times, it looks like cargo pants and sweatsuits, but it's still that when I'm wearing a tank top and if I decide to wear a dress. It's inherently anything that I wear.

SL: It changes all the time, and I think that's part of it—freedom to do what you want. For me, it started off as a way of rejecting the ways in which men's fashion was so built around a particular type of body. As an artist and curator, I learned about things like crip aesthetics and disability aesthetics, and how they shifted our understanding of perfection and beauty. My fashion sensibility centres around embracing the disruption that disability can bring into a space, and thinking about difference as a generative place to question what we think about aesthetics. There's so much value in finding different ways of expressing things like gender and sexuality and a crip sensibility.

Long ago, I was wearing a lot of flexible clothing and dresses. Instead of trying to conform the body to a certain ideal, those shapes work with the body, emphasizing aspects of difference in ways that could be interesting and beautiful, or my version of beautiful. As a disabled person, my back curves, my shoulders aren't even and I'm quite short. A piece of clothing worn by a six-foot model walking down a runway is going to look very different on me. But rather than thinking about clothing as being suited for one particular body, I've been trying to see how clothing can adapt to different bodies.

TN: What connections do you see between queer and crip identities?

PR: Something that stood out to me from the Cripping Masculinity project was a conversation I had with a researcher about queer flagging. Back in the day, when homosexuality wasn't as accepted as it is now, folks would use bandanas or handkerchiefs in specific colours to subtly let others know about their sexualities and preferred positions, and if they were interested in cruising. Today, when you see someone with a carabiner on their belt, you're like, 'Oh, maybe they're queer?' or 'That's somebody who's a bit fruity.'

With disability, I think there's a similar kind of signalling we do with our community members to be like, 'I'm one of you, we're the same.' It comes up when you see someone with a cane, or when you hear someone speak and you're like, 'Oh, there's something dyslexic about that,' or 'That feels really similar to the way that I talk, think or identify.' If I see someone at a workshop and they're using a heating pad, it gives me the idea that they may also experience chronic pain or fibromyalgia. I'm going to go sit with that person as opposed to everyone else that's sitting upright or in cliques.

SL: For me, crip and queer identity are inherently linked. There's a disability activist named Mia Mingus who talks about how ableism has to be embedded in our analysis of oppressions, because it upholds the other ways oppression is articulated. An ableist society imagines only one type of body, creating a mythical norm against which other bodies are judged. That norm provides a foundation for other forms of oppression. For example, ableism is used to justify heterosexism by casting queer bodies as undesirable. Recognizing this connection between disability and queerness can help us reject narratives around masculinity and other things we've been taught.

CX: My queerness relates to an openness in my body, my sexuality, my gender, and my artistic practice. I enjoy being around the uniqueness of other people in queer, crip communities. It supports how I am. I gain energy and nourishment from uniqueness, and I learn so much.

In that way queer and crip have similarities. My queerness, my gender, my disability are interrelated. As an artist, the art in me is informed by my queerness and my crip identities all at once.

TN: What does a crip utopia look like to you?

CX: I have lots of fantasies of a crip utopia!

A crip utopia for me is visionary, is fantastical. As a visual person with cognitive disabilities, bright colours help me navigate life. Things would be brighter, more colourful, and less boxy. There would be lots of graffiti and colours and animals. Instead of cars everywhere, we would see more wheelchairs and bicycles. Different ways of moving around, different choices.

Our bodies would be celebrated, not defined by or against those who are able-bodied and minded. Disabled people would make greater decisions about where and how we live, and be prioritized in how the world is designed. The people leading society would be disabled, creating crip-friendly places to exist in everyday life—from grocery stores, to living spaces, to streets.

We would all have things to offer. We could cocreate things that are fabulous and wonderful. We could acknowledge our history of being hurt. We wouldn't be afraid of each other.

I feel love and strength being around people with disabilities. It wouldn't be such a big deal to be disabled. We wouldn't only be in communities with other people like us, but we wouldn't have to hide. Those with and without disabilities would feel empowered to take a lead. We'd be open to mingling with each other. We would be interdependent, naturally. We would offer each other help and support and care without question.

My crip utopia feels very outside of the world we live in right now, which is so directed by a capitalist mindset. This isn't accessible for crip communities. But anything is possible within my realm of a crip utopia. It's all about more people being free.

PR: I feel like a crip utopia would look like those memes about artists wanting to go live in a forest or on a farm with their 10 friends. But in reality, when I've had the privilege of going on trips with some of my disabled and chronically ill family, something I've noticed is that we actually do need a lot of other kinds of considerations and support. So I don't think living out on a farm would be the best thing for us, because a lot of us can't really do that kind of labour. But I think some kind of community living that is independent but also interdependent, and doesn't shut us away from reality would be ideal. I know that crip utopia would definitely be centred around community relations, and it would be led by the most marginalized in our community, and definitely by Black and Indigenous disabled folks.

SL: I love the idea of utopias, because they're sites of possibility. There's a queer theorist named José Esteban Muñoz who talked about the idea of queerness as a horizon. It's this notion that as long as heteronormativity is present, queerness is an ideality. We may never fully be queer, but we can feel this warm illumination of queerness on the horizon. I really think about that application as a crip horizon—elsewhere and elsewhen, as Muñoz would say, in which disability is not only imagined, but embraced and dwelled in.

It's a complicated horizon because there's a diversity of disabled folks. There's so many different ways of thinking about access and how those identities and lived experiences come together with a tenuous throughline to create a whole disability culture. The question is, what's the culture that can be expressed in the future? The horizon represents a place that we don't fully know or understand, but one where we can fully be ourselves. And fashion plays such an important part in imagining what that's like.

We as disabled folks are unruly and noncompliant. We don't fit into a lot of the structures that have been imagined for only one type of person, that state you have to behave and act in certain ways in order to be part of society. But the idea of a horizon rejects the story of disability as having no place in the future. We're never going to be at the horizon, just as we'll never be 'fully accessible.' But we're always moving toward it.

SEAN:
GARMENT BY SEAN LEE AND DIEGO ORTEGA · MANNEQUIN BY THE DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY LAB AT TORONTO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

ALL PHOTOS BY MICHELLE PEEK PHOTOGRAPHY AND COURTESY OF BODIES IN TRANSLATION: ACTIVIST ART, TECHNOLOGY & ACCESS TO LIFE, RE•VISION: THE CENTRE FOR ART & SOCIAL JUSTICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

Baby

BY JENNY HEIJUN WILLS · ILLUSTRATION BY LILIAN SIM

THE ROPES AT THE BOTTOM OF MY MACRAMÉ POT-HANGER ARE FRAYED. Not on-purpose frayed. Just unravelling. The fern, the one I planted only a few months ago, is growing more on one side. It greedily reaches for the window even though the sunlight is inconsistent. Today is the first day that I watered it without needing to race down my Ikea step ladder and mop overflow from the fake birch table. I don't want the veneer to peel. It already has a ring from that time I didn't use a coaster.

The dead bird on the ledge outside my window is missing its head. It won't decompose. It's been there for months. Before, there were two decapitated birds out there. Now there is only one. I thought a crow ate their heads. But once I was walking in the parking lot behind my building and I almost stepped on a bodiless bird head. It was a different species than my headless birds. Winnipeg is a tough city. Even for wildlife.

In the past, I don't think I would have paid much attention. But these days I do because a tarot reader alluded that my baby's soul is in the woodpecker who visits the trees behind my building every morning. At least that's how I understood his words. I tell my baby to eat her breakfast as she slams her head against the trunk, searching for insects. I say, good morning, baby. Eat your breakfast. Usually, I don't see her. Mostly, I just hear her tapping.

I'm waiting for the woodpecker to release my baby's soul so she can come back to me. My girlfriend stares at me, failing to hide her concern, every time I tell her about it. But mostly we avoid eye contact. She doesn't look up from her phone as we drink coffee in silence, me listening for my baby to tap against the tree. She puts her AirPods in so she can pretend she doesn't hear me reminding my baby to eat her breakfast.

I should say "our" baby, but I don't want to.

Sometimes Wendy drinks her coffee in her home office. She closes the door, which is fine by me. The apartment is spacious. But Wendy complains that it's cluttered because I refuse to throw away anything that my baby ever touched. Stale boxes of arrowroot cookies remain open in the small pantry. Her teething ring is in the freezer next to a bag of frozen peas. "Let me put it in the storage locker," Wendy begs, gesturing to the infant pod we used to click into the back seat of our CR-V. But I cut her a dangerous glare and she drops the subject. The brackets that anchored it are still in the car. I won't let her take them out either.

I hear Wendy typing on her laptop in the office. I'm angry when she does it because she's making a spectacle of moving on. Of working as though nothing is wrong. Besides, her noisy typing makes it harder for me to hear if my baby is eating her breakfast. I'm afraid that my baby might think the clicking is another baby, a new, replacement baby, and then she'll really fly away forever. In my mind, I tell Wendy I hate her. But she never responds. She just keeps typing. Writing reports about heightened cortisol levels in fish whose ponds have been polluted or some other stupidly obvious thing that her lab gets millions of dollars of funding to "research."

I can't move from the "birch" table until my baby has eaten. Which means sometimes I sit here, waiting all day. Wendy emerges every now and then to use the toilet or eat lunch and either sighs in my direction or ignores me completely. I don't look at her at all. Just straight ahead. I will her to be quiet in case my baby needs me.

My baby's crying used to feel like a crystal chandelier was crashing to the floor. In helpless slow motion. Glass and beads delivering a devastating cluster bomb of tiny cuts all over. She exploded me with her crying. It was a tripwire to past horrors of unexpected cramps, pink water followed by endless fated clots running down my thighs at the grocery store, another failed round of IVF, and Wendy's threats that this was absolutely the last try. My baby's crying was the emotional shrapnel of what I previously, stupidly, thought of as trauma. I would pick her up quickly and sway her to sleep. Or place my pinky finger upside down in her mouth, her tiny tongue perfectly curling around it. Her black eyes would sparkle and I would wipe the tears from her lashes with my lips. Now, while I sit and wait to hear my baby tapping, I imagine her when she was still a human infant. I conjure the sound of her crying, so I can blow apart all over again. It reminds me that I'm inside. My own body, that is.

TODAY IS THURSDAY AND ON

Thursdays Wendy comes out of her office just before noon and puts on her own jacket before placing mine over my shoulders. Like the flight attendants tell you to do if the oxygen masks fall down from up above. If it is a good day and my baby has visited and eaten her breakfast, I slide my arms through the sleeves and zip it up on my own. If it is a bad day, I just let the parka hang on top of me. A stiff, waterproof blanket. Like

the ones firefighters drape over people they've rescued from burning buildings or mangled cars.

We are always late. Wendy apologizes to my therapist but I don't because I don't care. Sometimes, after therapy, Wendy admonishes me because she says that as queers and immigrants, we have to have better manners than everyone else. "We're representing a lot of groups of people," she says. I just stare out the windshield and ignore her.

On those days, she chatters to herself to feel less awkward. Mumbling something about "immigrant time" and making a good impression. She talks to me as though she's somehow possessed her mother's body and I'm a child version of Wendy herself. Because my girlfriend is second-generation, so what does she care about immigrant time? Her parents came here before she was born. Her dad owned a Tim Hortons franchise and her mom worked at the IGA. And even though technically I guess I am an immigrant, I was sent over as a toddler, so I don't know anything about Korea. Wendy doesn't either. But she has no excuse. Her parents aren't white.

Today, we are only a little bit late. "How are things this week?" the therapist asks, looking at Wendy even though I'm the patient.

"Not much change from last week, unfortunately, Dr. Evans." Wendy is very polite. To Dr. Evans, she is very polite.

"Again, please call me April."

They talk about names and doctorates for a while and I stare at the wooden duck on the bookshelf.

Back when we first got together, we inherited a pair of wooden ducks from Wendy's friend who got divorced. Wendy had never heard of Korean wedding ducks and didn't believe me until I Wikipediaed them to prove that they're a thing. I told her the set we inherited were lesbian wedding ducks because both of their bills were tied closed with string and I thought that only the female duck's mouth was supposed to be sealed. Her silence a symbol of her matrimonial submission. But then we read online that sometimes both Korean wedding ducks have their bills bound so it wasn't gay after all. We laughed about how apparently there are no gays in Korea anyway.

"Are you feeling tired, Maggie?" I don't immediately react at the sound of my name. Then, I shake my head no, but just barely.

"She's always catatonic." Wendy speaks on my behalf. She squeezes my hand to prove that she's a sympathetic partner. I want to pull my hand away but then Dr. Evans will write something down in her file.

"So, perhaps we have found a good balance." I deduce she is talking about my SSRI dosage. It doesn't sound like a question but like she's talking to herself.

"Sure," I say at last. Wendy squeezes again, this time harder, as though chiding an insolent child.

We sit in silence for a long time. "April" attempts to make fake-worried expressions but her face is full of Botox so she looks ridiculous.

She hesitates. Then: "And the birds? Do you still see the birds?"

I glare at her. She's acting like I'm faking it.

"One of the bird bodies is still there. The landlord says it's not his responsibility to remove it." Wendy fills in when the silence becomes too awkward for her to bear. Then she adds, as though hesitating, "The woodpecker still comes around nearly every day."

"How does that make you feel?"

I can't tell if she is talking to Wendy or me. So I wait. Everyone looks at me.

"Good," I volunteer.

"Great! Good! Yes, why does it make you feel good?" April's voice is excitable in contrast to her frozen face.

"Because soon my baby will come back. The bird will release her soul back to me."

I sense Wendy holding her breath. She and April exchange "uh oh" looks. I go back to staring at the duck on the shelf. April is whispering something about adding an antipsychotic to my nightly regimen. "It will help activate the anti-depressant." Wendy is nodding, conspiratorially. She asks some obnoxious questions in a foreign language. They shut me out with their scientific jargon.

I think "I hate you" on rhythm with every beat of my pulse. It is slow, so it's a mantra. I tap my fingers on the arm of the chair to express my impatience. No one notices me.

I open my eyes, which maybe were closed. I can't remember. We're back in the car. I turn on the seat warmer even

though it's not that cold yet.

"She might come around less, once winter arrives." Wendy warns me like I'm stupid. Just because I don't have a PhD in biology or whatever doesn't mean I'm completely ignorant. "Woodpeckers go where the food is."

"She'll be back." I am firm.

AT THE APARTMENT, WENDY hangs our coats up and I sit on the couch by the window. It overlooks the visitors' parking lot. I sit with my legs folded under me like I'm a cat. It's colder near the window because it is an old building. It is okay because it reminds me that I'm inside my body. That my organs haven't entirely detached from my skin. That I'm still somehow here even though I wish I wasn't. Dr. Evans and Wendy want me to expose the things in my head, but I am just trying to hold my body together.

Wendy goes back into her office after eating some raw egg on leftover rice. She doesn't offer me any. She knows I'll say no. "I'll pick up your prescription from Rexall after four," she says and closes the door. I'm relieved to be alone.

I think back to when my baby was learning to sit up. We propped pillows all around her in case she tipped backwards. If she dipped too far forward, I would catch her. Once I caught her with a kiss, her wet mouth against my smiling lips. A string of saliva stretched between us as I angled her upright again.

She laughed and said "Ummah" and I looked at Wendy for confirmation.

"She's just mumbling nonsense words," I remember her saying.

Nowadays it's hard for me to sit upright. My head feels too heavy. My neck too brittle. Like the single sunflower that grows in the alley out back. Every October, the sunflower collapses in on itself. Its face bows almost to the pavement, several feet below where it once blossomed. It dies crumpled to the ground, the flower part eventually ripped off by a passing car or buried in ice and snow.

My head is tired. I took a lorazepam before therapy when Wendy wasn't looking. Then I took two more on the car ride home because Wendy was listening to a true crime podcast and I didn't want to hear it. Now, my head is bobbing forward while I look out the window. Like my baby's head bobbed forward before she kissed me and called me Ummah. Like my baby's head bobs forward when she eats her breakfast.

Suddenly, I see a flash of black and white. A wisp of red. My baby swoops right by the window and perches on a telephone pole only a few metres from the building. I try, carefully, to lean forward to get a better look. To see if she is okay. I try to focus my eyes, but it's difficult. She looks small. Like she's lost weight. She pokes at the telephone pole but she won't find anything there to eat. "Go to the tree and eat your lunch, baby," I call to her. Through the office wall, I hear Wendy's typing slow to a stop.

Before I can instruct my baby again, my head falls forward. Fast. It is too heavy. It crashes against the window pane. I hear Wendy's desk chair push back. I hear her office door swing open.

"Holy fuck, Mag," she mutters, rushing toward me. Blood is streaming down my face. It reminds me of when I used to be able to cry. My cheeks feel warm and it is comforting. I haven't cried for many months. Dr. Evans' words, "a good balance," repeat in my mind. I imagine my head and face are red, like my baby's is now. Wendy is blotting my forehead with a dishtowel. It doesn't hurt. She is scared but is trying to act confident and calm. And everything I see is tinted red because I have blood in my eyes.

I look out the window but my baby has flown away. I scared her away. Inside I am screaming for her. I panic. Imagine myself chasing after her into the sky. But instead, I just close my eyes and let the blood come.

JENNY HEIJUN WILLS *is the author of* Older Sister. Not Necessarily Related. A Memoir. *It won the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for non-fiction in 2019 and the Eileen McTavish Sykes award for Best First Book in 2020. She is a professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, where she is also Chancellor's Research Chair. A Korean adoptee, Wills was born in Seoul but raised in Southern Ontario, Canada. She has a book of creative non-fiction forthcoming.*

GORGON

In me you found an amphitheatre
Oversold with statues—
Eyes ossified. My body made
Camera obscura by their pinpoint desire.
They project upon me
An eldritch want—retinas burning
The snakes in my hair. Give me a blade
And I shall be shorn. Each bloody stump
A choice of pain over objectification.

Watch how they turn my elected monstrosity
Into an abscess of lust. Let them see
The grotesquery of this weeping scalp.

Notice how I offend
When I choose my wounds
Rather than play along

With their mythmaking.

LEGACY

I realized you were resigned to death
when you handed over your earrings. Fat amethysts.
Granny Smith jades, with one wonky clasp.
The prim diamonds you cherished above all. Punctuation
for your face. They gleamed with your devotion
and blazed while you raged and shamed and beat me.

You didn't ask if I'd wear them, didn't insist
I store them in a bank box: just crumpled that refracted light
into a kleenex, then a plastic sandwich bag. I had no place
to lose them. *They're yours now*.

Now I skewer my earlobe with gold,
check the bathroom mirror to see if I'm still me.
Your eyelids wait there, the line of your jaw. I remember two
is the only even prime – all that intransigence as a matched set.
The second stone glints, slips, skips. So I let it skitter,
track its tiny death-rattle through the pipes.

Witch, bitch, and full-time disaster **HELEN ROBERTSON** *is a trans, bisexual, genderqueer woman moving through the lifelong process of accepting how lucky they've been; using poetry to excise her ire and sorrow — hopefully turning it into something worthwhile. They are a member of the poetry collective VII.*

Y.S. LEE*'s poems appear/are forthcoming in* Rattle, *the* Literary Review of Canada, the *Australian Book Review, and other journals. Her fiction includes the award-winning YA mystery series* The Agency *(Candlewick Press). She lives in a place we're learning to call Katarokwi.*

LOOK AT THIS

A life in pictures

Alex Antle's work is a tender portrayal of her brother's connection with the land

LEFT TOP: ALEX ANTLE, *TOQA'Q 2*, 2021, PRINT ON COTTON, APPLIQUÉ BEADWORK. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST. LEFT BOTTOM: ALEX ANTLE, *NEWFOUNDLAND BERRIES*, 2023, APPLIQUÉ BEADWORK. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST. TOP: INSTALLATION VIEW, ALEX ANTLE: *NJIKNAM (MY YOUNGER BROTHER)*. PHOTOS COURTESY THE ROOMS. BOTTOM: A GIFT FOR MATT, 2023, APPLIQUÉ BEADWORK. COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST.

ALEX ANTLE ISN'T NEW ON THE East Coast arts scene. But her work is going through a metamorphosis. Over the past several years Antle, a L'nu artist located in Elmastukwek, Ktaqmkuk (Bay of Islands, Newfoundland), has been focused on learning and practicing beadwork, with a community of Mi'kmaq beaders as her guides. Lately, though, she's been getting into photography. Her new exhibit at The Rooms in St. John's, Newfoundland is called *Njiknam (My Younger Brother)*, and features a series of photos of her brother Matthew. Matthew doesn't see himself as having a strong connection to Mi'kmaq culture, yet he practices many traditional ways of life, like hunting, fishing and foraging. Antle's work, which also features beading and caribou tufting, pushes back against the idea that belonging needs to look any one way. "This series communicates that Mi'kmaq culture does not solely revolve around ceremonial acts. Every person practices their culture differently, and they are all equally valid," Antle writes. Her innovative use of beadwork on her photographs makes them pop, rendering them an unforgettable testimony.


2578

PROFILE

Birds of a feather

From stages to council meetings, this Vancouver drag queen advocates for Indigenous representation and gender-affirming care

BY TOVA GASTER

THE SCARLETTE IBIS, WEARING BURGUNDY CURLS, a red leather corset, and matching heels, strode across the pub floor to the buoyant electro beat of Kim Petras's "Slut Pop." She briefly disappeared as she hit the floor in a confident roll. If she wobbled slightly on the rebound, the crowd only cheered harder. Shockingly, the February 2023 show, at Vancouver's University of British Columbia (UBC) campus, was The Scarlette Ibis's drag debut—it seemed like she'd been doing this forever.

Cheers from one table rose above the rest. They were from members of UBC's Trans Coalition, a new group campaigning to add gender-affirming care to UBC's student health-care plan. The Scarlette Ibis, also known as Oliver McDonald, is one of the coalition's most outspoken organizers. McDonald is transmasc, two-spirit and Cree from Peguis First Nation in Treaty 1—all of which shape his drag and advocacy.

The coalition formed because UBC's student health-care plan did not include trans health care. Paying out of pocket for hormones, surgery, and other treatments was a staggering burden for many trans students already struggling under the rising costs of living. "People's lives are at risk, including my own," McDonald said in an address to the UBC student council in February.

A month after the show, the coalition succeeded: UBC will now insure trans health care. Drag performers—both in and out of makeup—were a vital force for advocacy and queer joy during a tense campaign.

Gender-affirming care can be an issue of life and death. A 2020 U.S. study of 20,619 trans adults found that of those, 3,494 had wanted pubertal suppression at some point in their lives. Amongst that segment of the population, those who had received puberty blockers were 15 percent less likely to consider suicide than those who hadn't.

But council members and student executives had reservations. UBC's student insurance plan is financially strained, and adding gender-affirming care to the plan would require an $8 increase in student fees. Ultimately, the student body voted to raise their health fees to add gender-affirming care to the insurance plan. "I hope that with this win it lets other activist groups ... see that it is possible," McDonald says.

UBC's gender-affirming care campaign represents just one facet of a bigger fight for trans rights occurring across the continent. Trans health care in Canada is notoriously underfunded and inaccessible, and transphobic discrimination is on the rise. Last year, protestors harassed over 15 drag queen story hours across Canada.

Although McDonald is new to drag, he has always been a performer, and he used to sing in choir. That changed when he medically transitioned. "Testosterone changed my voice, so I can't sing like I could before," he says. "It pushed me out of my comfort zone." Lip syncing to femme-fronted anthems has been one workaround.

"[The Scarlette Ibis] is about expressing that fun, very feminine persona which, as a transmasc person, it's not always easy to express," McDonald says.

The Scarlette Ibis was born when McDonald was a volunteer at the Vancouver Aquarium. As a self-described biology nerd, he felt a special resonance with scarlet ibises—a vibrant red-orange bird related to flamingos. "That's me in every way—the drama, the poofiness, the colour ... they also love shrimp," he says.

The Scarlette Ibis is not the only alter ego McDonald has up his sleeve. King Colin Izer is McDonald's latest drag persona, intended to challenge settler Canadian masculinity by laughing at it.

King Colin Izer looks like moose-patterned boxer shorts, red flannel and miniature Canadian flag props waved with a sinister swagger. Before he struts onto the floor, he breaks character to tell audiences "not to be afraid to boo."

McDonald described this new act, which he performed for the first time at the end of March, as a way to process and play with "mixed confusion" as a light-skinned person with Cree and settler ancestry.

"I want to have a look that's iconically Canadian, that calls back to this very white working-class ... thing," McDonald says. "People who have a lot of misconceptions about Indigenous people—I really love playing with that."

He also plans to do more performances that represent his Cree culture. McDonald emphasizes that his drag career builds off of the Indigenous and two-spirit drag performers who came before him and created a thriving scene in Vancouver. He hopes to pay it forward through organizing drag events to platform other Indigenous drag performers, with the principle of ensuring that all get paid equitably for their work.

"Performing is really fun and I love it, but the more important thing is [to make sure] that other Indigenous people can show their stuff," he said.

PHOTO COURTESY OLIVER MCDONALD

VISUAL ARTS

Voyeurism and vulnerability

Daniella Williams's paintings explore the intimacy of sharing small spaces

IF YOU'RE A FREQUENT VISITOR of hip galleries in Toronto, you've very likely come across Daniella Williams's work.

Despite living in the city for only a few years, the young artist has taken root in the local art scene, with multiple exhibitions across the city—both solo and collaborative—showcasing her vibrant, warmly coloured pieces. Her first solo show, *Domesticity*, was just last summer at BrickBox Studios in Parkdale, followed by another in the winter at The Drake Hotel. In March 2023, she was part of a group show for International Women's Day at Cry Baby Gallery on Dundas West.

Working with themes of voyeurism, womanhood, and domesticity, Williams is taking figurative art and transforming it into her own, with the takeoff point of the female form. "As I grew into becoming more confident in my womanhood and my body, I realized that what I was really wanting to paint was this idea of it being really uncomfortable to be perceived," she explains. "We all feel like we're being viewed and we're being consumed, but also… it can be beautiful in the way that it's exposing."

In 2019, Williams graduated from the University of Guelph with a bachelor of fine arts and moved to Toronto with her close friends. It was then, when the world shut down, that she began to explore the female form in the context of intimate and private spaces.

Williams began by painting her roommates nude, in the sanctuary of their shared living space, before expanding her subjects to include other artists in the city. Adding another layer in her theme of voyeurism, the audience now got to take a peek into the lives of collaborators in her work that would typically be behind a brush or camera.

"I wanted [my subjects] to be expressing that they were in their own home, that they were comfortable but that their gaze never would meet the camera," Williams says. "[My work explores] being and sharing a space with somebody but not really feeling seen by them."

However, as the heavy haze of isolation fades, Williams plans to take her key theme of voyeurism outside the home, capturing private moments in public spaces. "[I like] catching people doing really mundane things that you wouldn't normally be part of, but then making it into art," she explains.

While figurative painting is one of the oldest versions of artistic expression, Williams is taking it upon herself to redefine what it means to her, especially as a biracial woman creative.

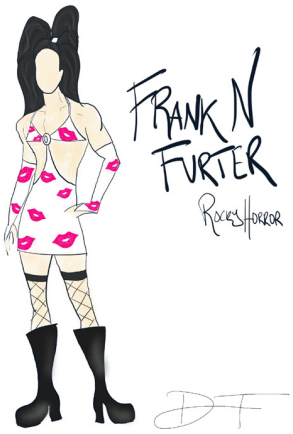
"A lot of my inspiration comes from classical figuration…and a lot of those painters are white men. So I've always felt like I'm playing in an arena that's primarily patriarchally dominated."

"I'm really open to painting anybody. I just want all types of faces and bodies and ages."

In June, Williams will expand her artistic landscape once again. She is taking up a summer residency at the New York Academy of Art, exposing herself to a new community of arts and culture. She's looking forward to living in a city so big, with so many intimate spaces.

—ELIZABETH SARGEANT

TOP LEFT: *SCROLLING*, OIL ON CANVAS
BOTTOM LEFT: *THE SUNDAY READ*, OIL ON CANVAS
RIGHT: *IF I STARE AT YOU LONG ENOUGH WILL YOU TURN AWAY,* OIL ON CANVAS
ALL IMAGES COURTESY DANIELLA WILLIAMS



TOP: PHOTO BY QUINTON CRUIKSHANKS
BOTTOM : PHOTO BY EMILY COOPER

COSTUMES

Behind the curtain

From wig styling to drag mothering, costume designer Donnie Tejani does it all

DONNIE TEJANI'S BOSS at the costume shop had just ordered him down to the basement to get to work on a collection of costumes for a production of *Beauty and the Beast*. There was only one problem: he didn't know anything about costume design.

That was in 2016, and Tejani has been hooked ever since. Last year, he created every outfit for *Call Me Mother* season two winner Weebee, working with the drag queen to bring her polished-punk fantasy to life through the reality TV competition. With Weebee's help at the sewing machine, Tejani completed everything from sketching to sewing without a design team—a feat that has jokingly landed him the title of Weebee's drag mother. She won her title in December 2022, and celebrating with her was a joyous moment.

"There was just no way to prepare myself for what it was going to feel like to see those looks on screen," says Tejani. "Now every time I get frustrated with a project I think, 'you know what, I built some pretty wild stuff from start to finish, so I think I can do this one.'"

Tejani is meticulous in his creative process. His designs breathe life into a character, turning script descriptions into the multidimensional personas that audiences meet on stage.

In theatre, the process looks different than it does for drag queens or solo performers. It involves working with directors to understand a character's core essence, researching their historical context and thinking about the garments they would have hanging in their closet. The resulting sketch is then modified in collaboration with actors—"meeting his canvas," as Tejani calls it—tailoring his stylistic vision to suit their body shapes, hair textures and skin tones.

Tejani's designs have graced stages across Canada, revealing fresh takes on cult classics like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. They've also appeared in many musicals including Raincity Theatre's immersive production of *Cabaret* last fall in Vancouver and a December 2022 production of *Anne of Green Gables* at Gateway Theatre in Richmond.

"I feel like I've been pigeonholed as a designer who does sexy, fun, edgy stuff, but I'm a big nerd for a period show," Tejani says. "So to get to do a show where no one was in their underwear was really fun."

Across such a wide breadth of styles and stories, Tejani's love of whimsical musical theatre is the inspirational tie that binds his art. "I just genuinely love entertaining an audience and anything that's going to wow a crowd," he says. "There's so much power in contemporary plays that make people think. But there's also something special about reveals and sparkle and rhinestones."

Vancouver audiences can experience Tejani's designs this spring at Royal City Musical Theatre's production of *Crazy For You* at The Massey Theatre in New Westminster and Green Thumb Theatre's *For Now*—a 2SLGBTQ+ coming-of-age story. Green Thumb is a touring theatre specializing in youth performances, and Tejani says he's proud to see this kind of queer content brought into high schools.

—JACQUELINE SALOMÉ

PHOTO BY MATT REZNEK

CULTURE

Stars and the City

How to identify your Carrie, Samantha, Miranda and Charlotte placements

BY YASMINE DALLOUL

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE FOUR MAIN CHARACTERS of *Sex and the City*. We love them despite the out-datedness of the show's plotlines, the lack of diversity in its original cast (followed by the cringe attempts of wokeism that we had to sit through in the first season of *And Just Like That...*), and of course, the stereotypes and slang that might have been considered fine at the time but today just make you wince and think "wow—we really don't say *that* anymore."

But the reason why the show is so loveable? Because it's relatable. I've watched it countless times. I watch it when I'm happy, I watch it when I'm sad. I may or may not have looked to it for signs during my last breakup, but I'm not alone. To many Millennial women, and the Gen Xers that preceded us, *Sex and the City* gave us four leading ladies who were meant to embody "every woman"—or at least every woman of 1998 who lived in New York City and either wore a size zero or made a six-figure salary. Perhaps some of this relatability is dead today, as society, the economy, technology, gender roles and every other aspect of modern life has changed since the show's initial air 25 years ago. But in other ways, the show's themes endure because some things haven't changed: the messy realities of trying to find love, the absurdity of dating, the fast pace in which lovers and potential partners can enter and leave our lives, and the idea that friendship is the one non-negotiable in life. This resulted in decades of the show's cult following, out of which spawned the question that seems to live forever: Are you a Miranda, a Charlotte, a Carrie, or a Samantha?

As I wait for the second season of *And Just Like That...* to air in spite of myself, I've been re-watching again, and re-working this question. Because people have evolved from boxed-in personalities, I want the question to keep up with what we know today, and to hopefully make it way less offensive: What's your *Sex and the City* birth chart?

Over the years, *Sex and the City* and astrology have become constants in my life. They both bring comfort, a sense of order, and the ability to recognize parts of ourselves and those around us we may not otherwise see. Whether it's for real or just for play, in my friend circles there's an immediate kinship one feels around identifying as a Leo or a Carrie. Both can belie one's true sense of being.

So, how does one determine their *SATC* chart? Unlike your astrological birth chart, where you'd visit cafeastrology.com and harass your parents about the exact time you were born, all you have to do is tap into your inner truth.

Now, many would base each character on their most basic and well-known qualities: Carrie is quirky and witty, Samantha is sexually liberated, Miranda is cynical and Charlotte is romantic and conservative. But, in order for this theory to hit a little closer to home, we need to dig deeper and understand that people aren't necessarily made up of one solo *SATC* character, but perhaps there is a birth chart of four that comprises our makeup according to our moon, sun, and ascendant signs.

The sun sign is your most dominant sign. This is the house under which you are born. So, whichever character you feel you relate the most to, that will be your sun sign. Your moon is how you see yourself, and how you show up for yourself. Your rising, or ascendent, is the "mask" that you wear—the way people perceive you.

In case you're wondering what makes your *Sex and the City* placements, here's how I like to break down the main four, with traits that surpass what is obvious at first glance:
The Samantha: Fiercely independent. Cutthroat. Blunt. Supportive. Curious. Sexual (akin to Scorpio) and determined. A real powerhouse who gets what she goes for. Stubborn. Works for pleasure. Would most likely have placements in Scorpio and Taurus.

The Carrie: A dreamer. Flighty. Compassionate. Anxious. Temperamental. Stubborn. A little lazy. Static, fears change and tends to revert toward what is comfortable. Vain. Addictive personality. Expects pleasure. Would most likely have placements in Libra and Taurus.

The Charlotte: Passionate. Momentarily judgmental but the most open-minded. Anxious. Most likely to try or consider trying new things. (I.e.: Considering anal sex and a threesome with past partners, adoption, IVF, converting to Judaism.) Fiercely loyal. A dreamer. Goal-driven and determined. Detail-oriented and a perfectionist. Naive. Highly focused. Expects pleasure but works for it. Charlotte is 100 percent a Gemini.

The Miranda: Goal-driven. Fiercely independent. Cynical. Judgmental. Nurturing. Focused. Awkward. Ambitious. Stubborn. Skeptical. Loving, but coldly so. Hyper realistic. Does not believe in pleasure and finds herself overindulging anxiously (falling in love with Steve, the phone-sex buddy, and the chocolate cake episode). Virgo, Virgo, and more Virgo.

Chopping up the qualities of the girls using the birth-chart method means that you can pick and choose your placements according to what you feel fits your personality (or that of someone you know very well) best. No birth timing necessary,

just a quick analysis of how you face life.

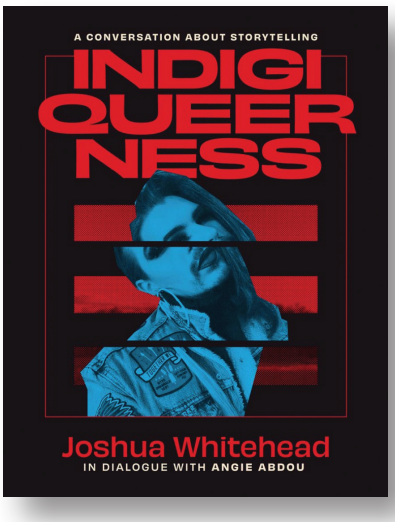
Personally, I am a Miranda sun: I'm cynical, unlucky, and clumsy in love, and I live alone with my cat. However, the way I scare men off due to my intensity and my constant need for validation is akin to a Carrie moon. Forget the fact that I'm a writer and have curly hair. With the moon sign representing how you present yourself to the world and those around you, it makes sense that I would be seen as a Carrie.

But then, my rising, which is the cherry on top of my entire personality, is Charlotte: not conservative, per se, but passionate about my beliefs and perhaps even stubborn, yet naive, at times. I'm also spiritual and faithful about little myths and tales, like the idea that everything happens for a reason.

When I first applied this theory to the group chat, I didn't realize how true it was. But the more I diagnosed my friends, the more I realized how well it works. My friend Kristan, for example, is clearly a Samantha-Miranda-Carrie, and Mark is an obvious Samantha-Carrie cusp with double Carrie placements and a Samantha sun.

While this dissertation is mostly in jest, it feels as though our stories as women need to be comparable to something viewable or categorizable in order for us to actually realize that things are going to be okay. Perhaps this is my cynical Miranda speaking, believing that the media has to show women examples of ourselves before we can feel more liberated and "normal," making our role in the patriarchy easier to swallow. Maybe this is why femme-presenting people also find themselves drawn to astrology, and to *Sex and the City* placements as well.

Or perhaps it's just that human beings find our own personalities completely fascinating and we just want more ways to classify ourselves. But, if any of this resonates with you, keep changing the narrative and be sure to correct people when they assign themselves and others to a single character. And if you find yourself thinking about your own chart and that thought starts off with "I couldn't help but wonder..., " then you'll know what at least one of your placements is.



READ THIS

Crafting community

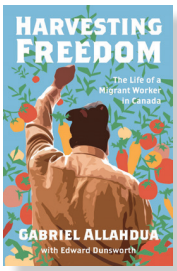
CBC Canada Reads winner Joshua Whitehead strikes again with a genre-blending read

INDIGIQUEERNESS: A CONVERSATION ABOUT STORYTELLING
By Joshua Whitehead with Angie Abdou
Athabasca University Press, $19.99

JOSHUA WHITEHEAD'S NEW BOOK IS PART INTERVIEW, PART AUTO-biography, and part visual art. A brilliant wordsmith from Peguis First Nation, Whitehead reflects on literature in a refreshingly honest way, showing how our identities shape the way in which we experience stories. In a world that seeks to shove Indigenous storytellers into a box, in *Indigiqueerness: A Conversation about Storytelling*, Whitehead breaks the mold and paves the way for other queer writers to be authentic and fearless with their art.

In a vivid conversation about identity, responsibility, and history with Angie Abdou, Whitehead explores how we as queer, Indigenous otâcimowak are stepping into our roles and redefining how Indigenous people not only exist within Canadian literature, but more importantly how we actively write ourselves into the artistic world. By reinforcing story as an interactive process, Whitehead succeeds in challenging readers to become part of the story and draw what they need from literature in any given moment. Whitehead encourages the artists around him to alter expectations, work beyond the norm of whatever medium we choose as art, and be dauntless in our experimentation. *Indigiqueerness* is another scintillating and heartfelt work by this up-and-coming storyteller that should not be missed.

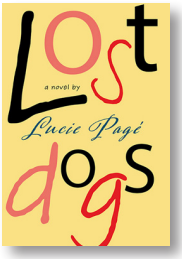
–CHEYANNE LEPKA



HARVESTING FREEDOM: THE LIFE OF A MIGRANT WORKER IN CANADA
By Gabriel Allahdua, with Edward Dunsworth
Between the Lines, $24.95

Gabriel Allahdua's memoir, *Harvesting Freedom: The Life of a Migrant Worker in Canada*, exposes the appalling working and living conditions of participants in the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP). Allahdua's decision to leave St. Lucia at the age of 40 to work in Canada is triggered by economic fallout from climate change and neoliberal politics. His astute analysis of the relationship between sociopolitical context and the situation of migrant workers is a strength throughout the book. *Harvesting Freedom* is a testament to the humanity of migrant workers and a call for Canada to live up to its international image as a just nation.

–JANET POLLOCK MILLAR



LOST DOGS
By Lucie Pagé
Cormorant Books, $24.95

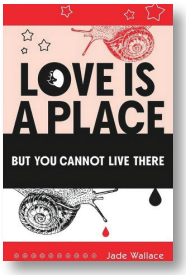
Set against the backdrop of Toronto's Queen Street, Lucie Pagé's debut novel, *Lost Dogs,* is a story about unhappy women and their search to be seen. With the missing dog as a catalyst, Pagé weaves the juxtaposing themes of toxic mother-daughter dynamics and patriarchal society into her contemporary, fast-paced plot. Pagé's exploration of the cyclical nature of trauma from childhood to adulthood is cleverly constructed between the overlapping narrative streams. Although different, Becca, Katherine, and Caroline all exhibit how delusion and self-loathing are a result of their upbringings. *Lost Dogs* offers up an insightful, affecting read.

–KASHI SYAL

BIG SHADOW
By Marta Balcewicz
*Book*hug Press, $23*

Marta Balcewicz's *Big Shadow* follows recent high school graduate Judy as she strikes up a complicated friendship with a much older man. Balcewicz is bold in her storytelling, spinning several plates at once as she attempts to tie up disparate threads of isolation, film, and the 1970s New York punk scene, among others. Readers will be enraptured by Judy's haunting and lonely world textured by Balcewicz's stylistically compact prose. Narrated by Judy later in life as she looks back on this influential but ultimately traumatic relationship, the perspective leans more toward reporting than reflection, missing the opportunity to delve deeper.

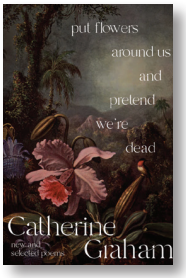
–ALEXA MARGORIAN



LOVE IS A PLACE BUT YOU CANNOT LIVE THERE
By Jade Wallace
Guernica Editions, $20

In their debut poetry collection *Love Is A Place But You Cannot Live There*, Jade Wallace has created a deeply intimate reflection on how we are bound by the connections we make—both to others and to the world around us—as we travel through life. Hidden places, family secrets, and waning relationships all play a part in the collection's themes of self-discovery and self-realization. The poems crackle with energy and wry humour then switch gears to whisper of love, longing, and rumination, building beautiful and heartbreaking images that remain indelibly etched in the reader's mind.

–ELIZABETH OBERMEYER



PUT FLOWERS AROUND US AND PRETEND WE'RE DEAD
By Catherine Graham
Wolsak & Wynn Publishers, $20

The poems in *Put Flowers Around Us and Pretend We're Dead* are crisp and lean, each filled with carefully chosen words that evoke deep feelings and memories. The seventh book of poetry by award-winning writer Catherine Graham, it brings together new and selected poems that explore many themes, including healing, family, and—most notably—the intricacies and charms of nature. Written over a 20-year span, *Put Flowers Around Us and Pretend We're Dead* is an impressive standalone collection. However, it's also something more significant: a worthy archive of Graham's ethereal work.

–JESSICA ROSE

SNEAK PEEK

Love Notes to Grievers

SHORTLY AFTER MY DAD DIED, I yelled at the man filling the propane tanks at my parents' house. He was grumbling about how the snow wasn't shovelled, so he could get to the tanks easier. The snow removal saga had been going on for over a month. The company was leaving messages about not servicing our house because the drivers complained that there wasn't a clear path to the tanks. No one in my family had the energy to call back. Not one of us could stand to say, "*we are too exhausted to get to that because my dad/husband is actively dying in the VERY house you won't service in the middle of frigid winter, causing my dad stress right before his death, so kindly FUCK OFF.*" No one wanted to explain why we had become the "inconsiderate snow people" on Waukegan Road.

Inside, we administered morphine, topped up IV fluids, assisted bathroom trips, washed dad's hair in the kitchen sink, picked up supplies for the nurses, learned to change out ostomy bags, and spent our last days together between trips to the hospital and one frantic trip to the emergency room after trying one dose of chemotherapy. He was already too weak for the recommended palliative treatment. Somewhere in the middle of this, we forgot to shovel the snow.

When one of the propane workers returned two days after dad died, the house was quiet. My mom and I were wrapped in blankets on the couch watching HGTV home renovation shows, a sanctified ritual for grief—watching mindless shows that typically don't talk about death unless a widow is moving to Mexico on *House Hunters International*.

I looked out the window to see him kicking the snow, muttering to himself, and preparing to leave. I whipped open the door and cried, "Sorry! My dad was a little busy DYING to get to that!" I opened the door again and, mixed in with a lot of swear words and tears, said, "You have NO idea what people are going through in these houses, so show a little respect." He stared, eyes wide. If he did respond, I don't recall what he said. Nothing was going to bring my dad back, so I wasn't interested anyway. I felt like John McEnroe, the legendary American tennis player known for his intensity and aggressive demeanour, yelling at the chair umpire but the *dead dad edition*.

Excerpted with permission from Love Notes to Grievers: Tending to Grief After Loss *by* **ANGELA E. MORRIS**, *2023 Pownal Street Press. For more information, visit www.pownalstreetpress.com.*

LETTER

Great expectations

How can Lake Ontario care for us if we don't care for it?

Akwe·kú úskah tsi? ʌtwahwe?nu·ní· yukwa?nikúhl̲a̲.
Tʌtyethinuhela·tú ohnekanusho·kú tsi? she·kú yukwatstuháti, khale? tsi? she·kú yukhi?nikú·lale?. Ta tho niyohtúhak yukwa?nikúhl̲a̲.

May we all gather our minds together as one. We thank all the waters, that we still go on using them, and that they still care for us. So, let our minds be this way.

–Adapted from Clifford Abbott

DEAR LAKE ONTARIO,

Out of respect for your great age, wisdom, and life-giving power, I have opened this letter with a small part of the Thanksgiving Address—a recitation that is traditional to the Haudenosaunee nations who have lived on your shores for millennia. For generations, Ukwehu·we? have been an integral part of your poetics—the ever-emerging waves of ecological and geological succession that define tsi? niyohwʌtsyó·tʌ, our kind of earth.

Our bodies are made by you, and your body is made by us. In your basin of fresh water, we feasted on strawberries, purified ourselves with tobacco, then harvested raspberries, crab-apples, and cherries. In the late winter, the maple trees fed us sugar made from your waters. The deer became our brothers, and through them, too, you sustained us. The life-giving zone around your shore is an open palm, and between your fingers our ancestors learned to cultivate sunflowers, flint corn, beans, and squash. Our minds met with your capable power, and we all became one.

ILLUSTRATION BY ROWAN RED SKY

Ukwehu·we? histories recall enormous serpents that emerged from the swamps and depths of your ancient waters. They are sometimes two-headed, can lay siege to whole towns, and vomit poison into the water and soil. They slink through tunnels under the ground, beneath the settlements and fields, spreading disease and death. Oftentimes, they are human beings who disguise themselves under scaly cloaks.

Today, the serpent of sickness and death appears in a bionic form: humans have built tunnels beneath and across your watershed to make sewage systems, electrical grids, and oil pipelines. Asphalt burns toxic trails across the land, and dams cut off circulation from your rivers. Like the snakes of old days, these new snakes follow human settlements. They influence and undermine the potential for any humans, including Indigenous communities, to live in respectful, reciprocal, and renewable relation to the polyrhythmic poetry of your biome.

As Haudenosaunee curator Deborah Doxtator once wrote, "How can anything in the world be outside of our vision of it?" Horned serpents are part of our world, but they must be made to exist in balance and rhythm with the freshwater ecosystem. Disastrously, the Ontario government recently approved a proposal to expand wastewater infrastructure and dump more sewage into your waters. New developments and a population boom will increase the amount of water piped from Lake Simcoe into your watershed, which could damage your ecosystem with accidental sewage spills and fluctuating water levels. It may also violate an international agreement to ban large intra-basin water transfers, which threaten environmental protections and conservation efforts.

Serpent stories often express territorial concerns. Their poisonous presence coincides with war, interrupts relations between allies, and defines the character of the land and water. Whether intent on conservation or motivated by greed, human diplomatic tensions metamorphose the rhythms and poetry of life that emerge from your watery basin, and your changed nature affects us in turn. Often you are regarded as lake alone, but you extend into the soil around us; the lake is your heart, which pumps cycles of water through a body that includes us human beings, amongst others, as vital organs. It's time we humans put our minds together as one, honour our agreements, and work toward skʌ·nʌ́—balance with all beings.

Gratefully yours,
ROWAN RED SKY

Family

fam·i·ly /ˈfam(ə)lē/ /ˈfæm(ə)li/

1. the basic unit in society
2. people not related by blood but who share deep and meaningful bonds
3. descendants of a common ancestor
4. a group of people united by certain convictions or a common affiliation

Family. It's what we are.

The National Union of Public and General Employees is the

British Columbia Government Employees' Union (BCGEU)

Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW local 325)

Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)

Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)

Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan (HSAS)

Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals (MAHCP)

Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)

New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)

Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)

Ontario Public Service Employees Union / Syndicat des employés de la fonction publique de l'Ontario (OPSEU/SEFPO)

Prince Edward Island Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)

Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)

National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE)

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