


THE SKELETON PRESS

ISSUE 4

Fall 2020



SAY THEIR
NAMES

Looking out your window



In times of social isolation, the simple act of looking out your window can be a more enlightening experience than some might have previously thought. This year — shaped by unforeseen events that point to what may feel like a far-off and unknowable future — has been a strange and trying one for many people.

Both directly and indirectly, the pandemic has brought to the fore many issues that shape our community. These are not new to Kingston, but over the past few months they have become visible to those of us who had not previously noticed.

You may have seen or been among the hundreds of people quietly making their way to the Black Lives Matter vigil in Skeleton Park in early June. Perhaps you joined them in seeking justice for the murder of George Floyd, or addressing police brutality and systemic anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism here in Canada.

Perhaps you've noticed people sharing food every night in the park and have begun to consider how the pandemic has exacerbated the pre-existing problem of food insecurity in our neighbourhood and beyond.

If you live near Montreal Street at Belle Park, you have likely noticed an increased awareness of mutual aid in our community with regards to Kingston's housing and homelessness crisis. The past months have shed new light on those who directly experience Kingston's housing and homelessness crisis, people living in our neighbourhood who are often overlooked.

This fourth edition of *The Skeleton Press* features stories of and reflections upon this community. Included here are interviews with activists, organizers and artists whose work and efforts have helped bring these issues to the fore.

In an interview with members of Kingston's Black Luck Collective, organizers of the Black Lives Matter vigil in June, Nirosha Balakumar helps us better understand our "commitment to use (our) voice, (our) privilege and (our) capital to hold the state accountable..."

In separate articles, Lawrence Scanlan and Jane Kirby provide facts and insights for our readers on food insecurity here in Kingston. Contributions by Councilor Mary Rita Holland and writers Aric McBay and Sayyida Jaffer outline problems of housing and homelessness, and propose ways of working together to find solutions.

This edition also includes reflections of different sorts. Helen Humphreys' study of "isolation botany" considers "a different sort of history for this neighbourhood" as told through the trees surrounding her home. Cat London shares lessons learned from her young daughters, and of taking the time to look around.

You will also find an eight-page insert called "Skeleton Park People Project," a virtual artist residency by Jon Claytor that tells the story of neighbourhood residents in a series of comic strips.

As in past editions of *The Skeleton Press*, this edition includes reviews of local music and food, and of goings on in the community.

We hope these pieces assist and encourage you in your reflections on home and neighbourhood.

What do you see from your window?

The Skeleton Press is interested in sharing more stories and would like to invite you to contribute by writing a letter to the editor.

SEND EMAIL TO:
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The Skeleton Press
PO BOX 222, Kingston Main
Kingston, Ontario
K7L 4V8

VIEW OR DOWNLOAD PAST ISSUES AT:
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MANDATE

The Skeleton Press was initiated by the Skeleton Park Arts Festival to create a free print publication that captures the vibrancy and diversity of the neighbourhood. We are interested in how print media can communicate and build relationships differently than digital publishing, and in how the act of consuming and distributing the physical object can build community. We hope copies of *The Skeleton Press* will be passed from hand to hand, sparking conversation with neighbours over the fence or at the corner store, and strengthening our sense of place and each other.

COVID-19 & The Skeleton Press

Community impact and response from the COVID-19 pandemic has evolved daily, and as an infrequent, hard-copy publication, we can't reflect that changing reality here. Instead, as always, we hope to provide an engaging read (maybe some of you have more time to read right now), featuring wonderful pieces on matters of importance and interest.

Please join us in protecting public health by following the current guidelines for social distancing, hand-washing, self-isolating where necessary — our community depends on all of us doing our part.

For up-to-date information on COVID-19, please visit www.kflaph.ca or call KFL&A Public Health at 613-549-1232; Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or 1-866-797-0007 (toll-free); COVID-19 Health Canada Infoline at 1-833-784-4397. Dial 211 for general information about public services and to find phone numbers for other community agencies (regarding library and community centre closures, crisis and counselling numbers, etc).

At press time, there were a couple of helpful initiatives in the neighbourhood:

- Mutual Aid Katarokwi was providing safe delivery of groceries, food bank boxes and pharmacy items (mutualaidkatarokwi.wordpress.com; mutualaidkatarokwi@gmail.com; 613-665-2959)
- Lionhearts was providing free daily meals in Skeleton Park, from 6–7 p.m. (lionhearts.ca; practicallove@lionhearts.ca; 613-539-3735)

CONTRIBUTORS

Jan Allen, Nirosha Balakumar, Alec Barken, Al Bergeron, Adam Biehler, Neil Bettney, Jon Claytor, Kate Archibald-Cross, Sadiqa De Meijer, Emberly Doherty, Tianna Edwards, Floriana Ehninger-Cuervo, Eric Folsom, Mary Rita Holland, Helen Humphreys, Sayyida Jaffer, Jane Kirby, Cat London, Aric McBay, Anna Mack-Keyte, Hayden Maynard, Morgan Oddie, Matt Robinson, Tanya Robinson, Lawrence Scanlan, Greg Tilson, Eric Williams, Linda Williams

STAFF

EDITOR
Greg Tilson

ART DIRECTOR
Vincent Perez

COPY EDITORS

Ulrike Bender
Melanie Dugan
Em Harmsen
Lawrence Scanlan
Mark Stoller

ASSISTANT COPY EDITOR:

Neil Bettney

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ILLUSTRATED ICONS: Pierre Collet-Derby



Black lives matter

yesterday, today, tomorrow and every day

A reflection on the Black Luck Collective vigil in Skeleton Park

STORY BY NIROSHA BALAKUMAR

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter.”
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

On Tuesday, June 2, 2020, the Black Luck Collective (@blackluckcollective on Facebook) organized a powerful and memorable vigil in response to the numerous Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests taking place around the world. These protests originated in the U.S. seeking justice for the murder of George Floyd, but quickly became a movement that highlighted the larger issues of police brutality and anti-Black racism on a global scale.

For organizers Lavie Williams (Inclusion & Anti-Racism Advisor at Queen’s University), and Kristin Moriah (Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Queen’s University), this vigil was an opportunity for the Black community in Kingston to collectively observe BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of colour) lives lost to police brutality, and for the wider Kingston community to physically join in support. It is crucial to understand this is not solely a problem in the United States but is in fact a part of the fabric of Canada. In conversation, both Williams and Moriah shared the importance of holding the vigil to bring awareness to the Black and Indigenous killings at the hands of the police, as George Floyd’s death was quickly followed by

the death of a Black-Indigenous Canadian woman, Regis Korchinski-Paquet.

When asked about the reason behind choosing Skeleton Park as the location for the vigil, they noted the symbolic importance of selecting a place that evokes a feeling of community and togetherness. They were met with unconditional support, and witnessed what felt like a turning point for many. To be able to mobilize a critical mass with social justice at the forefront instilled a sense of pride and a belief that it is possible to live in a diverse community where something like this can happen.

To Williams and Moriah, the community response was much larger than expected. They were astonished by the 800 to 1,000 community members who packed Skeleton Park the day of the vigil, the first event in Kingston related to the BLM protests. Moriah described an incredible energy of both peacefulness and solidarity. Seeing her students and colleagues attend, having members of the neighbourhood express that they had never seen a vigil like this before: here was a moment that will be remembered in Kingston’s history.

Williams also highlighted the positive takeaways in terms of safety, execution, and caring for one another. With COVID-19 introducing another dimension, organizers were met with an outpouring of support from the community, with many offerings donated and masks made within 24 hours’ notice. People were energized and motivated as they found ways to contribute to and support the cause. Williams noted, “The way the vigil was framed set the tone for how people showed up. It struck the right key, where people felt safe enough to show up whether they were committed to dismantling anti-Black racism or new to the issues at hand.”

The inspiring mobilization of the Kingston community at Skeleton Park due to the leadership of the Black Luck Collective created a momentum for change and a drive to demand justice. To Moriah, this vigil demonstrated there is a huge critical mass in the Kingston community and the opportunity to carve out the space needed to continue having these conversations, while pushing for change. In the words of Margaret J. Wheatley, “There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

Despite the success of the event, Williams did caution that these conversations are not new to Kingston. From the time she was a student to today, as a staff member at Queen’s University, many of the issues being raised now are the same ones she

addressed 10 years ago. Racial profiling and police brutality have both been prevalent issues faced by the Black community in Kingston for years. Those who attended the vigil must continue to show up for the Black community in Kingston.

Allyship doesn’t end at the vigil — it merely begins there. Showing up means understanding the call to defund the police and invest in social services. Showing up is having hard conversations with your families, friends, and colleagues, learning and unlearning, recognizing your privilege and unconscious biases. As Moriah reminded us, “You don’t have to turn to Black community groups to learn about Black Canadians. Read Black literature — there are plenty of teachers.” Do the hard work and take the initiative. Listen, learn, empathize, and amplify Black voices around you.

BLM is not a trend; it is a commitment to use our voices, our privilege, and our capital to hold the state accountable, to seek justice for the lives we have lost, and to change the oppressive systems that allow this narrative to continue being a reality. The Black Luck Collective aims to foster spaces connected to Black liberation, and provides a sense of belonging to Black community members across Kingston. Together, Williams and Moriah are strategizing how to implement the conversations happening both locally and globally while they continue to actively uplift Black people. There are so many ways in which the larger community can provide support, whether it be, for example, donating to the Mutual Aid Katarokwi Kingston (MAKK) group or lobbying for the city of Kingston to fund a bus stop providing access to the Mosque. Every action taken is one more demand for change.

We cannot be silent when our community’s cry for justice is deafening. It is time to show up.



NIROSHA BALAKUMAR is a 23-year old activist, advocate, and artist. She completed her undergraduate degree at Queen’s University where she focused on anti-racism work and cultural awareness on campus and is now pursuing her masters at the University of Cambridge in International Education.

Nirosha has performed in four countries for large and high-profile audiences. She uses her poetry as both an outlet and a platform and has been recruited to write for Plan International Canada, UN Women, and was published at Dokufest. Nirosha sees poetry as a tool to educate, empower and engage others by fostering space for intergenerational dialogue.



Hell and the helping hand

The pandemic asks the question: ‘Won’t you be my neighbour?’ Turns out, the answer is often yes

STORY BY LAWRENCE SCANLAN

PHOTO BY ADAM BIEHLER

In *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*, Rebecca Solnit argues that in a crisis, institutions and hierarchies (government, military, mainstream media) often disappoint — but individuals typically and collectively deliver. “Your neighbours are your rescuers,” she says, “and I find that incredibly reassuring.” Solnit examined various calamities — including the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the 1917 Halifax explosion, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005 — and concluded that a distinctively joyous form of altruism sprouts when we need it most.

Early in our pandemic-induced lockdown, a neighbour (a Queen’s visual-arts student I had never met) placed a card in our mailbox. Framed in hand-drawn red hearts and sprigs of green, the message on one side read, “Sending peace & love, hugs & health to you, neighbour!” On the other side were her name (Sarah Swedberg), her contact information, and an offer to run errands, walk our dog, or help in any way she could. On her car’s rear window, she had written, “Have courage! Be kind!”

Swedberg grew up in suburban Connecticut, a place with a strong sense of kinship and common purpose. “I like the idea of community and neighbourhood,” she told me.

“Kindness,” wrote Sophocles, “begets kindness.” Kingston may be a case in point. In March, a woman informed friends that her aged mother — housebound by the virus and virtually immobile — could no longer get groceries. These friends huddled with more friends and improvised. Thus was formed Mutual Aid Katarokwi-Kingston (mutualaidkatarokwi.wordpress.com). MAKK soon had a website and a team of dispatchers overseeing 250 volunteers delivering groceries, food-bank items, and meds. The collective created a check-in service, matching an altruistic neighbour with a lonely one. Finally, MAKK began offering logistical and political support to those without decent housing.

At the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Kingston, the hot-meal program and used clothing depot-cum-food bank, executive director Judy Fyfe strikes an upbeat note. “Things are going really well,” she tells me. “I’m ashamed at not being more optimistic when the pandemic hit. I thought the behaviour of some of our clients might be affected by the stresses and strains. But the opposite has happened. It’s all running smoothly.”

When Vinnie’s (<http://www.svdppington.com/>) closed its dining room and warehouse to respect social distancing rules, kitchen staff switched gears and prepared packed lunches daily. Food hampers went out the door, food donations took off. Even better, Fyfe witnessed a spirit of co-operation emerge in the city.

“When I worked at the Salvation Army,” she says, “I sat on what was called the Food Providers Network. It was a way of keeping tabs on numbers and trends. But it was hard to maintain and it fizzled out about three years ago.”

Enter Sophie Kiwala, the former Liberal MPP for Kingston and the Islands. As the pandemic began she saw the need for a coordinated effort to help those on the margins. She made some calls. Now city officials, the Partners in Mission Food Bank, Vinnie’s, Lionhearts, Martha’s Table, Lunch by George, KEYS, Kingston Interval House, the school boards, public health, and other community organizations meet via Zoom on a weekly basis to share resources or information and test ideas.

Lionhearts normally rescues and distributes food and clothing. Since March the charity has been offering prepared evening meals at McBurney Park, Rideau Heights, Amherstview and Napanee.



“We noticed front-line agencies pulling back in the face of the virus,” says executive director Travis Blackmore. “Some of their chefs were a vulnerable age. So we launched the street programs.” Lionhearts (lionhearts.ca) now has some 200 volunteers providing up to 900 meals on any given day.

The pandemic hurts in countless ways. But during the pause that the virus forced on everyone, were seeds of change planted? With shelters closed or restricted, their clientele set up sleeping bags on Princess Street or erected tents at Belle Park. Usually these individuals would have been told by police to move along, but these are not normal times. The tents lasted four months.

Sharon Way, a member of MAKK and a longtime Kingston activist, agrees that crisis does indeed kick start collective action. She cites the example of Belle Park. “Without the support of multiple community groups, the city would never have gone there to help out [with Wifi, shower hookups and daily garbage pickup]. Politicians are weather vanes. Unless you push them...”

The pandemic has made the marginalized more visible. “The cracks in the system,” she says, “have been brought to the surface. And a lot of people have turned, not inwards, but outwards.”

The homeless, grocery store clerks, and nursing home staff were on no one’s radar. No longer. The virus has also put Basic Income in the heads of policy makers, and may usher in changes to what the folks at MAKK call “the everyday violence of capitalism.”

We have a long way to go to address shameful inequality and income disparity in our city and our country. But as long as the pandemic remains a force in our lives, it is, as always, neighbours and civil society to the rescue.



LAWRENCE SCANLAN is the author of 24 books, including *A Year of Living Generously: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Philanthropy*.

The Woolen Mill

One building's history reflects Kingston's shifting development aims

BY MORGAN ODDIE



FOR MORE:
swampward
history.com

Located in Kingston's Inner Harbour, The Woolen Mill harkens back to the City's earlier industrial days. Its little-known history reflects the City's principles of development and economic incentivization still at work today.

Built as a cotton mill in 1882 on farmland formerly owned by Molly Brant and her family, the Kingston Cotton Manufacturing Company (Dominion Textile Co.) employed hundreds to produce khaki and "grey cloth" for World War I efforts. Those hundreds lost their jobs when the Great Depression hit in 1929, ravaging the global economy. Canadian Prime Ministers William Lyon McKenzie King, and his successor, millionaire R.B. Bennett, largely displaced economic stabilization onto municipalities — with the former ignoring the national economic impacts, and the latter implementing a half-baked employment bailout plan.

This put the City of Kingston's business incentivization planning into overdrive. In 1931, the City purchased the mill for \$75,000 — an enormous investment at the time — to cheaply lease to the Hield Brothers, an English company, for the production of woolen fabric.

Although city councillors questioned details of the company's financial standing, the potential benefits to the city, and the lack of posted bond by the company (which would guarantee the company would locate to Kingston after the building was purchased), the Council voted in favour of putting the by-law vote to the electorate.

The Kingston Whig-Standard reported at the time that the new woolen textile industry would employ between 250-300 workers, and commended the Chamber of Commerce for working to secure the company's establishment in Kingston. In the days that followed, the city saw public meetings and letters to the Editor; supporters pointed to job creation and the continued investment in textiles (a federally protected industry) over a narrowing focus on Kingston's budding tourism industry.

The electorate voted in favour of the mill's purchase and in favour of the fixed assessment of the property, which later allowed the Hield Brothers to purchase the mill in 1944 for the same \$75,000 the city had paid 12 years before.

All this undoubtedly had a great impact on the 150 employees (far fewer than *The Whig's* initial reports) who kept their jobs during the Depression, something that was unique at the time. The wages supplemented family incomes when unemployment was at an unprecedented national high, but the best-paid and most highly trained menders were actually contracted from England. Although the work was hazardous and employment conditions deplorable, union attempts at organizing were never successful, likely due to fears about job security and *The Whig's* ongoing promotion of the company's corporate citizenship.

There was a short burst of demand for woolen fabrics to supply the Royal Canadian Air Force in World War II, but as synthetics grew in popularity during the 1960s the mill closed.



PHOTO: Courtesy of Queen's University Archives

In 1969, the Hield Brothers sold the property to Montreal-based St. Francis Developments, which apparently intended to transform the large space into viable commercial properties but neglected to undertake any renovations, resulting in the building's growing dereliction.

In 2001, The Woolen Mill was recognized as a winner of Kingston's "Livable City Design Award."

The mill's first tenant was Kingston Spinners, a United States carpet fibre manufacturer, funded by the Ontario government's \$475,000 Industrial Incentive Loan. But the Spinners left their 40,000 square-foot space in the mill after a few short years when construction of their own factory on Dalton Avenue was completed. For a decade, Montreal owners Wilf and Mary Eagle struggled unsuccessfully to create a break-even venture.

On May 12, 1987, The Woolen Mill was declared an historical building under Bylaw 87-151: "...this red brick, many windowed building is one of the very few large industrial buildings still standing. Its exterior has few alterations; its interior has been well adapted to a number of modern uses." But it hadn't been well adapted; aside from the renovations for Clark Day's high-end River Mill restaurant in the east wing of the building, there was no insulation, the building was nearly impossible to heat, and lack of security meant the building was frequently broken into via the fire escapes and exterior mounted gas pipes.

Only in 1993, under current owners Abna Developments, did the building undergo significant renovations. That same year Molly Brant Point was deeded to the City of Kingston and the shore was transformed into Douglas Fluhrer Park.

In 2001, The Woolen Mill was recognized as a winner of Kingston's "Livable City Design Award." The jury commented, "This building renovation and the creation of nearby Doug Fluhrer Park is catalytic, making the entire area into something worthwhile by uniting public and private initiatives."

Now, among the dozens of tenants in the building, one can find the only five-star spa in Kingston, a private school with annual tuition costs of \$15-20K, and the home of *The Kingston Whig-Standard*.

In the 1960 planning study of the city, Kingston Mayor William T. Mills wrote about improving the city: "This process of improvement is called Urban Renewal and it has but one justification — the enhancement of the general welfare of the people of Kingston."

Given the historical and contemporary realities of economic incentivization and Kingston's record in business and renewal planning, residents observing the history of the Woolen Mill may ask exactly what is being enhanced and to whom the benefits accrue.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is indebted to Dr. Laura Murray and the Swamp Ward and Inner Harbour History Project and to local historical work by R. Bruce Warrington.



MORGAN ODDIE is a freelance writer and PhD Candidate in the Cultural Studies Program at Queen's University. She lives with her partner and dogs in Kingston, where she teaches yoga, and spends as much time as she can outdoors.

Growing gardens, growing communities

STORY BY JANE KIRBY

PHOTO BY ADAM BIEHLER

To find out more about community gardens in Kingston, visit the Kingston Community Gardens Network, kingstoncommunitygardens.ca. You can find out more about the Kingston Indigenous Language Nest at their website kingstonindigenousslanguge.ca or by liking their Facebook page.



It is no secret that 2020 was the year Kingston residents got their hands dirty. While many people started gardens at home, the isolation required in response to COVID-19 has also highlighted just how many people lack access to private outdoor space. Community gardens were essential to filling that gap.

“Demand for community gardens has always been high,” says Ayla Fenton, the GROW Garden Coordinator with Loving Spoonful, who oversees the City’s community garden network. “But this year it has been through the roof.”

Initially classified by the province as a recreational service, community gardens were considered non-essential and were required to close at the outset of the pandemic. Advocacy efforts locally and provincially forced a reconsideration of that decision and gardens were able to open in time for growing season.

“We were very grateful that our local health unit was advocating for us to the province,” says Fenton. “Within two days of reopening we had protocols in place, allowing us to open locally.”

Fenton says that Covid-19 encouraged people to start gardening in part because of the threat of food insecurity. In Ontario, outbreaks of coronavirus among migrant farmworkers, which included three deaths, highlighted how much of our food system is reliant on workers without access to secure immigration status or basic labour protections. Breakdowns in supply chains and reduced household incomes also exposed the precariousness of our current food system.

Community gardens are essential in giving renters, homeowners without yards, and others without access to land, alternatives to the industrial food

system. Fenton notes that racialized communities, in particular, are underrepresented in land ownership statistics.

“One of the ongoing things we are advocating for is reclassifying community gardens as subsistence agriculture rather than recreation,” says Fenton. “They are essential services. Access to land and the ability to produce our own food should be a human right.”

Fenton is hopeful that increased demand for community gardens, as well as the City’s support, will translate into increased funding for gardens and the expansion of the community garden network even beyond coronavirus.

“Once you start gardening, it is hard to go back,” says Fenton.

New community garden projects in the neighbourhood can help make long-term gardening a reality, while also providing garden education. Kate Thomas, president of the McBurney Park Neighbourhood Association, has made a proposal for a community garden in McBurney Park composed of accessible raised beds that could be used for educational purposes.

“We’re looking at something we could share with the community that could be used by schools and different agencies in the neighbourhood,” says Thomas. Although the garden has yet to be approved by the City, Thomas is hopeful. “We have a lot of community support,” she says.

Kingston Indigenous Languages Nest (KILN) also has plans for an Indigenous languages- and education-focused community garden at the Katarokwi Learning Centre. The garden, which aims to bring together people from different Indigenous communities and their allies, was due to open in the spring of 2020 but the project was delayed due to coronavirus.

“We plan to plant and harvest traditional medicines, including tobacco, sage, sweetgrass and cedar, and traditional foods like beans, squash and corn,” says Liv Rondeau of the Mohawk Nation, who

is coordinating the project. “We hope to incorporate songs, stories and teachings, while working with traditional planting methods.”

As part of KILN’s broader goals to revitalize Indigenous languages and culture, Rondeau says they are planning to use Penfriend, a voice-labeling technology commonly used by the Blind Community, to mark plants in multiple Indigenous languages, including Anishinaabemowin, Cree and Mohawk.

For Kevin Vertatschitsch, a KILN community member and volunteer treasurer, the project has changed his perspective on gardening. “When I gardened as a kid, I saw it as a chore,” he says, “but through this learning journey I have gained a new appreciation for it, especially for the way it can revitalize culture and language.”

For Rondeau, the garden project is also about connecting to the land and caring for its inhabitants.

“When we started to garden together as an Indigenous community, especially as a Mohawk person where we are so connected to the land, it becomes so much more than just gardening,” says Rondeau. “It moves towards a way of life and a way of being. It becomes about revitalizing our traditional planting methods and cultural teachings, as well as food sovereignty and caring for all our relations, caring for the plants, the animals, the insects, the dirt.”

Projects such as KILN’s highlight just how important gardening together can be beyond food production — and give us more reason to hope that the future includes more community gardens.



JANE KIRBY is a circus performer, movement educator, non-fiction writer, and author of the book, *Fired Up About Reproductive Rights*.

Providence Manor & COVID-19



Essential workers and their “second line”

STORY BY LINDA WILLIAMS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AL BERGERON

Have you ever walked past Providence Manor (275 Sydenham Street) near Skeleton Park on the way to school, work, downtown or wherever you're going and wondered “What happens in there?”

The House of Providence began in 1861 at the corner of Montreal and Ordnance Streets, as a mission (and later residence) of the newly established Roman Catholic order of nuns called the Sisters of Providence of St Vincent de Paul. The Sisters have a long history of serving and empowering people who are vulnerable, poor, abandoned or elderly living in the community, in prisons or within the House. In addition to supporting local orphans, between 1888 and 1891 several hundred “English Home Children” from Liverpool were received and adopted or placed in foster homes. Currently, Providence Manor (renamed in 1970), provides long-term nursing care to 243 individuals with significant physical health problems or dementia.

The Sisters are no strangers to nursing people with infectious diseases. In 1918, many Canadian soldiers returned home from WWI with the Spanish Flu. In Ontario approximately 300,000 people contracted the flu and about 10,000 died; at least 25 Sisters became ill during this time. Sister Mary Remigius (Catherine Egan) died at Providence Manor at age 32 from the Spanish Flu (Archives, Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul).

According to Cathy Szabo, Chief Executive Officer of Providence Continuing Care, the institution began preparing for the arrival of the COVID-19 virus in January 2020 (<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/podcasts/ontario/ontario-morning/> April 17, 2020). When the pandemic emerged in Canada and Kingston in mid-March 2020, Providence Manor

staff responded to the times once again. The administration worked extensively with institutional committees, community partners and the local KFLA Health Unit. The tradition of compassionate caring for the vulnerable proved to be a huge asset.

COVID-19 had and continues to have an impact on the lives of the staff. Life centred on work and home, and feelings of isolation and uncertainty were common. Many staff, including housekeeper and former certified health care aide Stefanie Cahill, worried about becoming ill and transmitting COVID-19 to their family or the residents. Everyone interviewed described their elaborate after-work routines: removing work clothes immediately, jumping into the shower, doing a load of laundry and disinfecting surfaces, all before, finally, hugging a family member. However, the sleepless nights full of worry decreased when staff and residents tested negative for the virus.

It has been heart-breaking for staff to see the many residents with dementia become more confused by new strange routines and lack of family contact. During the lockdown, staff struggled to fill the void when family members were unable to visit with their loved ones receiving end-of-life care. To reduce social contact and ease emotional fatigue, many staff depend on family or friends for groceries/errands. Activities of the supporting “second line” are essential in reducing virus transmission and keeping households afloat, although their critical role has often been neglected in the thanks offered to essential front-line workers. Gratefully, at the time of writing (July 2020), the dedicated effort of staff and their “second line,” plus the low incidence of infection in the Kingston community enabled Providence Manor to avoid any COVID-19 illness or death among residents and staff.

LINDA WILLIAMS' connection to the neighbourhood began in the 1990s when she worked at Providence Manor through the Psychology Dept. of St. Mary's of the Lake Hospital. She moved to the 'hood in 2012 with her husband. A theme of Linda's life and work is the belief that when we connect with people who are most vulnerable, we all benefit.



What made life easier? The rewards of hard work: keeping Providence Manor virus free, ribbons and words of encouragement fixed to the fence, seeing a resident smile when their family waves through the window, hiring extra staff, Kingston PUC reducing electrical rates, the City offering free parking, public acknowledgement of the challenges of the job and the poor conditions of some other facilities.

In the years to come, Louise Sherwood, a personal support worker, hopes Providence Manor will be remembered for the high quality of cleanliness, care and emotional support the residents experience on a daily basis, as well as during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

Providence Manor and the Sisters have been a presence in the neighbourhood for 160 years. Within 5 years, this will change when the residents of Providence Manor are relocated to Providence Village. The Sisters and staff remind us of our responsibility to others. COVID-19 clearly revealed how quickly any of us can experience the profound isolation, loneliness and yearning for connection that many people experience daily. How can Providence Manor be re-imagined to continue supporting vulnerable people who need assistance?

↑ A resident visit at Providence Manor



I WORKED EXTRA SHIFTS TO SUPPORT THE RESIDENTS. SOME WERE SO AFRAID OF CATCHING THE VIRUS AND DYING. WORK WAS VERY DRAINING.

It's the Inner Harbour neighbourhood, but everyone calls it Skeleton Park

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BY SADIQA DE MEIJER

My daughter holds two of my fingers in her fist.
Cheerfully greets everything but people:
hello there, snail, hello tulip, hi paper cup!

At the chestnut tree, I always lift her into the branches,
and repeat a rhyme in my own language.

Margaret on the corner keeps trinkets on the window sill.
The house was her father's shoe repair shop. She sits out front
in her lawn chair, sunburned, older than electric blankets. If you admire
anything, she gives it to you. She asked me once to chase
a scary bird from her cellar. When I feel spectral,
the unmodulated volume of her greeting
gives me form.

The lilacs are primordial perfumeries.

A duck leaves a strangely long wake in the park grass, parting, parting—
wait, it's ducklings!

*Mama, let's pretend that I'm a stranger to this land,
and I don't even know what the sky is.*

The closest I've come
to holding the chirps and warbles of her voice
was when she sang to me through a pool noodle,
and each word trilled in my hands.
I wanted it to last forever.

Aphids on the milkweed pods: ochre, powdery roe. When she finds ladybugs,
she delivers them to their sustenance.

I've never looked at the back of my hand as intently
as we have examined this street.

An idling car is a consciousness.

That hollow between the sidewalk segments
is called wish world; you have to drop
a flower in it when you pass.

Dandelions and earthworms weren't here, earlier.

From one yard comes a cough that is a grievance. Do you think
an ogre lives there, she whispers.

Near The Store Famous
is an aperture where summer enters
the neighbourhood. We're willingly barefoot.
I carry her over the blistering tarmac.

The meows of Tyra the tortoise shell cat sound like the word hello.

Gus sits in a chair on his sloped lawn, belligerent
unless Portugal wins. He has railed against Pakistanis
on my own porch, and been sent away, and returned
with lovage and lettuce from his garden, because he is twofold
like everyone else, fluctuant between a face and an idea. At her
lemonade stand, he hands her five dollars
and says no drink, I've got the sugar.

Dead squirrel's eye is a burnt currant—
she pokes its tummy with a stick.
What made it dead?

We see Helen, and she's pregnant. Soon she'll be with us
in this submerged world.

A tug on my pants means lift me.

She presses her hands to her ears, against the pervasive
hammering, sawing—that's the gentry, making their houses
over. I am part of it, but not enough.

Teenagers on longboards, gangly and mesmeric. The noise
of the wheels is a mantra.

We eat on the front steps, bowls of dal in our laps.
Overhead, nature is stripping the paint for me.

Also, the light on one of Gus's windows, at sunrise,
makes rows of golden yellow squares for a few minutes,
then abruptly goes.

She climbs the cannon at the park's edge. I promise to catch her
when she leaps. Silently, I hold the images of my century;
violence on the scale of metal balls is quaint.

At downpours, we stand in the street's shallow river,
make currents in the gritty water with our toes.

I'm foreign, and she is home.

The lake is a banner without a slogan, strung between the houses.
We smell it, the odd morning; a lithic clarity with an edge of fish.

Wad of filthy tissues at her feet—*don't touch!*—but I get closer,
it's a rust-edged peony.

We wave at Leah, who coasts downhill on her bike
after a night shift in obstetrics. While we slept, was she the first
human that someone ever saw? Her face is right for it,
a kind moon.

Pedestrians carry laptop bags, or groceries, or take-out, or they tug
at a leash and ask if my daughter wants to pet their dog
who is friendly. She does.

Lord, some days there's so much whiteness, hard
as the stratified walls of old quarries that edge the backyards.
I'm Guatemalan, Native, Arabic, whatever, they insist they've met
my sister, but I have no sister. And the ones who say,
that's so interesting, I'm just boring old nothing, are the most
dangerous people, who think they have no history.

When we meander, slowly, nowhere,
all my places are in my pocket.

During the dog days, the roads are still. People have siphoned
to cottages. At the splashpad, small rainbows
and wilting parents.

Evening's relief. The tree receives a great wind.

She sprints after wild rabbits at dusk, seeking to hold them.
When I catch one, can we keep it? I say sure,
because of the odds.

On the sidewalk is a man weaving a low bike around the bins,
eyes ticking between alleys, porches, people
whom I don't expect to recognize, because even if I say hello,
I segregate and think of it as vigilance—
he sees a whole different neighbourhood. I'd like to ask,
but we don't even speak much alike.

Rumours of meteor showers. Too much urban light.

When Sei practices marimba with the window open, we sit
on a stump in her yard to listen. I saw her perform at the church
with the apparition of her father.

There's a woman perpetually at an upper window
in the nursing home, who waves at us. One day she is
at the doors in a wheelchair, and presents
markers and a colouring book.

Mama, what made myself?

When the road is dug up for sewer repairs, it turns out
that Margaret has been sitting, in her lawn chair,
along an ancient, subterranean river.

That small maple is the first to turn each year; an ignition
in the crown.

Once I used to go to movies. She has to pee, and I recall
the Kiarostami title, 'Where is the friend's home?' Our luck here
is that around every corner, there is a friend's home.

Mama, I am going to bless you because I see a ragweed.

She loves to swing in the playground on the ossuary,
where only the Irish and Scottish have plaques.
I start to tell her of the bones under the bones—
but Brandon's no ghost, crossing the park in skinny jeans,
humming his two-spirit self into being.

Then the months enter a chute, strung with rituals.

A clear day is for collecting leaves to dip in beeswax.
She's indiscriminate. *Mama, why didn't you
pick that one up?* I inspect the torn, brown scrap,
and see the strictures of my aesthetic.

A crowd of starlings descends on an apple tree.
They poke at the soft, copper spheres,
then seem a little drunk.

One night, everyone is their other selves, costumed,
in the center of the park. It frightens her.

She says she loves me more than fifty-four-a-hundred. I say love
has no measurements, there is enough in the world
for everything. *Everything? I didn't know that,* she answers,
and turns quiet. *Even concrete?* I feel compelled
to sustain the premise with a yes.
How does concrete cry?

The spindle reveries of trees are flecked with nests,
small clots of thought.

We scrape out a turnip, place a tealight, sing *I'm walking
with my lantern, my lantern walks with me.*

I move differently now, which means I have altered
my temporal experience. My tread is gradual, and my mind
is an umbrella. I know the minutes as the lichens
on the breakwater know them. It is like holding my usual breath
for a few years, and finding that another part
of me is breathing.

The houses get draped in lights, some a frigid, diode blue.
Then there are singers at the door, and she hides behind me,
listens with all her ears.

I pull her on the sled. Some days we don't get far, because
every snowbank is a place to disembark and throw herself
into its cushion. On others, we make it to the grocery store
and she rides home hugging coffee and oats.

Cars slide past the stop sign.

She loves to eat the snow, so I impose a new rule: graze only
from shrubs and trees.

The playground is forlorn, except for the crows. The slides
are magnificently fast. Alone, I prefer to avoid the park
after midnight or so. That conversation,
when she's older, will fracture this living map
that we're making
again.

To patch the torn knees of her snowsuit, I cut two bright hearts
out of an old shopping bag, and pad them with scraps of wool
while watching 'The Office.' In the morning,
she is pleased.

From the top of Patrick Street, the neighbourhood
looks like a painting; faint brushstrokes, colours of stones.

The whack of the puck on the boards of the park rink is discrete
and vacuous, as if it occurs in outer space.

Our mittens hold hands while she stomps the milk-white
ice of the puddles to shards.

Deep within every landscape,
something is in bloom.



SADIQA DE MEIJER's debut collection, *Leaving Howe Island*, was a nominee for the 2014 Governor General's Award for English-language poetry and for the 2014 Pat Lowther Award. Her forthcoming book, *alfabet / alphabet*, will be published with Palimpsest Press in September 2020. She lives with her family in Kingston, Ontario.

Review of *The Outer Wards* by Sadiqa de Meijer



BY ERIC FOLSOM

A book of poetry often starts with an epigram, usually a brief quote from some other poet's work. Sadiqa de Meijer's new set of poems begins with two such quotes, one from Sylvia Plath and one from Elizabeth Bishop. The two highly regarded mid-twentieth century poets, women of two very different orientations, sexual and otherwise, act as literary grandmothers to Sadiqa's work, contributing different DNA strands to her poetry. Speaking broadly, Sylvia Plath adds fiery determination and forthright emotion, while Elizabeth Bishop offers a calm outsider's eye and a subtle rebellious wit.

If we are doing poetic lineages, we should add the obvious. The output of Kingston's own Bronwen Wallace is a clear precedent for the work of Sadiqa de Meijer, the concerns of family woven out of stories and anecdote, and a rare but sensible perspective on a larger, unavoidably political world.

To these qualities, Sadiqa brings her own highly developed sense of sound. The first two lines of "Bind," for instance, the second poem in the book, state "Adorable remora/you skew my velocities," which could just be an announcement of love as well as a demonstration of the poet's musical ear. This isn't just a particular taste for a type of poetry, it shows the craft that goes into the work and the pleasure the poet wants us to take out of it.

Thematically, the book begins and ends with mothering. The journey is circular and organic, with detours toward geography, intersectionality, and illness. None of the subsidiary themes is overly intrusive, but the poems dealing with illness wrap themselves around the parenting theme, making everything darker and deeper. For any family, the emotional shakeup of a young mother's illness or injury is immediate and profound, the damage sometimes lasting for generations. Sadiqa's special contribution here is to explore the nuances of various stages of trauma for both the mother and the child, rendering observations in verse with a maximum of compassion and sensitivity. Every parent lives through crisis to some degree. Every child does, too, so we can all relate at a certain level to the voice that says "*mother, I was alone.*" For some of us, that voice never leaves us.

There is so much more to highlight in this collection. A poem about the empty carapace of a dragonfly nymph, a poem about menstruation, a poem about ferries mythical and real, a poem about the recess noises in a schoolyard, and a poignant poem for childcare workers at a local playground, whose own children are far away. Among the many worth rereading is "House of God" (think Hôtel Dieu Hospital), a poetic memoir about the challenges of being a medical student. References to famous modern paintings are mixed with medical terms and powerful anecdotes to recreate a stressful time of life and a grueling environment. With skill, the poet distills experience down to insight, not forgetting a helping of sympathy towards the younger person she once was.

Then there are the poems about Kingston, poems I could relate to strongly because I recognized the neighbourhood and maybe even the people she references. Here Sadiqa de Meijer most closely resembles Bronwen Wallace, both apparently having made a decision that Kingston and the countryside around it belongs to them. A place chosen because it's home and home is what they want to write about.

The long poem, "It's the Inner Harbour neighbourhood, but everyone calls it Skeleton Park," is a rambling tour of the district, pulled along by a child's limitless curiosity. ("*Mama, what made myself?*") This random journey has a kind of parallel emblem in an underground stream revealed when the city digs up the road to replace the old sewer lines. "...Margaret has been sitting, in her lawn chair, / along an ancient subterranean river." The hidden current runs not just beneath the city streets, but through the larger body politic, a circulatory system of small generosities, unconscious habits, and gratuitous hurts. The poet describes people who don't see their own whiteness and their normativity in other ways, as "dangerous people, who think they have no history." We stroll through a park "where only the Irish and Scottish have plaques." It's a bit more than a child's-eye view, but absolutely includes a child's innocent incomprehension of injustice.

We Kingstonians live in a beautiful, perplexing place. The everyday kindness that has greeted some of us so frequently is not, in fact, present every day for everyone who lives here. Yet, it is important to have the courage of looking at these hard truths. We can see our flaws willingly, with a little help from writers like Sadiqa de Meijer.

ERIC FOLSOM has lived in and around Kingston since 1974. He is the author of four books of poetry and three chapbooks. He is a retired library assistant with the Kingston Frontenac Public Library and, from 2011 to 2014, he served as Kingston's Poet Laureate.

Jon Claytor's Skeleton Park People

STORY BY JAN ALLEN

ILLUSTRATION BY JON CLAYTOR



Like so many plans, artist Jon Claytor's residency with the Skeleton Park Arts Festival was radically changed by the arrival of COVID-19 last spring.

Festival Director Greg Tilson had invited the New Brunswick-based artist to travel to Kingston in May 2020 to meet with a cross-section of community members. These encounters would be captured in graphic story-board style portraits, or "comics" of the participants to be exhibited as part of the annual Festival in June. By the end of March, however, as pandemic travel restrictions and social-distancing rules came into effect, it became clear that an in-person residency would be impossible. At the same time, with society's massive shift to working and schooling from home, video conferencing became more common, raising the possibility of undertaking a virtual residency. A new plan was laid: Jon would interview Skeleton Park neighbours from his home in Sackville, and, to help him visualise the context, Greg would provide virtual walkabouts of the Park and the surrounding neighbourhood streetscape, augmented by Google Street View. Despite his "deep fear" of online meetings, Jon gamely embraced the creative challenge of a virtual residency, holding Zoom conversations with invited participants from May through July.

As coordinator of the residency, Greg Tilson recruited the dozen subjects, a mix of individuals, families and groups reflecting a rich range of perspectives and circumstances: generations and cultural realities, beliefs, histories and ideals. His outreach was well received; according to Greg, "Not one invitation was turned down. People were very excited to take part."

The resulting graphic stories, featured as an insert in this issue of *The Skeleton Press*, are beautiful open-ended gems. They capture lives-in-progress: each subject is affected by COVID-19 in large and small ways. Across the suite, Jon Claytor maps the social landscape of the Skeleton Park neighbourhood including stress points, ways of coming together, challenges, and rewarding connections. The immediacy and subtle emotional impact of his suite of fourteen comics demonstrate the artist's powers of storytelling and the generosity of his subjects. The limitations of the virtual are overcome, and a real connection is made and shared.

To create these works, Jon spoke with each subject for 60 to 90 minutes. After a long reflective walk — a key part of the process — he spends about eight hours immersed in drawing and writing the comic. He conveys a life arc, allowing each subject's voice to shine through. These loose elegant line drawings, selectively shaded with washes of greys and blues, are surrounded by spiky hand-lettering. The text is a mix of narration — Jon's account — and first-person quotations drawn from his subjects, set in the subject's home or business. Recurring views of the Park reinforce its role as a forum or linking "character" through and around which life is played out.

The comics define a journey of self-discovery, including moments of struggle, quiet revelation, and incidental joy, sustaining one another and finding meaningful place. While each is very specific, together they offer a portrait of the neighbourhood in all its diversity, and, in tandem, an investigation into the nature of love. By tapping into revealing anecdotes, Jon dives deep: his art is driven by empathy. With a blend of sweetness and solemnity, the comics reflect on the

The comics define a journey of self-discovery, including moments of struggle, quiet revelation, and incidental joy, sustaining one another and finding meaningful place.

forces of change wrought by the pandemic on individual lives. In creating this "family album" of the community, Jon reports that he was struck by similarities between Kingston's Skeleton Park district and his hometown of Sackville.

Jon Claytor's paintings and sculpture have been exhibited across Canada, and internationally in Tel Aviv and Los Angeles. In *Skeleton Park People*, the artist's first such commission, he uses a digital drawing tool, a recent innovation in his 25-year art practice. He developed this new story-telling style in 2019 on a trip to Prince Rupert, BC, where he undertook a "life-changing" artist's residency at the Cassiar Cannery. This journey — part road trip and part personal quest — is the subject of his epic graphic novel, *The Long Way Home* (publication pending). In that project, Jon was surprised to discover the expressive fluidity of drawing with an iPad, the method he uses so effectively in *Skeleton Park People*.

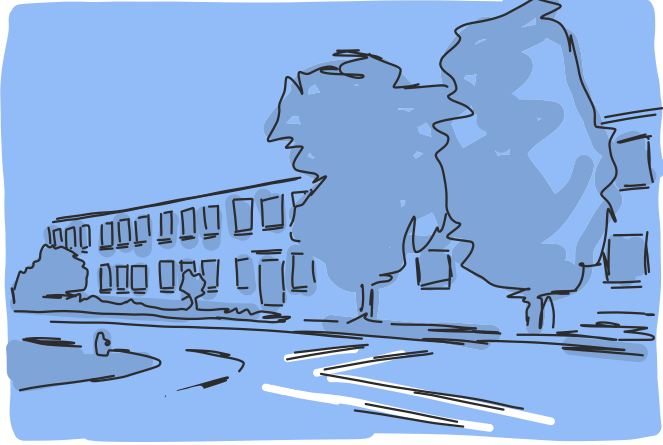
Greg Tilson reflects on the outcome of this experimental residency: "What strikes me most about the project is how many chapters are so incredibly intimate and personal. The generosity of project participants like Justine, Ather, and Jim, who so willingly share their stories of vulnerability, is inspiring for me. Stories such as Kristin's, Ella's and Mutual Aid Katarokwi-Kingston (MAKK) volunteers' help bring to light rarely heard realities about people's lives." With this success, Greg is already thinking about working with community partners to extend the series in the future. Necessity has led to a wonderful form of invention that strengthens the ties of neighbourhood, and creates a record of our times.



An artist, curator and writer, **JAN ALLEN** moved to the Skeleton Park neighbourhood in 2007. After a long career at Queen's Agnes Etherington Art Centre, she is savouring post-institutional life.

Safe crossing at Ordnance and Sydenham

As I've mentioned I've never been to Skeleton Park but early Friday morning as I explore the neighbourhood in my imagination I passed Central Public School near the south-east corner of the park.



The only thing stranger than an empty park on a beautiful spring day is an unused school mid April.

There should be the sounds of children joking and playing. Ken the crossing guard should be guiding them safely across the street.



He would ask them a riddle like "When is a door not a door?" and they would shout back, "When it's a jar!"

No, today all is quiet



at Ordnance and Sydenham

Like the students, teachers and staff of Central Public Ken is adjusting to an absence of routine.



It's giving him time to reflect. How did he become a crossing guard?

Ken moved to Kingston for the best reason of all, love. That was 37 years ago and the love lasted. He had been musician, ran a restaurant and owned a music store.



love and Kingston gave him a new life and a beautiful family with four daughters all named with names that start with the letter "J" in honour of his favourite team, The Toronto Blue Jays!

So he became a crossing guard which he loves. Dressing up as



As I continue to explore the past, present and future of a place I've never been,



I wonder when Ken and the kids will be back to school. When will the streets be alive with laughter again?

Justine got her sense of empathy from her mother

I bounced around Nova Scotia and New Brunswick before ending up in Kingston. I was an army brat and free spirit, sometimes living with my dad and sometimes with my mom.

Now my life is downtown in the skeleton park area

I walk three minutes to work at a harm reduction health centre.

Street Health Centre

I watched this place change my step father's life and now I get to work here.

I'm missing people, my clients, the pandemic has made them even more vulnerable

To make sure they are:

- A- OK
- B- eating
- C- getting medical attention

So I gather my PPE, personal protective equipment and go look for them

Sometimes all you can offer is a hug - but that's not in the tool kit anymore

One thing I do is make sure everyone who needs it has a naloxone kit.

Naloxone can be an antidote to an opiate-related overdose, what it does is it kicks those opiates off the receptors and it actually puts somebody into instant withdrawal, but it saves their life.

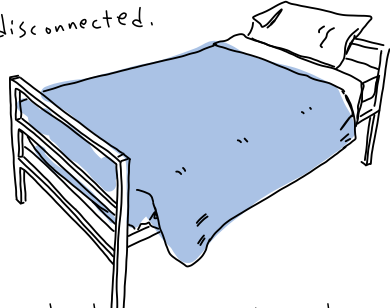
For many in the skeleton park area the coronavirus pandemic is being experienced on top of the brutal opiate epidemic.



How do you isolate if you don't have a place to sleep?

My clients are feeling more and more disconnected.

Social distancing doesn't exist in their world. They have to do what they have to do.



I've probably cried more in the last two months than in my whole life

And to keep myself healthy and sober I rely on family, connections, and yoga,

but sometimes I don't deal well

I let myself cry, sleep, and be depressed for a few days

Then I push myself to get over it

not that it's always easy

At the end of the day, I love this neighbourhood, I love my clients, they have changed my life and I value them so much. This is their neighbourhood just as much as anyone else's

Heart Is Where The Home Is

Ella was born and raised in Skeleton Park.



She remembers a youth spent making friends easily at the park.

Young Ella was a doctor for her stuffed animals.

Perhaps as a result of spending a lot of time in hospitals due to being born without the left side of her heart.

She had her first open heart surgery at 5 days old and her 4th open heart surgery at 5 years old. There was a lot of stress and scary moments for her parents but Ella remembers her reaction after getting her first pace maker fondly.

let's play! My heart is happy!

This is a drawing of Ella in highschool. High school was full of theatre and sports. Ella is a great athlete and pursued sport management in college.

I have amazing supportive friends

I need that. We are all a mess together. We need each other.

In grade 11 Ella called Fridays, "Fancy Fridays" and always wore a suit. She played pick-up ball in the park with other Skeleton Park kids.

I have one friend in particular to confide in

about how I'm uncomfortable with my gender. She supports my journey in so many ways

Photography became a new passion of self expression.

I dealt with my gender discomfort by being very sporty and dressing in a sporty way. Which is a part of me but I was overcompensating.

I moved to Toronto after highschool and found a wonderful community. Then I came out

Ella told me she could not have had a better coming out story.

Her academic dad asked a million questions

Her mom is also amazingly supportive. The skeleton Park community of family friends helped create understanding.

Ella has moved back to Kingston and has become the first POC on the Pride board.

I want to be a part of making a place for everyone

She is involved in the queer community organizing events.

It's important to me the queer community listens and responds to people of colour. That's my passion.

I'm excited for the future. Right now I'm organizing a food share potluck online to get people talking about their needs.

It's a community effort

I might not be in Skeleton Park forever but I love being here right now

It seems the more involved Ella is in the neighbourhood the more she loves it. Showing how our communities are only as strong as our involvement in them.

An Academic
A Mutiny
An Opera singer
And a Vigil

Have you read Benito Cereno?

It's a short story by Herman Melville that deals with race and performance.

I thought I was going to study post colonial literature until I read that story.

The story (which is based on real life, whatever that means) tells a tale in which an American sea captain, Delano, boards a stranded, tattered, and battered slave ship.

The Spanish captain, Benito Cereno begs for food and supplies. Something else is going on but Delano can't see it.

Babo, a slave who serves Cereno with extreme attention, seems to possess a power over him.

Finally Delano is tipped off to the fact that the slaves have actually taken over the ship and Cereno is their captive.

Unfortunately the slave rebellion is crushed and Babo is killed

To Delano this is seen as a firm conclusion to a crazy adventure

This wild thing happened to him on one of his travels

But really there is so much more to this story

I was struck by how Delano's own prejudices prevented him from seeing what was really going on, on the ship, and the type of performances that were happening.

Melville was a gateway into ways of thinking about 19th century Black performance and now I'm mostly interested in thinking about the performers themselves

I'm interested in Black vaudeville performers that travelled abroad.

I trace the way Black newspapers covered the reception of these performers as they travelled

Kristin told me all about Sissieretta Jones:

from the late 1800s to early 1900s Black vaudeville performers travelled the world.

The racial climate in the US. at the time made it safer and more profitable to perform abroad.

One performer that fascinates me is Sissieretta Jones.

Sissieretta Jones was an operatic talent beyond compare who's opportunities were blocked and shaped by racism.

Right from the beginning of her career Black newspapers promoted her as a major opera star.

But formal education was denied her because of her race.

Sissieretta Jones never performed in a full scale opera but travelled abroad and leveraged the mystique of her performances there into leverage for better gigs in North America.

#Sissieretta Jones often performed wearing all the medals she was awarded for performing for Kings, Queens and dignitaries abroad.

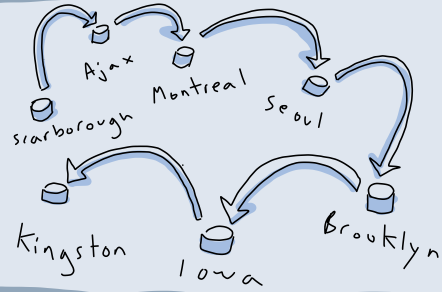
She was so famous a fake Sissieretta Jones started stealing her gigs.

Her life was singing and travelling. It's very likely she even performed in Kingston and Sackville.

But she gave it all up to care for her sick Mother. She eventually had to sell everything and even her medals and jewels gained on her travels.

But in the end, even though she lost her fortune she was cared for by her community as she had cared for her mother.

like the characters in *Beito Cereno* and the Black performers she studies Kristin's own life has been one of motion.



Travelling the academic highway has brought Kristin to Skeleton Park.

I guess you could say Kristin's journey began with a childhood love of reading.

I remember some kids bragging they had already finished the purple turtle reader before me, and I was like, oh no, not on my watch.

I remember making my mom a purple turtle out of clay.

Reading was going to be a thing.

I had a special bookshelf my dad made with my favourite books like *Anne of Green Gables*.

from a childhood of reading about adventure to academic adventures around the world and back to Ontario:

I never thought I'd be able to teach African American literature so close to home!

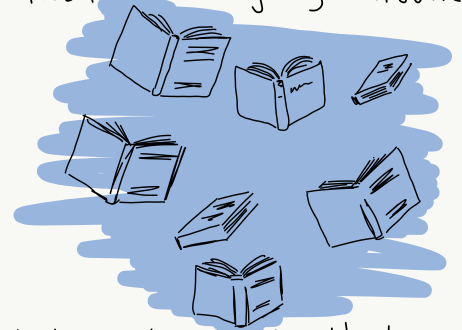
Before the pandemic I had a simple routine based around teaching.

One big change has been that I got a pandemic puppy!

And of course coronavirus has had other effects, I think people have had a chance to slow down and notice what's going on. Right from the beginning some of the disparities in health outcomes for Black people became very apparent.

Race is clearly a factor in how the virus has played out.

I also think there's a positive and negative way to think about all the reading lists that were going around.



but I do think it has changed how people think about racial justice.

I would never have thought that the Black Lives Matter vigils and marches would have become so mainstream.



And I think people are reflecting and giving back to their communities.
*drawing inspired by photos by Dave Ridout

We talked about communities and the university bubble. And how Kristin worked with the Black Luck Collective to organize a vigil to mourn the victims of systemic racism of police brutality.

The vigil took place on June 4th.

There were 800 to 1000 people.

We didn't have any expectations that it would be such a big event.



Skeleton Park was overflowing with people. It was overwhelmingly positive and we were blown away to see so many people show up.

I feel very positive about the future in Kingston and how people can take this forward. It can feel very isolating here when you are talking about issues of race and racism, but what happened at the vigil was a critical mass of not just Black people. They were saying we want to support everyone who lives here and that our city does not support racism.



I could have listened to Kristin talk forever about Melville, Sissieretta Jones and The Black Luck Collective.

Nice meeting you.

Bye!

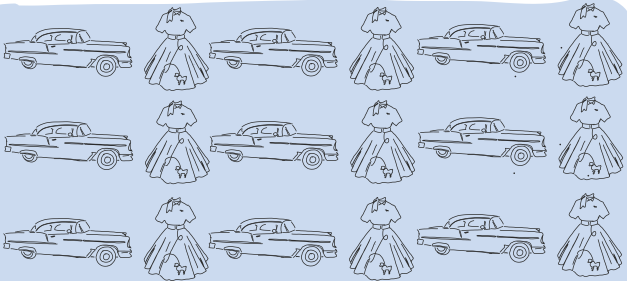
But all good things come to an end and in fact this was my last interview for The Skeleton Park People Project.

Black and white Rainbows

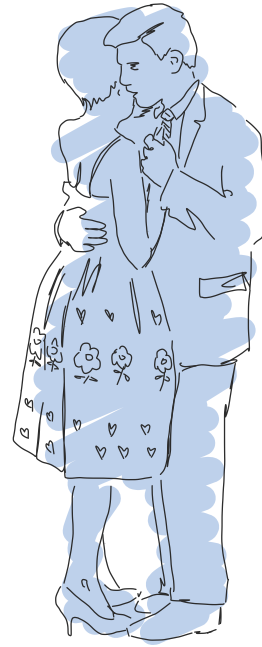
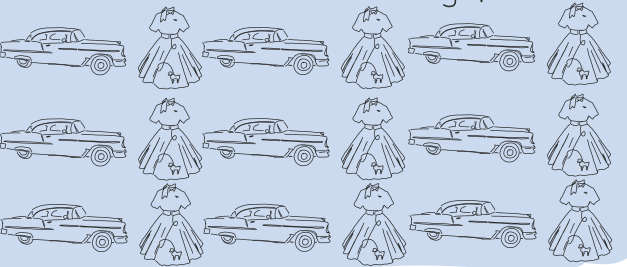
Her favourite song is Moody Blue by Elvis Presley. She loves Elvis, and cars, 55 Chev's to be precise.



Her grandson thinks he might grow up to be an Elvis and that's A-OK with Marina.



Her husband John loves 55 Chev's too and has restored quite a few. And for each one Marina sews a matching poodle skirt.



They met at a highschool dance in 1967, or as John describes it, back when rainbows were black and white. Surely the band was playing all of Elvis's hits setting the soundtrack for their next 49 years together.

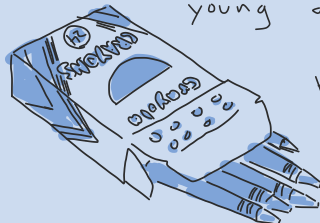
If you lived in the Skeleton Park area in 1978 you might have been in the habit of taking your car to Marina and John's newly opened car wash. They were young, in love with cars, and each other. They grew the business and a family after adopting two beautiful children. From then on the garage was always alive with the sound of children. When I spoke to Marina, young inventor and grandson Zander sat on her lap and future animal rights activist and granddaughter Keeva stood by her side.

A-1 Car Care Centre



(613) 546-1214

Life has been good for Marina and John at the garage but not without tragedy. Their son Adrian was well on his way to becoming a mechanic when he succumbed to cancer at the young age of twenty-five.



His presence is felt in Marina's voice and in the air of the garage he grew up playing in.

A1 Auto Repairs



All through the years John and Marina have watched the families of skeleton Park grow and change as the neighbourhood has also grown and changed. Small Mom and Pop stores are being replaced by chain stores as home prices rise. When John and Marina retire will another pair of young lovebirds move in. Only time will tell.

Talking to Marina and John it was easy to forget about Covid-19. Little has changed about their routine. Then the Snowbirds flew overhead on their odd mission to inspire Canadians during the pandemic and we were all reminded that these are not normal times.



A Long Journey To The Park

Ather has been in Skeleton Park for only 15 months and has already a part of the community.



Jill invited him to volunteer for the Skeleton Park Arts festival last year and he loved it.

Before coronavirus Ather loved to play pick-up soccer with new friends.

I haven't played for 10 years!

But it's comin back

They were shocked at his skill. They didn't know he had played for Iraq's 16 and under international team.

The thing that I love about it here is that people help each other

This is the most beautiful thing I would miss if I left Canada

I feel safe

I'm getting my confidence in people back

Ather is about to move again (nearby) and it won't be easy right now but will be much easier than the series of moves that brought him to Kingston.

I told my family I wanted to leave Iraq but they said no. They wanted me to stay.

I wanted to leave Iraq because I didn't have a good job, I didn't have a good life. My life was zero.

finally I was able to leave with some relatives and my family wished me luck

First we went to Turkey, then Jordan and then Egypt.

Then I applied for a visa for many countries

Canada was the first to accept me

I didn't choose Kingston, it chose me, but I'm so glad



Ather loves to explore the local parks, meet new people and get involved in the community.

He says he might not stay in Kingston, it all depends on work. I hope fate will guide him to as positive an experience as he has had in Skeleton Park. Although I suspect it's Ather's resilient spirit that is mostly responsible for his positive outlook.

I am really looking forward to next year's festival

and finishing school

and most of all to working

With Ather's soft compassionate voice, gentle, caring, and sensitive demeanor, intelligence and community spirit I'm sure he will find the perfect place to thrive. If the residents of Skeleton Park are lucky that is where he will stay.

From Iroquois Falls To Boys Town

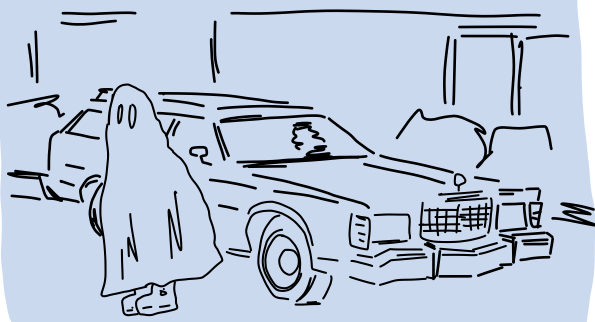
Jim grew up in a small forestry town in northern Ontario where he enjoyed being a little bit of an outsider.



The town was dominated by a mill and watched over by a big lumberjack.



Jim remembers it fondly, especially the rural halloween tradition of driving house to house with your costume worn over your winter jacket.



But it wasn't until Jim came to Kingston and the Skeleton Park area that this lovely outsider found his rightful place and title.



He found a home looking among a tangle of streets including Cherry and Plum called the fruit belt and a grid of streets named after saints like John and Patrick called boys town.



And soon a star was born! As Tyffanie Morgan found her calling as a performer and a second family with her "drag" mother Jas Morgan and "drag" daughter Venus Morgan. It was a Tiffany epiphany.

I looked like Tyffany from the 80s and knew that was my name.



At one time Tyffanie may have been the last drag queen in town but in a blink of an eye



they were coming out of the woodwork

Jim is very modest but his DIY style drag shows and events all over town are a huge addition to the community.

He remembers the quick ad hoc vigil for the Orlando shooting victims as a moment all the communities of Kingston came together. It was a bit of a turning point.



I have no doubt that whether live or online, in times of quarantine and after

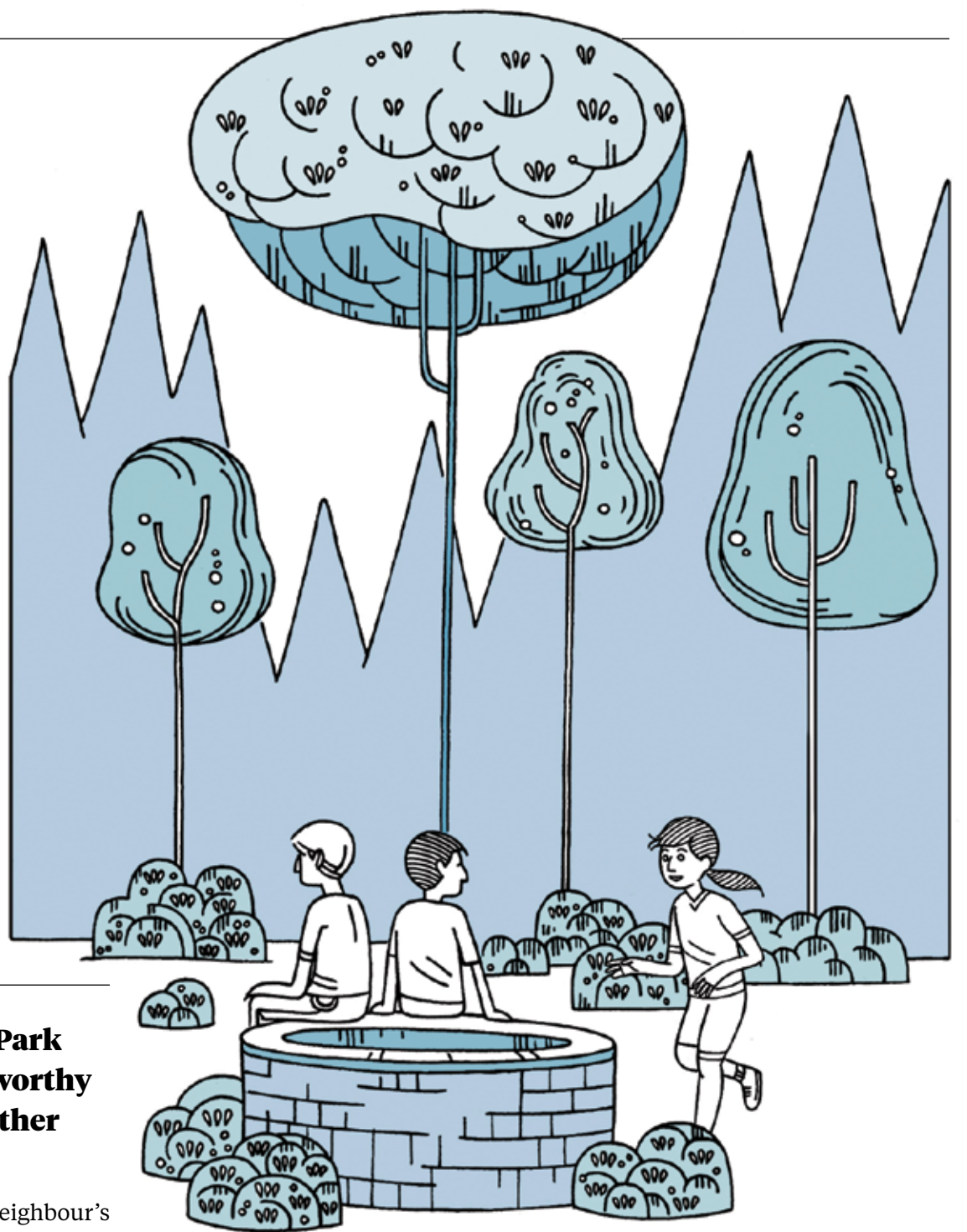


Jim will find a way to make sure the show goes on

The kids are alright

Reflections on growing up in Skeleton Park, and how today's youth can make it even better

STORY BY ANNA MACK-KEYTE
ILLUSTRATION BY HAYDEN MAYNARD



Growing up in the wonderfully eclectic Skeleton Park neighbourhood was sort of like living in a binge-worthy 90s sitcom where everyone seems to know each other and the community is like its own small town.

As in these beloved sitcoms, I have found myself walking over to a neighbour's house to ask for a cup of sugar, for example, when my Mom realizes that we are out. I've become accustomed to waking in the morning, not to an alarm, but to the sounds of community members and family crowded in the kitchen enjoying their morning espressos over great conversation and laughter. Every day since grade 1, I've walked to school passing by Ken the crossing guard, neighbourhood friends, and all of the cute neighbourhood dogs I love, meeting each with a smile.

Eleven years ago I moved to Kingston from a small town in Quebec. We moved so my Mom could go back to school, into a house north of Raglan and East of Montreal street. My Mom valued being nearer friends, and educating me in a Waldorf community, also in a cool part of town that was considered more affordable at that time. In this last decade the neighbourhood has changed a lot. I've watched our part of the Skeleton Park community bloom into a beautiful, vibrant, active, colourful neighbourhood. When we first moved here, our street was full of beige and white houses with no kids or dogs running around. Our first Hallowe'en there were no kids at the door; now we have as many as 100 trick-or-treaters. Our part of the 'hood has exploded in size, and lots of people from many different backgrounds mingle and share space.

Growing up as a member of the Skeleton Park community provided many offerings. Some of these included: babysitting, attending art festivals, being footsteps from downtown, lots of safe backyard hangouts, sidewalk chalk masterpieces, beautiful parks with benches to chat on with a friend, flower and veggie gardens/markets, and lots of cute coffee shops. The Skeleton Park Arts Festival has played a part, too, in raising me and much of the younger generation that lives here on good music and dancing, all held in the vibrancy of a multi-generational, welcoming community. I recognize my good fortune in having experienced my youth this way; I have been well-fed, educated, and cared for. Our neighbourhood has taught me a lot about my privilege because our neighbourhood is very diverse. This has been a gift to me as I've grown up because not everyone in our neighbourhood has had the incredible luck, safety, or support that I have experienced.



ANNA MACK-KEYTE is a teenager living in the Skeleton Park neighbourhood. She goes to school at KCVI and is going into 12th grade. She loves to play guitar, paint, write, read, play with her puppy, mountain bike, row and drink green tea. Her goal in is to help people, travel and take photos, ideally with a dog by her side.

Here's a list of some activities I've enjoyed that cost little to no money in and around my neighbourhood:

- Shooting hoops in the park, skateboarding and biking around the streets;
- Walking along the river year-round, skating on it in the winter and paddling on it in the summer;
- Jumping on the Wolfe Island Ferry to enjoy an ice cream at a corner store on the other side;
- Going to see a movie at the Screening Room (120 Princess Street);
- Visiting friends and going for coffee-shop hang-outs downtown;
- Walking to the Memorial Centre (303 York Street);
- Taking my dog for tours around the winding blocks of colourful houses;
- Chilling under the big trees of Skeleton Park reading or daydreaming;
- Rock climbing at the Boiler Room (4 Cataraqui Street);
- Meandering the streets looking at art, and the graffiti wall in Douglas Fluhrer Park;
- Going to open mics at the Elm Café (303 Montreal Street).

Not everyone in the neighbourhood has the same means, and the offerings for youth can be meagre for those who lack the time and resources. There are limited youth-led initiatives, such as music or art clubs. I believe that our community could be seriously improved by incorporating more of the interesting and strong ideas from my generation. It would be nice to start a schedule of things to do that is actually run by the youth in the park — whether it be an organized game of soccer every Wednesday at 5pm, or a full open mic in the park sharing music and art from the youth in our community. The park itself is a beautiful outdoor space and our neighbourhood is full of teenagers who might very well be looking for a place to move their bodies, place-share, learn, play, share their creativity, get on stage, and meet new friends. There are improvements to be made, but I feel positive that this community has the people and resources to make these changes possible, to highlight the roles of youth, our interests, our health, and our future.

Taking the bitter with the sweet

Coffee Way's Krzysztof Brzezinski finds a silver lining amidst the pandemic

STORY BY TIANNA EDWARDS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ADAM BIEHLER



Covid-19 and its restrictions have brought many things to light. I've likened lockdown to shutting down and then repowering a device in need of updates. My hope is that we come out of this pandemic with clearer perspectives and priorities. That we take less for granted, appreciating the little things in life a little more.

On that note, it's safe to say that I've always appreciated a Coffee Way donut. Particularly around 10 p.m. when it is freshly baked, slightly warm, extra soft, melt-in-your-mouth goodness. I kid you not, I once made a 20-minute drive to Coffee Way on a very snowy evening, just to get my hands on a toasted coconut donut. I was pumped when they decided to re-open their doors. This was at a point when masks were required, but not so far into the pandemic that I had given up my disposable masks for a cute reusable polka-dot one.

When I was given the assignment to interview Krzysztof Brzezinski, the owner of Coffee Way Donuts (472 Division Street) about his resilience during these ominous times, I was delighted to have the conversation.

A little background, if you're not already familiar, Coffee Way is the OG donut shop in town. Their delectable pastries are baked fresh on site. Good ol' fashion high-sugar, high-fat treats. Comfort food.

Like many local business owners, Mr. Brzezinski was faced with the tough decision to temporarily close the doors to Coffee Way Donuts after learning that COVID-19 was officially a global pandemic. "We closed our doors for eight days. I decided because people were scared. Especially the staff. I decided that we were going to take vacation," says Mr. Brzezinski, who works at least ten hours a day, 7 days a week, baking thousands of goodies. He loves what he does and wanted to re-open the doors with protocols in place as soon as he could (with his staff's blessing).

Mr. Brzezinski says he is passionate about his businesses because he loves to make people happy. Being able to bring customers joy makes him happy. The 60-year-old explains, "If you can put a smile on people's faces. Not just the money. Of course, you need money to live, but if you do work that makes you happy, that's what keeps you going."

Coffee Way has been selling more donuts than usual through this time of social distancing, but the customer base has changed as a result of the tables and chairs being removed from the indoor space. Mr. Brzezinski shares, "There is a different kind of business and less business, of course, but we are surviving. We are making people happy. My regular customers who come down to sit and chat with friends? Right now, I don't have them." A few loyal customers have found a loophole to stay social. "I have three guys who are coming down, buying coffee, sitting in their cars and talking," he says.

The way Mr. Brzezinski has navigated the challenges of COVID-19 is admirable, and he's done it all with a smile and great advice to others facing uncertain times. "That's life. You adjust to the situation. First, it's shock. Then you worry about what's going on and then you say, 'well, that's life.'" He adds, "You've got to get used to it. You've got to get smart. You've got to live with it. So, I am coming to work, happy and smiling."

Mr. Brzezinski's optimism is likely tied to his life experience. He credits his ability to stay agile through these challenges to first moving to Canada from Poland in his twenties and then from Toronto to Kingston. "I moved to Kingston. I didn't know anybody. It was strange to me. I lived in Toronto for many years. It didn't take long to adjust. Same thing when I came from Poland to Canada. I didn't know one word of English. I looked around and thought, 'where am I?' It doesn't take long. A couple of months. You figure it out. You learn a new thing and might end up saying 'whoa, that's even better!'"

Wouldn't that be the ultimate silver lining? To look back on 2020 and think it was the year all things changed for the better.

Mr. Brzezinski's final advice for us all: "Keep smiling and keep positive. Whatever comes, comes. Try to comply to the rules. Keep the distance from other people and one day we will go back to shaking hands and sitting at tables."

Until then, help yourself to a fresh-baked dozen to go.



TIANNA EDWARDS is a Kingston young professional, Queen's master's student, and the creator/author of keepupwithkingston.com. She was born and raised in Kingston and now lives here with her husband and daughter.

Rest from the rink



2020 has kept roller derby's skaters out of competition, but they're hoping it won't be long before they're back on the track

BY KATE ARCHIBALD-CROSS



PHOTO: Courtesy of Kingston Roller Derby

It's not the tenth anniversary season anyone anticipated. Kingston Roller Derby (KRD) had big plans for 2020: it was the inaugural year of their junior league, a large cohort of new skaters were poised for their first bout, and KRD had joined a new regional association of derby teams to promote league interplay and to grow the sport in the Kingston area. Currently, KRD has two adult (18+) teams: the Rogue Warriors (their A team) and the Skateful Dead (their B team), as well as its new junior (ages 8-18) team. Practices and games are held at the Kingston Memorial Centre. The stage was set for the league to have an exciting year, marking a decade of derby in Kingston. And then came COVID-19.

We sat down (virtually, of course!) with skaters Brooke Gilmour (AKA Pepe la Puke) and Stephanie Henry (AKA Stevie Kicks) to talk about the impact the pandemic has had on their lives, their league, and their sport.

SKELETON PRESS: Tell us about your involvement with KRD.

PEPE LA PUKE: I have been involved in some capacity since 2011, and I am the league president, Derby 101 coach, Juniors coach, and co-captain of the Rogue Warriors, KRD's charter team.

STEVIE KICKS: I joined the league in 2015 and I am now the League Head Coach (Skateful Dead) and co-captain of the Rogue Warriors. I also help with Derby 101.

SP: What were you looking forward to this season?

PP: Our juniors had their first bout planned for this year, and watching them practice gave me a ridiculous amount of joy. I was excited to skate with our two league teams: the Skateful Dead and the Rogue Warriors.

SK: This was going to be a pretty exciting season for me: my first in a full coaching role, after volunteering as the Training Committee Chair since 2016. I was looking forward to seeing a season-long progression from a coach's perspective, as well as learning a new position on the track. This year would have been my fourth as a Rogue Warrior, and I was also set to skate with an experienced and challenging team in Watertown, NY.

Skaters globally seem to care more about members and fans than about profits, and are willing to wait rather than risk outbreaks at games, tournaments or training clinics.

SP: What has COVID-19 meant for the 2020 season?

PP: Our season came to a full stop: league practices and junior practices were cancelled in March. August saw some outdoor, socially distanced practices for our adult skaters, but our juniors will not come back until social distancing requirements have been completely removed. We will resume indoor practices as soon as possible. We are sad to have lost our momentum with our new skaters; we lost a few core members this year, so it was really important to re-build in 2020.

SK: Our most recent Derby 101 grads were working towards their first game when lockdown occurred, and after many years of dreaming, some of our members had just launched the KRD Juniors team. I'm hoping that all those new skaters will return to skating, but people's lives fluctuate and I worry that we may not see everyone back on wheels.

SP: What have skaters been doing to keep connected with derby and each other?

PP: A few league members have hit the streets in order to keep skating, and others have started skating with CIB Kingston, a group that meets at skate parks and works on tricks. I've loved being the 41-year-old at the skate park with the skateboards, scooters and bikes. Also, I've learned how to turn right while skating; anyone who has played derby knows, we only turn left.

SK: We offered support to those wanting to stay in shape during lockdown, and have tried to stay connected virtually, but it has been a challenge, for sure.

SP: Have there been any silver linings to this unexpected break?

SK: Derby is a sport that is HARD on the body, and for many of us, these past months have been an opportunity to rest and repair. I take comfort in the fact that I know the sport and the league are going to be OK. Skaters globally seem to care more about members and fans than about profits, and are willing to wait rather than risk outbreaks at games, tournaments or training clinics. In fact, our governing body has used the expertise of its members in the public health field to develop a return-to-play plan that has received much praise.

[Google "roller derby return to play" for an article about this at wired.com]

SP: What can derby fans expect from KRD's 2021 season?

PP: We have high hopes! No bouts planned at this time, but as soon as we can, our planning will jump into overdrive. It's been a frustrating process, 'cause we all just really want to hit each other!

SK: I'm hopeful that we may have some games, but it may be very regionally limited. In the past, the Rogues have traveled to New York state to play, and I have a feeling that cross-border travel will not be in the cards for 2021. Returning to skates will be like starting at square one for some of our adult skaters, and likely almost all of our junior skaters, but that's a small price to pay for the safety of our league-mates and their families.

For up-to-date information on KRD's return to skate plans, visit their Facebook page or follow them on Instagram. You can also find details on CIB Kingston on Facebook and Instagram.



KATE ARCHIBALD-CROSS has spent much of her life in and around Skeleton Park, and despite her recent move to the wilds of Kingscourt, will always have a place in her heart for this neighbourhood and community.



Hitting the right notes

Santur player Sadaf Amini finds the local arts scene a welcoming place to play

BY TANYA AND MATT ROBINSON

PHOTO: Courtesy of Sadaf Amini



LISTENING TO AMINI PLAY THAT NIGHT IN FEBRUARY, WE HAD NO IDEA IT WOULD BE ONE OF THE LAST SHOWS WE WOULD HOST FOR A VERY LONG TIME.

This past February we had the pleasure of hosting a night of live music with local musician Sadaf Amini, and Toronto/Peterborough duo Joyful Joyful. Hearing Amini play was a transcendent experience, as was the improvisational collaboration with Joyful Joyful. When Amini began that night, the percussive, yet melodic qualities of her music created an almost trance-like environment, setting the tone for a moving evening of sound. Both the traditional and original compositions Amini played enthralled the crowd. It was one of the more powerful shows we have held in our shop (Something Else Records, 207A Wellington Street).

Amini writes and performs music on the santur, a traditional Iranian stringed instrument played using lightweight mallets. She began playing the santur at the age of 12 and went on to study at the Tehran Music School, Tehran University, and the University of Toronto. Soon after moving to Kingston around three years ago, Amini started working at the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts, where she quickly made connections with local musicians and artists. She had always thought living in a larger city, such as Toronto — a more multicultural place with a larger Iranian community — might help her grow faster as a musician. However, after some time she found Kingston was providing opportunities due to its supportive arts community. With this support, Amini was able to grow and build her reputation at an even faster pace than she expected while exposing non-Iranian audiences to the beauty of santur music.

The connections and influence of the music scene here are now part of what drive Amini to continue creating and composing music. Collaborating with musicians and artists of different genres and disciplines is becoming more of an aim for her; she says when she plays with other musicians or bands “the music changes and gets closer to that style.” This is inspiring for an artist such as Amini, who was already beginning to expand her repertoire toward a more personal and expressive style. We were lucky enough to witness this magic in person.

Although collaboration and improvisation are common within the tradition of Iranian music in which Amini trained, the evening with Joyful Joyful was her first unrehearsed collaboration in that style. “The show was a complete improvisation,” Amini says, “without even setting a tune or modulation points. It turned out really interesting with the padding and atmosphere that Joyful Joyful created.” The shared meditative style both acts contributed really blossomed when the two played this set together. “It was one of those collaborations I wish we could have had for a longer time and....I was really enjoying my time,” Amini expresses.

Listening to Amini play that night in February, we had no idea it would be one of the last shows we would host for a very long time, or just how much things were about to change. Like most people during these uncertain times, Amini’s schedule, plans, and creative life have been shifted. All her upcoming concerts were cancelled, including a performance of a composition for the santur and quartet with the Isabel String Quartet, and a feature in the Global series the Isabel Bader Centre was scheduled to host this November. Despite these changes, Amini has remained busy.

Since we last met her earlier this year, Amini has released a solo album of all original compositions on the santur, titled *Flow*. She collaborated with the Skeleton Park Arts Festival (SPAF) to create a music video of her song “Dawn,” which tied for Jury Choice at the Kingston Canadian Film Festival. The video, directed by Allen Bergeron, features Amini playing to a group of community members who were invited to make art inspired by music. Amini also played a livestream show in June from the Isabel Bader main stage, as part of SPAF! At Home, and performed an online concert from her own home for Visit Kingston as part of the #TogetherAtHome initiative. She continues to keep busy recording santur tutorials and working on future projects.

“Kingston is a city with lots of admiration for arts and culture,” says Amini, a sentiment we wholeheartedly agree with. Artists such as Amini, who choose to make Kingston home, share their craft, collaborate with others, and form and maintain the culture here, help make that statement true. The methods, locations, and circumstances of sharing art and music in Kingston may be ever-changing, but respect for the arts is an important part of our collective identity.

You can learn more about Sadaf Amini, view previous live performances, watch her santur tutorials, and purchase *Flow* at www.sadafamini.ca.

Sadaf Amini will be performing at the October 29 Elm Cafe Online Coffeehouse. For more info please visit skeletonparkartsfest.ca



TANYA AND MATT ROBINSON are the owners of Something Else Records (207A Wellington Street, Kingston).



My favourite little thing

One family discovers a mystery set in stone

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAT LONDON

A column in which people from the Skeleton Park area submit sometimes quirky, often overlooked neighbourhood gems for our consideration.



O Two doors down from our house there is a secret that I don't think most of our neighbours know about: a hidden piece of poetry that is also a riddle that takes time, patience, and even the right weather to decipher.

My kids found it first. When my oldest child, Emily, was about six, she pointed to some words pressed into a paving stone outside my neighbour's blue gate. "What are those letters, Mama?" she asked. I glanced at them, but we were in a hurry so I just shrugged and said, "I have no idea."

But Emily wanted to come back. And so did her little sister, June, who couldn't really read but still wanted to know what the letters said. They were blurry and eroded and some of the words were hard to make out. Some days we could read a word or two, and some days we could read a whole phrase. We tried doing rubbings with crayons, but the rough texture of the pavement obscured the words.

PHOTO, LARGE: Cat London's kids in front of the paving stone.

PHOTO, INSET: Detail of the paving stone, located on the east side of Bagot just north of Raglan.

Then one day it rained, and we were finally able to read the whole thing. I won't tell you what it says, so that it can be your mystery to solve now too. But I will tell you that we sometimes forget what all the words are and then we get the pleasure of solving the riddle again. And the lessons are always the same: slow down. Look around. And take the time to get to know your neighbourhood. Even the paving stones have something to tell you.

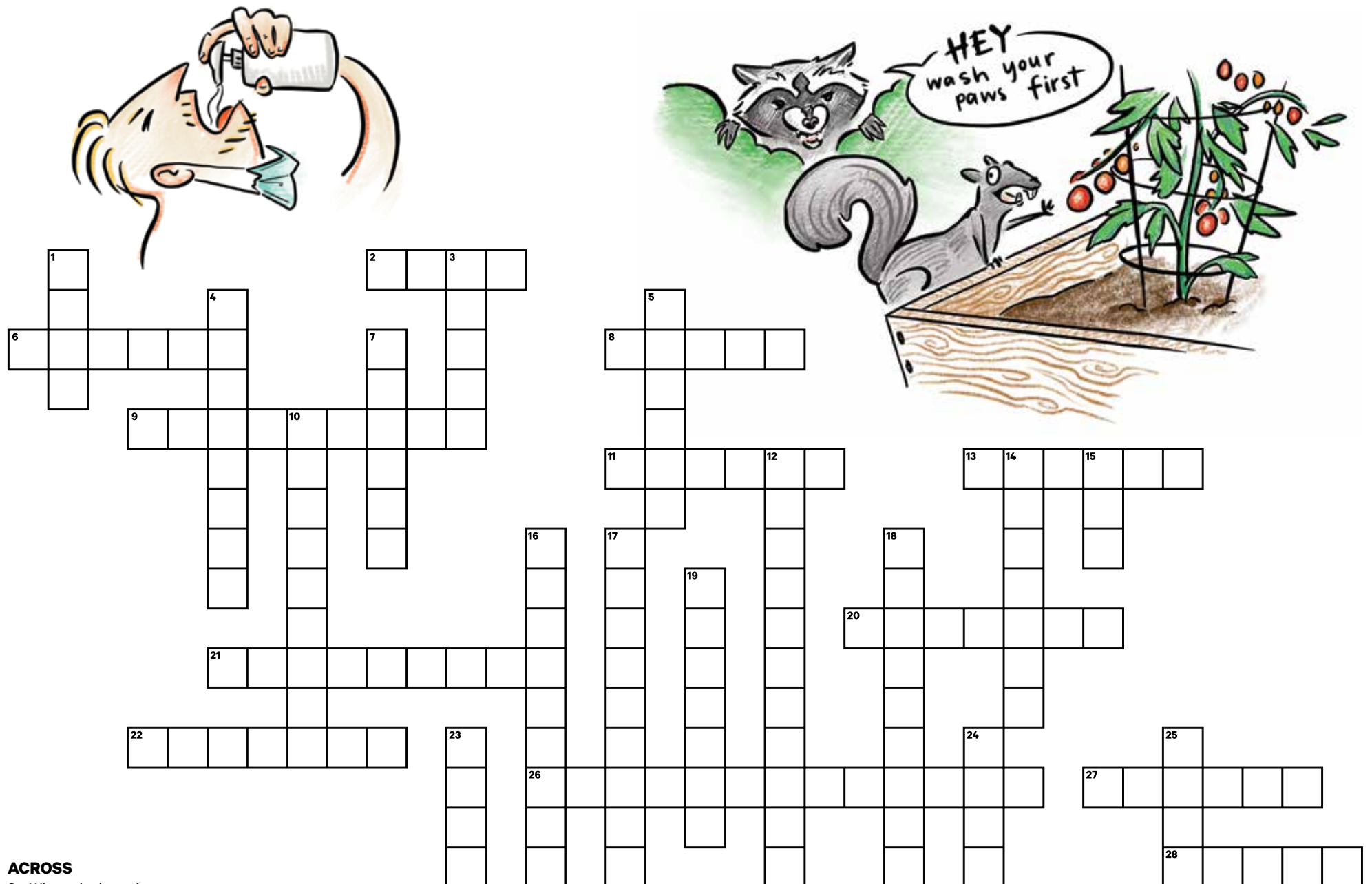


CAT LONDON is a book editor and photographer who misses doing her work inside the Elm Café instead of just near it. She and her partner wound up in the Skeleton Park neighbourhood by accident but, three kids later, they are happy to be here for good.

These crazy times

CROSSWORD BY NEIL BETTNEY AND ALEC BARKEN
 ILLUSTRATION BY FLORIANA EHNINGER-CUERVO

Wash your hands,
 sharpen your pencil,
 and puzzle over these
 pandemic-themed clues.



ACROSS

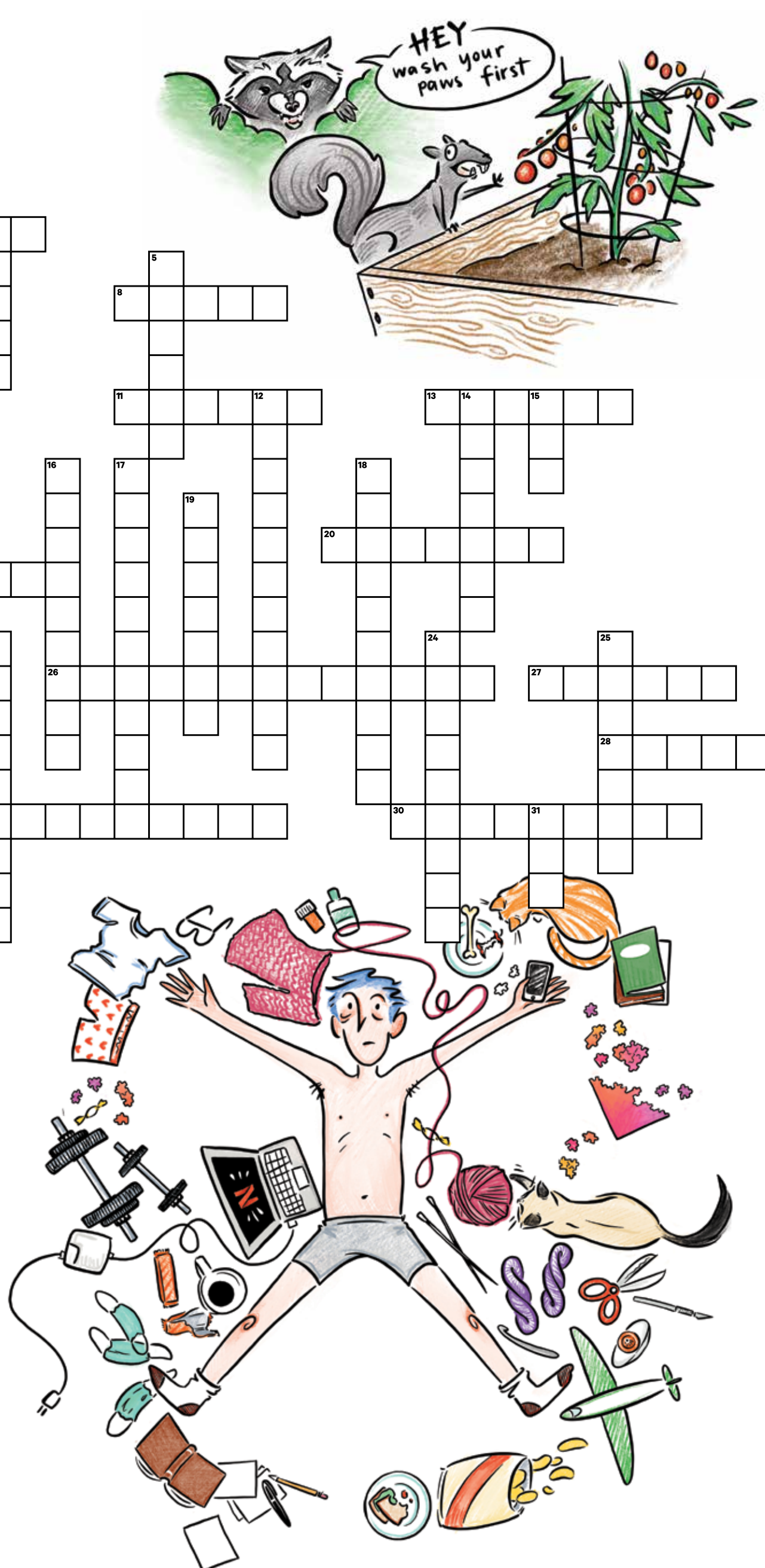
- 2 Where the heart is
- 6 The florans and the faunas
- 8 Try something new
- 9 Safe distance (2 words)
- 11 Learning and working, a desert isle
- 13 How long to wash your hands, in seconds
- 20 Hope in liquid form
- 21 _____ basic income
- 22 Soapy spheres of 10
- 26 The act of looking within
- 27 The world could use Moore of him
- 28 Director of NIAID Anthony _____
- 29 Wringing them won't help but this will (2 words)
- 30 Dan Harmon sitcom

DOWN

- 1 The deck and your nose
- 3 Wear these please
- 4 The science of serums and immunoresponse
- 5 Don't cross this line
- 7 Contemporary hero's shining armour
- 10 Necessary, needed
- 12 Some people now have a lifetime supply of this (2 words)
- 14 One foot in front of the other
- 15 Rating, not a bingo winner
- 16 Lighthouse keepers' situation
- 17 Aurelius' Diaries
- 18 40 days alone in olden times
- 19 Sometimes you drink it, sometimes you don't
- 23 Feeding neighbourhood squirrels
- 24 Bad Money?
- 25 Saving our sanity, one binge at a time
- 29 A place in BC, something everyone needs
- 31 How NOT to handle a pandemic

LAST ISSUE'S SOLUTIONS

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Shawarma Damascus offers Syrian comfort food



Shawarma Damascus
101 Dalton Avenue, Kingston

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY EMBERLY DOHERTY AND AL BERGERON

My husband and I take the trip up Division often. The route may not be the most scenic, but it's our go-to for grocery shopping, a gateway to the 401 and, I am happy to report, the surprise location of a delicious and bountiful plate of shawarma.

A bit outside the boundaries of Skeleton Park, tucked between the big box stores of King's Crossing Fashion Outlets, lies Shawarma Damascus. It's a cavernous place rich with aromatic and savoury smells from the moment you open the door. The owner, Sanad Chalhoud, gave us a warm welcome, letting us take our time as we picked from the big menu board. A couple of years ago, I helped facilitate an arts camp for Canadian newcomer youth. Sanad catered a lunch for us, and I was soon hooked on his food. I was happy to find his new restaurant when poking around the Magnotta next door. When I asked how long Shawarma Damascus had been open, Sanad lit up as he realized it was the restaurant's one-year birthday to the day!

The menu provides exactly what you would hope from a shawarma joint. There are pillars of succulent marinated chicken and beef orbiting in all their skewered glory, ready to be shaved, seared and served hot in a pita or on a platter. We ordered a large chicken shawarma platter (\$17.99) to share and were mesmerized as Sanad layered one delicious thing after another onto our plate. It was a mountain of food! This meal could easily serve as a satisfying dinner for two with enough for leftovers, if you can restrain yourselves. The chicken was tender and flavourful, laced with notes of cinnamon and clove. The platter came with piles of rice and potatoes, topped with zingy garlic sauce, hummus and pita to wrap it all up in. You won't need a face mask after this meal; the garlic breath will be a natural social distance enforcer!

While the shawarma was the star of the platter, there was also a bounty of fresh vegetables to feed non-meat eaters as well. Our platter carried a large scoop of peppery tabouli, a no-nonsense salad, bright pink pickled turnips, and surprisingly pleasant sour pickles. The whole thing was doused in a swirl of shawarma sauce, with the option of hot sauce to boot. We made room for a few pieces of baklava (\$6.99 for a box of nine) that were sweet and oozy in their plastic container. We were happily, absolutely stuffed.

This might not be your romantic date-night spot, but we think it makes the perfect stop for fast, fresh, Middle Eastern comfort food. And the next time you have a houseful of hungry guests (we can be hopeful), Shawarma Damascus Family platters (\$43.99 for Family mix platter for four... a ravenous four) are quick, delicious, and come with way more vegetables than a pizza. Sanad is clearly passionate about food. And things are going well! He has opened a second location in the east end across from La Salle Secondary School. Happy opening and happy birthday! Here's to many more!



EMBERLY DOHERTY AND AL BERGERON are two creatives living, working, and eating in the Swamp Ward. Emberly is an artist educator and Al likes to play with cameras, computers, and storytelling.



Kingston's housing crisis isn't just about economics — it's about power



STORY BY ARIC MCBAY

ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC WILLIAMS

“The pandemic has laid bare the power imbalance of everyday life,” says Ian Clark of the Kingston Coalition Against Poverty. “There’s a housing shortage, and prices beyond what people can afford.”

The tent city at Belle Park, stay-at-home orders, and the economic crisis have brought Kingston's worsening housing crisis to public attention.

“The Kingston, Ontario, and Canadian governments have not built enough affordable housing for many, many years,” says Jeremy Milloy of Mutual Aid Katarowki-Kingston, which has been helping tenants affected by the current crisis. “A lot of people now are in situations which are very precarious.”

A shortage of housing is part of the problem. Kingston's vacancy rate was only 0.6% in 2018, the lowest in Ontario, and low vacancy drives up rental and housing prices.¹ After years of low vacancy, Kingston's rates rebounded to 1.9% in 2019.² That sounds like good news, but it's not so simple.



“I couldn't afford to move if I wanted to,” says Liz, a renter in the Skeleton Park neighbourhood. She has lived in the same place for five years, as rents have risen around her. “To rent just a room in the neighbourhood is now \$1200. A lot of friends are stuck in the apartments they are in now,” she says. “I've had a lot of friends who've had really desperate searches, using all their resources to find any place.”

“It hurts our community,” Liz explains, when people are not able to stay in their neighbourhood or in Kingston. And research shows that Indigenous people, young people, LGBTQ+ folks, veterans, and newcomers are especially impacted by gentrification and rising rents.

Average rent in Kingston increased a record-breaking 7.9% in 2019.³ Rising rent has increased vacancy by pushing people into more crowded and difficult living situations. “I have seen places I would not want my dog living in,” says anti-poverty activist Tara Kainer, “let alone my children, or anyone else.”

This crisis has worsened for years, and many housing advocates have harsh words for the City of Kingston. “They're all talk,” says Doug Yearwood, organizer with the Katarokwi (Kingston) Union of Tenants. “They've all paid lip-service to housing to get elected, and what they've done since is a bunch of nothing.”

Mayor Paterson's Task Force on Housing and Homelessness included three developers, but not a single representative for tenants. This has fuelled concerns that the City ignores the needs of tenants in favour of big landlords and developers.

“They have far too much power,” says Councillor Jeff McLaren, partly because a handful of developers and corporate landlords make substantial campaign contributions. “When people donate, you listen to them more. If you want to get re-elected, you keep them onside.”

That power imbalance shows in the City's track record on housing. In 2013, the City's Housing and Homeless Plan recommended building at least 211 units of affordable housing each year to keep pace with demand.⁴ But only 15 per year



were built. As of summer 2020, there were 654 residential units under construction in Kingston, and only 23 of them were affordable units.⁵

Landlords also have more power under the law and at the Landlord-Tenant Board. Councillor McLaren, who lives in and owns a 16-unit building with his family, says: “As a landlord, I have to know the law. Landlords say that it's slanted in the direction of tenants — it's not! If you follow the law, the landlord wins every time.”

“As long as you can fill out the forms properly, *any* landlord can get *any* tenant evicted,” says McLaren. “That's another structural problem.”

Evicting or “renovicting” tenants allows landlords to evade rent control rules, and the eviction problem is getting worse. The final report of the Mayor's Task Force notes that the number of cases handled by the Kingston Community Legal Clinic has risen 50% in five years.

Mayor Paterson's Task Force on Housing and Homelessness included three developers, but not a single representative for tenants.

Worse, the provincial government recently passed Bill 184, Premier Doug Ford's ironically named “Protecting Tenants and Strengthening Community Housing Act.” In reality, it's an attack on tenants that streamlines the eviction process even as millions of people struggle with unemployment and falling income due to the pandemic.

Ford also removed rent control rules in 2018. Previously, a landlord could only increase rent on an occupied unit by a limited amount (usually around 2%). Those protections do not apply to rental units created after November 2018, meaning that landlords can increase rent as much as they please.

It's a big problem. But there are answers. For a Skeleton Press online exclusive on housing solutions in Kingston, visit: skeletonparkartsfest.ca/the-skeleton-press/

END NOTES

¹ A vacancy rate of 3-4% is considered “healthy,” because in that range rents usually keep pace with inflation. See Big city rental blues: a look at Canada's rental housing deficit. Focus on Canadian Housing, RBC Economics, Sept. 25, 2019. http://www.rbc.com/economics/economic-reports/pdf/canadian-housing/housing_rental_sep2019.pdf

² Also, most of the increase in new housing in the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) happened outside of Kingston in the County of Frontenac.

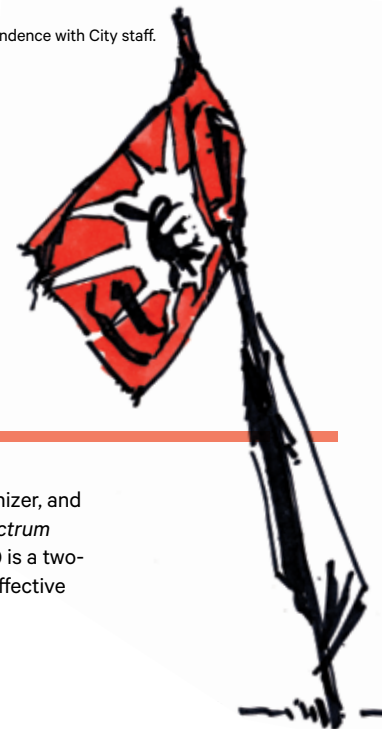
³ In the 10 years prior, rent increased by an average of 3.2% per year. Home prices have increased as well (thanks in part to the financialization of the housing market, and the increased use of residential real estate as an investment by absentee owners). In the year 2000, a single detached home in Kingston sold for about \$125,000. By 2010 that median price had risen to \$225,000. And in 2020, the average price was over \$400,000. [<https://creastats.crea.ca/mls/king-median-price>, July 14, 2020.] Just between 2019 and 2020, those prices increased more than 10%.

⁴ https://www.cityofkingston.ca/documents/10180/13880/10Year_HousingHomelessness_Plan.pdf/2498b02e-6832-4250-95fc-6372b2bfc490

⁵ Direct correspondence with City staff.



ARIC MCBAY is an author, organizer, and farmer. His recent book *Full Spectrum Resistance* (Seven Stories, 2019) is a two-volume guide to building more effective movements.



No evictions at Belle Park!

BY SAYYIDA JAFFER

The following is an edited excerpt from a Belle Park Solidarity Rally speech given by Sayyida Jaffer on July 7, 2020.

Can you imagine what it's like to live somewhere and not know if or when you might be forced to leave? The residents of Belle Park have been living under this stress for weeks. Safe and affordable housing is hard to find in Kingston given the vacancy rate and extremely high rental rates.

City staff have said there can be no quick solutions to the housing challenges in Kingston, and to that I heard Nathan Rosevear (a Belle Park leader) say, "Then there should be no quick evictions." I couldn't agree more. I understand that it takes time and consistent commitment to create more affordable housing to meet current needs, and it's good that houses are getting built, though of course it would be helpful if Kingston were building five times the number of rent-geared-to-income units.

The City of Kingston pushed hard to approve the Third Crossing so that drivers can get somewhere eight minutes faster. The city has committed \$60 million to that project and likely will have to spend more. So why can't we find \$60 million in the city budget to make sure everyone in our city has safe and affordable housing? We can. We just haven't chosen to.

I know one reason it's hard to create rent-geared-to-income housing--nimbysm. Lots of people don't want to live near poor or working-class people. Because they have been taught to fear others, because they worry about their property values. So I want to encourage all of us to say yes to affordable housing on our streets and in our neighbourhoods. Let's tell the city to build as much as they can everywhere in the city. Class-based discrimination is unacceptable and we local residents can stand against it. Likewise, rather than calling the cops, let's commit to getting to know each other and addressing the problems we can solve together. Let's also be ready to keep standing up for each other against pandemic evictions that will put many people on the streets.

I also want to give a shout-out to HARS (HIV/AIDS Regional Services) and Street Health staff for ensuring that people using the cooling centre help decide how it is run. The Artillery Park Cooling Centre is needed to provide a place for people to access services and a place to cool down. But it's NOT housing, and we can't let ourselves be fooled into thinking it is. Belle Park residents need safe, affordable housing!

The challenges that Belle Park residents face are far from over. In addition to collectively running this supportive community and searching for housing, they, like all of us, are dealing with the stresses of a pandemic.

I want to say to the residents of Belle Park: What you have created together is incredible. I don't have words for how inspired I am by how you look after each other, try to understand each other and keep each other safe. No community is perfect, including this one, though I think we could all learn from how you back each other under challenging circumstances. Thanks for showing us other ways of living together.



SAYYIDA JAFFER is a member of Mutual Aid Katarokwi-Kingston. She has lived in the neighbourhood for twelve years.

The search for a solution

The issue of homelessness is complex, but progress is possible.

BY MARY RITA HOLLAND / JULY 30, 2020

In the spring of 2002, I moved out of the apartment of my former boyfriend. He threw my belongings in garbage bags over the balcony and onto the sidewalk below. After staying with family outside the city for a while, I decided to get back on my feet in Kingston. It took months of couch surfing and apartment-hunting and, finally, a stroke of luck before I found a bachelor apartment I could barely afford.

My near miss with homelessness and the chronic homelessness of many others point to the trend of precarious housing in the city. Dramatic change is required to reverse that trend.

We have heard loud and clear from residents at Belle Park that the current shelter system does not work for all...

As an elected official, I want to respect the plight of homeless individuals in the short term while offering some hope for the longer term. With the 2018 Strategic Plan, the supply of affordable housing became a top priority for Kingston. Those of us on the city's Housing and Homelessness Committee heard clearly from individuals representing organizations that serve a range of complex needs in the community — developmental services, youth homelessness, domestic violence, and mental health and substance-use disorders. Without such programs, these people told us, their clients would move in and out of homelessness. The challenge for all of these organizations is that they lack access to the funds and property that would make supportive housing for their clients a reality. Partnering with the city and non-profit housing providers is the best approach to addressing the problem. A few examples of recent progress include 1316 Princess Street (90 affordable housing units), support for an Ongwanada supportive housing project, and backing for a Home Base Housing plan for transitional housing at 484 Albert Street. A city pilot project for tiny homes is also in the early stages.

Yet the need for affordable and supportive housing far exceeds these projects. Our centralized wait list for rent-geared-to-income units holds steady at approximately 1,300 names. The latest count of self-identified chronically homeless persons in the city is 135. We have heard loud and clear from residents at Belle Park that the current shelter system does not work for all and we at the city are embarking on a review of these services in 2021. A permanent location for the integrated services hub (currently operating at Artillery Park) would provide a means of addressing the supportive housing needs in the city while our permanent supportive housing projects are completed.

Here are a few practical ideas to speed up progress. First, push for greater funding for health and social services at the provincial level so our supportive housing partners can continue to lower barriers to permanent housing. The federal government, which has the infrastructure funding needed to kick-start affordable housing projects, needs to hear from residents that Kingston urgently needs the money already promised. Finally, the Belle Park phenomenon mobilized hundreds of community members who demanded that the UN Protocol for Homeless Encampments be met. The compassion and generosity of residents guided city council in the early days as we sought solutions for homelessness in the spring of 2020. But there was no consensus in the community on ensuring self-determination for residents at Belle Park. As representatives, we reflect the will of our districts' residents, many of whom pushed for the city to enforce the no-camping bylaw.

Eliminating homelessness in the city of Kingston will take more than the tremendous effort and sacrifice of engaged housing advocates. It will take more than a handful of votes on city council. It will take a deeper and more universal understanding of the complex needs of our most vulnerable. It will take more public money, which means higher taxes. But the reward would be immeasurable: the knowledge that no one — not one person in our city — would be without a safe home.



MARY RITA HOLLAND, a Kingston city councillor, has represented the Kingscourt-Rideau district since 2014. She is a teaching fellow and PhD candidate in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen's University. Her municipal work has focused on improving access to transit, affordable housing, and health and social services.



Isolation botany

STORY AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY HELEN HUMPHREYS

During the pandemic, and through the unusually cold spring, I spent a lot of time looking out my windows at the neighbourhood. While I have lived in my house for over a decade and am very familiar with the views from every window, it occurred to me that I don't really know exactly what is out there, and sheltering in place might provide an opportunity to learn. I decided to practice a sort of "isolation botany," with the deceptively simple plan of documenting and identifying the trees I can see from my house.

This project follows the principles of the self-taught American botanist, Mary Treat, who in the 19th century supported herself by writing books and scientific articles primarily about the plants she found in her garden in New Jersey. She believed that observing a small place yielded better results than travelling over a large area, and stated that — "The smallest area around the well-chosen home will furnish material to satisfy all thirst of knowledge through the longest life."¹

While I could have included shrubs and even flowering plants in this survey, I have decided to limit it to trees because the greater height of trees will mean that I can include trees that are blocks away, rather than just name the flowers I can see in my neighbour's garden. Trees introduce distance into the equation, and I'm interested in discovering what is the most distant tree visible from my house, and where it is located.

I start upstairs with paper, pen, binoculars, and a compass. My plan is to make a cursory map of the trees and then walk out to identify those I can't recognize through the binoculars.

Because of the slow spring many of the trees haven't leafed out yet and still look like their winter selves. In contrast, the forsythia blazes with bright and splendid yellow and seems infinitely more interesting from my second floor window than the shadowy outlines of the distant indecipherable trees. Perhaps it is a mistake not to include shrubs?

My house seems to be surrounded by maples and cedars. There are also a linden, and several spruce trees, including a blue spruce, as well as a couple of yews, and a green ash. Although there are many lovely magnolia trees in the neighbourhood, none fall within my sightlines, but there is an old pear tree a couple of doors down, a holdout perhaps from the days when there was once a pear orchard where our houses are now standing.

Some of the trees I can't identify from a distance because they don't have their leaves yet, and others are inside people's yards, so it's hard to get a good look at them when I go out on foot to follow my tree map.

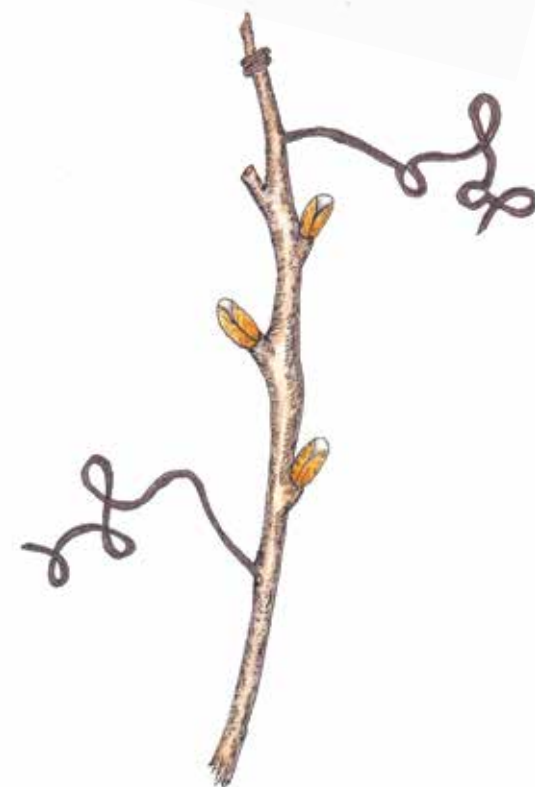
From the second storey of my house, the most distant tree is to the west and is a balsam fir. It looks to be miles away, but it turns out to only be two streets up, and is actually at the bottom of a friend's garden. While I can't see my friend's house from mine, I like the idea that I can see her tree, and it makes me realize that the trees are a different way to think about a map of the neighbourhood.

Drawing an imaginary line between my house and the tree at the bottom of my friend's garden, I think, too, about the birdways, about how the various birds use the trees as perches or nesting sites and fly between them, creating yet another kind of map.

I know that the sparrows near my house favour the conifers because they can shelter in their dense foliage during winter, and that the songbirds like the pear tree when it is in blossom. The more territorial birds such as the cardinals, robins and crows like to perch at the tops of the spruces and firs because they offer good vantage points over the neighbourhood.

I wonder, too, at the relationship between the various trees I am seeing when I walk through the streets. Were the three pine trees in three adjoining yards planted at the same time because the people in those houses made that decision together? Are the two older apple trees in the yards of houses beside one another different varieties so that the families in those houses could share the fruit between the two households? Could studying the trees in the area be a way of creating a different sort of history for this neighbourhood?

It was a simple project, identifying the trees I can see from my house, but the questions it has raised are ones that I am interested in pursuing long after the need to shelter in place is over.



HELEN HUMPHREYS is the award-winning author of 18 books. Her most recent is the novel, *Rabbit Foot Bill*, published by HarperCollins Canada.

¹ *Home Studies in Nature* by Mary Treat; New York; American Book Company; 1885