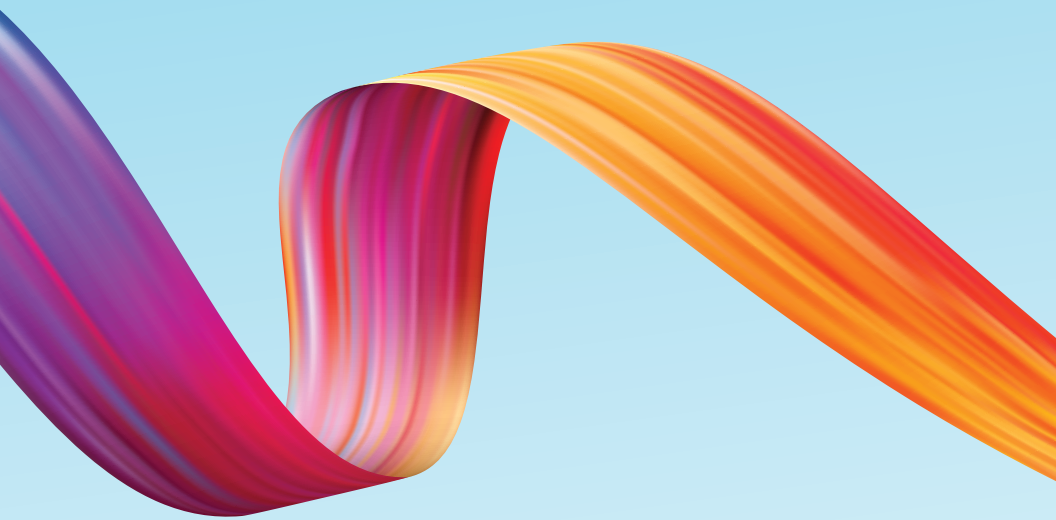
WriteTo*Move* Anthology



Edited by
Sharon Chisvin

A Winnipeg Arts Council WITH ART project
in partnership with the Winnipeg Trails Association

WriteTo*Move*

An anthology

The WriteTo*Move* anthology was created through the Winnipeg Arts Council's WITH ART community public art program and is part of the City of Winnipeg's Public Art Collection.

WriteTo*Move*

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WriteTo*Move* logo designed by Anders Swanson.

With special thanks to:
Marshall Carroll, Niri Carroll, Andrea Davis and Paul Doyle.

ISBN 978-1-7775184-0-0

FIC003000 Fiction Anthologies (Multiple Authors)

FIC019000 Fiction, Literary

LCO010000 Literary Collections, Essays

Printed in Canada by Hignell Book Printing

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5. **Foreword** — *Leigh Anne Parry and Anders Swanson*
9. **Introduction** — *Sharon Chisvin*
13. **Meeting Ernesto** — *Alex Merrill*
20. **In French Class** — *Diane Driedger*
21. **Right to Meander** — *Moneca Sinclaire*
23. **Centurion** — *Sandra Schmidtke*
27. **Wednesday Commute** — *Cath Nichols*
29. **Tracks** — *Byron Rempel-Burkholder*
33. **Movement** — *Jenean McBrearty*
36. **Henderson Hwy Blues** — *Emma Durand-Wood*
42. **The Dancer** — *Laura White*
43. **Double Blades?...Well Maybe** — *Yvonne Kyle*
48. **Imagine** — *Izzeddin Hawamda*
50. **The Climb** — *Kevin Strong*
57. **Walking** — *Laura McMaster*
58. **Pilgrim on a Freedom Machine** — *Bob Armstrong*
67. **Senior Strength Class** — *Tricia Knoll*
68. **Through a Child's Eyes** — *Binh Pham*
78. **Transplant** — *Steve Abbott*
79. **The High Pass** — *Brendan McKay*
90. **From Birth to War, from Army to Prison Camp, from Music to Canada, from Marriage to Israel, from Romania to Kaddish** — *Ron Romanowski*
91. **The Battalion** — *Donald Vogel*
99. **self, in motion** — *Korellia Schneider*
102. **Invisible Disabilities** — *Jim Ross*
106. **My Mother's Bike** — *Karen Solomon*
108. **Independence** — *Robert Beveridge*

109. Southeast by Southwest — *Vincent Ternida*
115. Legends from the Trails: Shelby Encounters the Memegesi — *Janell Henry*
117. La texture de l'écorce — *Laurence Ammann-Lanthier*
119. The Accidental Walker — *Nancy Wick*
124. Paddle on Paddlers — *Carol VandenEngel and Glenn Green*
130. Your Movement, My Moment — *Holly Ferrier Lamon*t
131. Roncevaux Roncevalles — *Gabriella Brand*
135. Cycling While Female: Barriers to Women's Transportation Independence — *Nicole Roach*
140. Desperate for a Seat — *Cath Nichols*
142. Reflections on Finding Yourself Abroad — *Matthew Robinson*
146. I Have a Home — *Berhe Gebrihet*
151. Crossing The Border — *John Grey*
152. Interpreting Desire Lines — *Eva Morrison*
157. Author Biographies

Foreword

Leigh Anne Parry and Anders Swanson

We're too late. To move is now different. Oh how we wish we had wrapped this little introduction up before March 2020 so we could look back, smiling to ourselves, marvelling at how cute we all were in our innocence. From this code red perch, talking about going where you want to is strange.

How do you write a foreword about the right to move in a pandemic, without seeming like one of those camo bedecked guys in a trucker hat without a mask, yelling at some horrified nurse that they really do deserve a haircut?

We meant well. What we're after is serious and true in any era. And, you can easily argue that the right to move became even more important lately. Especially if you are reading this from one of those postal codes with a 60% transit ridership that watched your city hall walk away from you. After all, we all have a right to the space between the houses. That bike boom left shrapnel all over the place. And that space between the houses suddenly became very important when it was the only space we could use. And it became really, really, really important when everyone suddenly needed a new way to get to work and there just isn't enough money or space or good air for more cars.

Borders are weirder than ever too. Without getting into the intricacies of rainforest removal or bat physiology, everyone has this vague notion that all of this has got to be, somehow, our fault. Invisible borders both large and local—the pen strokes that hem us into our countries and ghettos on a good day start to really lose the rest of what shine they had when a pandemic rages and only some people can outrun them to their cottage.

There are a lot of things around the right to move that we need to answer for.

Not that the timing is wrong too. Now is probably just the right time to add to a discussion about being outside and connecting with other human beings—and our right to it. If ever there was a species that

needed a co-pilot to take the wheel or the handlebars and make a sharp right turn on its beeline to the cliff edge of global catastrophe, it is probably us humans right now.

But the reality is, around the end of March last year, the meaning of "the right to move" suddenly changed and words mean things to writers.

COVID-19 equalized us. What was a far off scare—something that happened to other people (as long as you weren't trying to navigate a Winnipeg winter in a wheelchair or be a North African trying to make it to Italy of course) suddenly became the new norm for a whole new group of people. Most of the world can't ever fly anyway, but one day, no one could either. And then your office building closed down. "It's time to come home" said the new Justin a few days past needing a beard trim.

You too are vulnerable. I too am vulnerable. We all are.

So no one is going anywhere and that's that.

Even the suburbs are rolling their home office chairs off their plexiglass carpet protector, pumping up their tires for the first time in a while, and going for one more lap after a delivered dinner, seeing neighbours they've never seen and discovering cul-de-sac sneak throughs they forgot or didn't know existed.

Like polar bears digging themselves out from a long sleep to find the pesky snowmobilers that had annoyed them so much had vanished, more of us have started to move again than we have for decades because, well there was simply nothing else to do.

Breath starts the bones rotating, our bodies slip into motion without decision. The muscles lengthen, our bodies swoop, slide, jostle, wiggle, step, jump, repeat, squat, sway, climb, roll, lean, balance, lunge, run, stretch, reach, bend, vibrate, freeze, shake, tip toe, slither, walk, fall, shuffle, break, hop, prance, spin, swivel. Forward. Backward. Toward. Away. Across. Through.

Children learn to ride in front of their house. The risk is back to being skinned knees, not the neighbour's tan sport utility crossover with the in-dash iPad and a moment's inattention. Being outdoors are the only qualifications you need to be an expert in our environment, when you can hear, see and smell. The results of some of our mistakes should be pretty clear. Cars, in particular, have been devastating. They have

destroyed natural habitat, caused chronic illnesses, killed and injured massive amounts of people and animals, and created an economy reliant on the idea that it is the only way to move. We've trapped people into a metal box moving through neighbourhoods when humans need to interact with each other and the outdoors. That much is going to be clear to at least a few more people.

Here is the thing: Every single one of these stories in this anthology was written pre-pandemic. No one knew what was coming. Sorry submitters. We didn't know. Lockdown. Closure. Stay home.

Now, how exactly do you write a foreword and publish a book during a pandemic to an anthology of writings written before a pandemic about something so intrinsically related to moving? It becomes a sudden retrospective. Is this an essential collection that serves the needs of our times appropriately? Do we have the right to throw our submitters' thoughts out into the ether like this, knowing full well they had no idea what was coming and that their own vulnerability might inform what they would say now?

Whatever. This is the right time for these stories. More than ever, this pandemic we're in has made it clear that—whatever it is we thought before—this little first book clearly won't remotely contain all of the stories that need to be told.

It is clear that this anthology needs to lead to many. We need to hear from a lot more people.

Freedom to move was considered by many writers who submitted to this anthology. Maybe it's timeless. It should be. What resulted from the WriteTo*Move* call for submissions is an array of stories that transcend any single interpretation of movement. What gets carried through is an amorphous celebration of human resiliency through motion, while at the same time it gently draws attention to humanity's capacity to create borders and barriers.

Movement—geographical, physical, emotional, mental—is a necessary and beautiful part of our everyday lives. Everyone's an expert in their own movement. Everyone has an opinion about transportation. But not everyone experiences the built environment through the same lens.

The WriteTo*Move* anthology is Winnipeg Trails Association's first ever publication. We hope you read it all. If you hate it, we hope you tell

someone why. And when you are ready to tell your story too, we hope you will share it with us. If you start to wish for a different world, we hope it makes you a little more likely to get involved. Worlds change faster than you think.

Leigh Anne Parry, past-Chair of Winnipeg Trails, initiates many movement-based artistic partnerships such as the WITH ART project that led to this collaboration. Anders Swanson is the Executive Director. As an organization, Winnipeg Trails sees its job as eliminating barriers to human movement in the city. Part of the organization's goal is to prepare a more equitable and resilient society that is ready to tackle climate change with urgency. All of Winnipeg Trails' board, staff and volunteer community extends its heartfelt thanks to everyone who submitted their work, to the Winnipeg Arts Council for hosting a wonderful program and, most importantly to writer and editor Sharon Chisvin for her patience, perseverance and strength for breathing life into this creative project.

Introduction

Sharon Chisvin

This anthology was first imagined in early 2019 shortly after the Winnipeg Arts Council's WITH ART program selected me to partner with the Winnipeg Trails Association (WTA) in the creation of a collaborative public artwork. The public art projects fostered by the WITH ART program are designed to enhance the identity of local community groups, promote their interests and concerns, empower their constituents, and in some way enrich, edify or entertain the City of Winnipeg and its citizens.

It was a natural choice for me to use my skill as a writer and editor to create a publication that would reflect WTA's main focus, so clearly stated in their promotional materials—the creation of a society that ensures "that everyone who wants to or needs to walk, use a wheelchair, ride a bicycle or use any other form of human-powered movement can easily do so to access every area of their community and all aspects of their life."

While the publication could have taken any form, I quickly landed on the idea of an anthology focused on the general topic of mobility, and excitedly shared my vision with WTA's then chairperson, Leigh Anne Parry, and executive director, Anders Swanson. We talked about reaching out to local writers, as well as active transportation activists and enthusiasts, and inviting submissions of poetry and prose that explored what it meant to have, or not have, the freedom to move as one wished. We imagined that we would hear about icy, snow covered downtown sidewalks that imperiled walking; the joy of cycling along the Bunn's Creek Trail; and leisurely canoe trips down the Seine or La Salle Rivers.

But after further discussion, Leigh Anne, Anders and I determined that we should actually broaden the scope of the anthology's parameters, and in so doing, broaden its reach and relevance. The right to movement, after all, was too big a topic to confine to Winnipeg.

It was around the same time that we came up with the anthology name of WriteTo*Move.*

Mobility rights were very much a main topic of conversation back in 2019, as an estimated 65 million men, women and children—the largest number of people since World War Two—were on the move, fleeing war, conflict, and climate change, and seeking safety and refuge wherever it could be found. The crossing of borders, the building of walls, the caging of children, and the creation of or lack of welcoming and accessible communities were major topics of conversation at the time.

And so, we put out our call for submissions to a wider writing audience, and ultimately selected 37 pieces, from both emerging and established writers, to feature in WriteTo*Move*. The selected writings represent a variety of experiences, some real and some imagined, and a variety of voices—some of them instructional, some of them triumphant, some of them tired, and all of them inspiring. Those voices explore freedom of movement, barriers to movement, refugee experiences, personal bests, agile bodies and aging bodies. They explore cycling, boating and hiking, the splendor of dance, the thrill of world travel, and the serenity inherent in a simple neighbourhood walk.

This anthology, of course, was designed and curated before the world changed in the winter of 2020. The stories contained here, therefore, do not delve into the restrictions of movement imposed by COVID-19. At the time these pieces were being composed and selected for publication, those restrictions did not exist. In fact, they were unimaginable.

Fortunately, the constraints imposed by COVID-19 are temporary. Whether it takes a year or two for life to get back to normal, it will eventually, and once it does, many of us will return to moving around freely wherever and whenever we want. But for so many others, including millions of refugees, asylum seekers and detainees around the world, a COVID-19 vaccine will not ensure a visa, a passport, or a pardon.

Those are the people that I hope readers will keep in mind as they peruse, enjoy, and are emboldened by the pages of this anthology.

The book itself is intentionally designed to fit snugly into a backpack, a fanny pack, or a pannier, in the hope that readers will carry it with them, and read it along the way, as they navigate our city's increasingly comprehensive network of trails, bike paths and bridges—all of which are the direct result of the Winnipeg Trails Association's tireless advocacy and efforts.

It has been both a pleasure and an education working on this anthology with the Winnipeg Trails Association, and especially Anders and Leigh Anne, and I am grateful to them for their input and enthusiasm, and for all they do to make the city of Winnipeg safer and more accessible for everyone. I am equally grateful to the Winnipeg Arts Council and WITH ART program for their support of this publication, as well as for countless other cultural and artistic initiatives that enrich our city. Finally, thank you to everyone who entrusted their writing to this anthology. I wish we could have published every submission that we received.

Sharon Chisvin has edited thousands of words of copy for newsletters, newspapers, magazines, memoirs, and fiction and non-fiction books, and written countless articles for a variety of publications. She is a regular contributor to the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the author of three social history books, and the author of the children's picture book, *The Girl Who Cannot Eat Peanut Butter*. Sharon's short fiction and creative non-fiction have been published in the *Toronto Star*, and in the anthologies, *Prairie Fire Home Place 3, Under the Prairie Sky,* and *Living Legacies.* In between freelancing, Sharon has worked as a communications officer in the non-profit industry and as an interpretive writer at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Meeting Ernesto

Alex Merrill

This is the story of how we met Ernesto.

It started with the war in El Salvador. And Sister Lucy of Orland, Maine.

In 1988, civil wars were tearing Central America apart, especially in El Salvador, and Salvadorans by the thousands, as well as Nicaraguans and Guatemalans, were migrating north for refuge.

My husband and I had just moved from downtown Toronto to St. Stephen, New Brunswick, where Glenn worked at a United Church and I at the local newspaper. We were newlyweds, new to each other, naïve Come-From-Aways in this small Maritime town with staunch United Empire Loyalist roots. And we had a very basic grasp of the struggles in Central America. (Before moving to New Brunswick, we'd attended rallies about the struggles in Central America. And on our first "date" we went to see Ed Asner, aka Lou Grant, speak at a Central American solidarity event at the University of Toronto. That was the extent of our knowledge of what was going on in Central America.)

Enter Sister Lucy.

Sister Lucy Poulin lived in Orland, Maine, two hours southwest of St. Stephen, in a co-operative community called H.O.M.E. (Homeworkers Organized for More Employment). She founded H.O.M.E. in 1970 after she was ousted by the Carmelite order for "an incorrect spirit of poverty"—as in: working too closely with the poor. For almost 20 years H.O.M.E. had provided a place of shelter, work and dignity for people who struggled to meet their basic needs. In fall 1988, H.O.M.E. also began to host Central Americans trying to reach Canada via a new "overground railroad" that was supported by the Sanctuary Movement. Many had already been living with "undocumented" status in Mexico and the US, but when those countries began passing more restrictive laws, thousands began heading farther north and seeking asylum at border crossings across Canada.

For those who managed to reach H.O.M.E. in Maine, Sister Lucy and her compatriots began to provide safe escort to the New Brunswick border where they could claim refugee status.

Once they crossed the St. Croix River, which separated our two countries, the newcomers faced a lot more challenges seeking shelter, food, appropriate clothing (Canada being colder than most had ever imagined), as well as support to figure out their next steps. St. Stephen was a town of 5,000 with few opportunities. Most of the newcomers would eventually have to move on to Montreal, Toronto and other large centres. But first they'd need a support network in our region.

Sister Lucy called a meeting in St. Stephen shortly after we moved there, and made her appeal for support.

I don't remember anything about her appeal except that she began with the prayer of St. Francis. "Make me a channel of your peace…"

Glenn and I must have had some discussion, the two of us, about what we could do to help, but the details are now fuzzy. In the end we decided to join the fledgling support group and share the room we had been using as an office in our apartment.

Within days we welcomed the first newcomer to our home.

Ernesto was a surprise, in lots of ways. He was 15, much younger than the other Salvadorans seeking asylum, at least those who came without their family. Also, unlike many other Salvadorans, he was close to six feet tall and had the build of a professional athlete. Basically, he could pass for the major league home run king at the time, Jose Canseco. A far cry from the person we had imagined.

As we got to know him, Ernesto shared how he had come to be so far from home:

By the time he turned 11, he was already taller than many his age. His size began to catch the attention of the Salvadoran army who were recruiting –as in: kidnapping– young men to serve in their fight against the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional), the united front of guerilla groups made up of farmers and other disenfranchised groups. From the age of 12, Ernesto was kidnapped by the army several times. Each time, his mother, a shopkeeper, had to find the cash to bribe the army to bring

her son back home. As time went on, she wasn't going to be able to keep the army at bay anymore. Finally, she raised enough to pay a "coyote" to smuggle her 14-year-old son north to the US.

Ernesto managed to make it to New York City where his older sister, living there legally, could take him in. He worked as a drywaller. That lasted a few months, until the US authorities caught up with him. Ernesto had signed up for an amnesty program for farmworkers, even though he had never worked on a farm. They gave him a brief test that included showing him a picture of a tractor and asking him the English word for it. He failed and was taken into custody. Because of his age, he was sent south to Cutler Bay, Florida, to Boystown, a detention centre for unaccompanied migrant children. But security was low at the detention centre and Ernesto just walked away from it. Somehow, he found out about the sanctuary work of H.O.M.E. and bussed north to Maine.

After hearing Ernesto's story, we quietly marvelled at how calm and cheerful he appeared in what must have seemed a strange world. He spoke little English at first, but had a smile that took over when words failed him—or us. We learned over time that he carried the weight of feeling responsible for getting his mother and other family members to safety and needing to make money for that. But, as his proxy family in Canada, we enrolled him in the local high school—he had not been to school since leaving El Salvador two years earlier and he seemed to adapt with ease. He laughed when he told us the other students called him "Chico." This was not a school that was generally kind to people who looked or acted differently—we knew this from our friend the French teacher, another Come-From-Away, who'd told us that French teachers there typically lasted a year, two at most. Ernesto never let on if his new nickname hurt him. We figured that he had developed ways of coping with situations far worse.

The language piece had its moments both for him and for us. Holding up his toothbrush one day, he asked, grinning, "Why don't they call it teethbrush? I don't understand." Snow was a revelation too, and we were lucky enough see it through his eyes, like it was new to us too. After the first snowfall, he was out in the yard, an adult-sized child, making snow angels and snowballs. And one clear night when it looked like the sky was on fire, he was treated to his first sight of the *aurora borealis*. He was sure we were doing it with a flashlight or projector. We ended up getting

out our Canadian Encyclopedia to prove it because he thought we had made up the name "northern lights."

Over the months that Ernesto was with us, we three spent a lot of time with the other Central Americans who had continued to pour over the border—about 60, a significant number of newcomers for a town of 5,000—and their supporters. The support network had grown to dozens of people who provided housing, food, clothes, rides, translators, legal aid and more, extending up to Fredericton and St. John. Quaker friends held a Christmas celebration for everyone on their farm. After dinner, we all had a wild go at a piñata some of the newcomers had made and tied up in the rafters of the barn.

We became engrossed in this new community.

On more than a few occasions Glenn spent hours at the St. Stephen border crossing after answering calls from Sister Lucy that more people were coming. The border staff—and one in particular—had a good relationship with those providing refugee support on the Canadian side. This customs officer actually requested that Glenn give him a heads up when Glenn knew people were coming from H.O.M.E. so the border could arrange for interpreters and extra staff. The strict reading of the law would say that Glenn could have been put in prison for 10 years for helping refugees get to Canada. When Glenn pointed this out to the officer, the man explained that the law was for preventing human trafficking and profiteers—and he knew that Glenn was doing neither of those things. It was a very respectful relationship. Still, whenever Glenn phoned that officer to say that more newcomers were arriving soon, he'd use the phrase "my spidey senses tell me that someone is coming" and both he and the officer had a good laugh.

This same man was involved one day when several refugees in St. Stephen had to cross back to the USA to do some paperwork. He told all of the men to cling to him while they crossed the border as he did not want them to be apprehended by the Americans. He was a massive guy who was solid in more ways than one.

My work as a reporter at the newspaper suddenly became more engaging, as several people agreed to have their stories on the front page. This was a way—we hoped—to foster understanding among locals about these visible newcomers to their community. St. Stephen had seen influxes of migrants to its shores before, starting with the United Empire Loyalists

escaping the American Revolution. We hoped for empathy among St. Stepheners for these latest arrivals, and as we heard little response to the newcomers' stories in the paper, we took it as quiet acceptance in the community. Glenn did have one meeting with his church's Ministry and Personnel committee where he was asked about his work with the refugees and how it related to his job description. In response, he quoted from his job description that he was to be a "friend and listener to members of the community." He refrained from asking if they wanted to insert the words "rich" or "white" in the job description. He took it that they did not want him helping refugees but only engaging with potential church supporters.

There were a few other tense moments over that year. Police were called one night to a house of a woman who was hosting several young Central American men. One of the men had pulled a knife on the other. It turned out they had been on opposite sides of their civil war back home, and had gotten into a heated discussion about it. It was a lesson for us: we'd naively expected that once in Canada, the newcomers could simply put their past behind them.

We also had not fully grasped that many of the people coming through had been torture victims and were experiencing PTSD and like symptoms. In one house, a man found and drank an entire Christmas gift of a bottle of Grand Marnier. He then tried to swim across the St. Croix River, back to the States. He was caught by Canadian immigration officials. Fortunately, the officials phoned the host family to report that they had found the man, and brought him back.

Many of the 200 or more Central Americans who claimed asylum at the St. Stephen border did not stay, but went on immediately to larger centres. The largest group was taken to Saint John to a hostel run by the Salvation Army. One of the people brought there went running out the door when he saw the meagre accommodations and uniformed staff. He thought he was being put in jail.

The support network in St. Stephen came from all walks of life but most had a church connection. In this small community were representatives from the Quaker, Catholic, Anglican, United and Evangelical traditions. While the Quakers and some of the Catholics were theologically aligned with the left-community movements in Latin America, the Pentecostals in St. Stephen saw this as an ungodly manifestation of the church and set out to convert the newcomers to "real" salvation. At one

of the refugee board hearings in the town, the interpreter, who attended the Alliance church and had been a missionary in Mexico, was heard altering the testimony of the claimant by implying he was running away from the Communists.

Before Ernesto arrived on our shores, for the two years since escaping El Salvador, he had been leading the life of an adult. But he was still, by our standards, a teenager, and under our care. After we figured out that he was attracting the attention of girls at school—one in particular (as well as her mother!) had taken to calling him at our home, nightly—Glenn decided he should talk to Ernesto about sex. Ernesto had, by that time, told us that his father had several children with several women. With no kids of our own and no experience at "the talk," this wasn't going to be easy. But Glenn gamely sat down one day to broach the topic with Ernesto. Deciding that both languages might work best, and after some fumbling, Glenn said, "*No poqueno Ernestos*. No little Ernestos." Ernesto simply smiled back and said, "Don't Worry, Be Happy" – quoting Bobby McFerrin's big hit at the time.

At the end of the school year, Ernesto made contact with a cousin out west who had a drywall business who could employ him. "I can live with him," he told us, "And make money." We got that he needed to send money home to his mother, and also needed get started on the next part of his life in Canada. So, Ernesto joined most of the other newcomers who left for larger cities before the year was over.

After Ernesto left, another Salvadoran took over his room. This man went by the name "Alejandro." He was in his 30s, and very quiet. He didn't divulge many details of his life although he did say he had been a boxer, and had been with the FMLN. He did not want to use his real name as he felt it might put him in danger. He was a great cook, and introduced us to Central American delicacies like flautas. Once, he did show off his prowess in public when the newspaper held a fundraising "skip-a-thon" on the Front Street, and he out-skipped every other contender. He, too, moved on after a few months, having found both love and work in Saint John.

We had some contact with Ernesto in the years after he left, through the grapevine of our support network as well as our family. He lived briefly in Winnipeg where Glenn's parents had him over for dinner one night. He was doing okay, he was working and had a place to live. After another year or so, we heard no more.

Until 21 years later.

In 2010 Glenn received a message on Facebook from a young Filipina. He did not recognize her name, but through his work as a prison chaplain it was not uncommon for friends of friends to reach out to him, so he replied. The account belonged to Ernesto's wife. Shortly afterward, Glenn was in Toronto for a conference and met up with Ernesto at a local Salvadoran restaurant. Ernesto introduced Glenn to the owner as "my Canadian father." At that reunion, Ernesto filled Glenn in on the years in between: After leaving Winnipeg he'd lived in Edmonton, Toronto, Vancouver, married, had a son, moved back to Ontario and settled in Brampton. During those years Ernesto had run his own business, a cleaning company that had employed over 40 people. He said to Glenn, "Every job I created was to say thank you to you for what you did for me."

It was a huge joy to hear Ernesto's story. As his immigration status was still pending when we'd lost touch, we'd had some fears that his claim was refused and he'd been sent back to El Salvador where he could have faced execution.

Ernesto invited Glenn home for dinner the next day and Glenn met his son, who was 15, the same age as Ernesto had been when we met him. And yes, there was a striking resemblance between father and son.

We have social media to thank for the reunion with Ernesto and are deeply grateful not only that he'd reached out, but that he'd thrived in the years since we'd lost touch. The web also helped us learn that Sister Lucy and H.O.M.E. in Maine have continued their work of "Serving first those who suffer most."

For more information about:
Central American migration to Canada - migrationpolicy.org/article/canada-northern-refuge-central-americans
H.O.M.E. - bangordailynews.com/2016/04/02/next/ousted-from-her-order-sister-lucy-found-her-own-way-to-support-needy-mainers/
Sister Lucy Poulin - americanswhotellthetruth.org/portraits/sister-lucy-poulin

In French Class

Diane Driedger

we're in Senegal
with Mamadou
in the French text
I name myself Gabrielle here
we all picked a French name
my friend
with her friendly orange
and brown wooden necklace
swinging
tells me *Australia*
where I lived before
was so good
so calm
I nod

later Madame has asked
me a question
I was not listening
I was back in Winnipeg
bike riding monkey trails
in the sequin willow forest
avoiding manhole covers
on the road to King's Park

Right to Meander in a Store

Moneca Sinclaire

I am walking around looking and browsing the same as many other patrons in the store. I am enjoying this time to wander, but suddenly I feel funny as if I am being watched. I dismiss this and keep dilly-dallying. A shudder comes to my shoulders and I turn around. No one is there. I decide to turn around again and I see what it is that is giving me this unnerving reaction. Just as I suspected—'incognito' security personnel.

My right to move freely in this store has been violated once again. I am pissed and think long and hard about how I want to handle this situation. In the past, I have just left the store seething in anger. The store doesn't care that I leave and most certainly doesn't care about the money I could have spent there. They see only that I am Indigenous and believe that I will take their property without paying. What they don't know is that I contribute to society. They don't know that I have a PhD, I volunteer my time to worthy causes, and I am a responsible mother, aunty and friend. Most certainly they don't know that I am constantly healing on a daily basis from historical trauma resulting from our colonial history. They don't know any of this. All they see with their stereotyping eyes is 'another Indigenous person.'

I continue to walk down each aisle knowing that a male security guard is following me.

I put items into my shopping cart, and at one point I look him straight in the eyes. He averts his gaze but continues to follow me. I carry on and keep pushing my cart, feeling good that I am able to keep moving about and resist the temptation I feel to flee from his scrutiny. I keep walking around the store and finally, after about 45 minutes, my cart is filled to the brim. I slowly walk towards the cashier with dollar signs in her eyes, but when I reach the counter, I announce, "Hmm, you know what? I don't think I really want to buy any of this stuff."

I start to walk out, but before I leave, I turn to the cashier and say, "Next time, hire someone who is not so obvious when they are following me around."

I have practised this one act of resistance several times over the last 10 years, since I finally figured out that I have the right to be able to walk around in a store without being followed. I also have found other ways to cope when I am being followed, besides using my 'fill the cart' strategy. Sometimes I turn around and shake the hand of the security personnel; sometimes I walk up beside them and let them know where I will be heading; other times I walk really fast, whip around a corner and then turn around quickly so that they almost bump into me.

This time, I walk out of the store smiling, proud that I have calmly asserted my right to walk around freely, without my usual seething anger.

Centurion

Sandra Schmidtke

A century ride is a bike trip of 100 miles (or, for my fellow Canucks, 160 kilometres) that takes place in one day. Most cyclists do them with support, like roadside stops, and medics and, you know, OTHER PEOPLE. Not this girl.

Covered in a gritty film of 60 SPF sunscreen, industrial-strength insect repellent and dust mingled with sweat, I sat beside the highway and questioned my life choices.

The day had begun with such promise. At 8:00 in the morning I stood outside my house on the Friday after my 33rd birthday, ready to tackle the longest bike ride of my life. My panniers were packed with two bagel sandwiches, four granola bars, three bananas, and a bunch of red grapes. I had a litre and a half of water—not enough, of course, but I planned to stop at gas stations along the way to refill.

My first century ride. I relished the fact that there was a name for this achievement. By day's end, I would join an elite club of cyclists as a… centurion? Centenarian? Maybe there wasn't a name for it, but when I arrived that evening in Falcon Lake, Manitoba, I would have clocked 160 kilometres in one day.

I pedaled with the flow of morning rush-hour traffic and smiled at the poor saps destined for fluorescent-lit cubicles. The sun shone in that gentle, early-June way, and the tiny hairs on my arms turned gold in the soft morning rays. I felt strong; my leg muscles were loose and warm, eager to break free of the stop-start urban rhythm and open up on a long expanse of highway.

That bonhomie carried me past the city limits and down a graham-cracker-yellow country lane that curled like a ribbon through green fields. I hummed contentedly to myself as I joined Highway 1, the paved path that would lead me to Falcon Lake and to glory.

Three hours later, I had yet to pass a gas station, and my water levels were perilously low. It appeared I had overestimated the number of gas stations along Highway 1—there seemed to be none. At all. Not one. Cripes.

Necessity demanded a pit stop in Ste. Anne, Manitoba. A beautiful hamlet, to be sure, but the addition of 10 extra kilometres to my journey irked me. There was no help for it, so I forced a grin and sailed into the Esso station.

Really, it wasn't the worst thing. After my bottles were refilled, I bought two litre-and-a-half jugs of Dasani water. Surely that would be enough to keep hydrated for the remaining 110 kilometres.

One hundred. And ten. Kilometres. Strange how the number, taken from where I sat on a picnic bench behind the Ste. Anne Esso, felt larger than 160 kilometres had seemed when I left home that morning. I mulled this over while I ate the first of my bagel sandwiches and decided it must be a trick of the road, like when the highway seems to glitter with water, only to have it evaporate as you draw near. It sounded far, but it would be over in a blink.

The black flies found me around the same time that the voice of self-doubt caught up with me, which is to say around kilometre 60. Hard to say which was more insidious, though both were inescapable. Dark bodies dive-bombed me like kamikaze pilots, and their incessant drone provided the ideal soundtrack for the voice.

You're not fit enough to do this. Maybe if you were 10 pounds lighter. Arms waving like an inflatable tube man at a car dealership, I flailed around in a vain attempt to dislodge the invaders. They would not be dissuaded. No matter how fast I pedaled, pushing to 25, then 30 kilometres per hour, the relentless villains pursued me through the gauntlet of trees on either side of the highway.

You don't have bug spray. You didn't even bring enough water to keep hydrated. Rookie move. You're unprepared.

I was frustrated to the point of tears when I saw them. They appeared like an oasis in the desert. A highway mirage? Road workers. Four of them, real as the chafing of my bike shorts, wearing dirty jeans, long sleeves, and beekeeper hats with nets to keep the black flies from their faces.

I stopped beside their truck and said, "Looks like you guys have the right idea. The black flies are driving me crazy. Do you have any bug spray I could borrow?"

When they produced a can of OFF! Deep Woods with DEET, I whooped as though they had given me diamonds. I clasped it to my chest and liberally dowsed myself with the stinging mist. Probably it would give me cancer, but at that moment, I would cheerfully have bathed in carcinogens to rid myself of the black flies.

I tried to hand the canister back to them, but one of the men smiled and said, "You keep it. I think you need it more than we do."

Sometimes, angels wear grimy work boots and neon-orange safety vests.

The brief interlude with my roadside saviours had muffled the voice, but in the void left by the black flies, it returned.

Did you see that sign? Eighty kilometres to go, and would you look at those clouds? Storm's rolling in. You're not going to make it. You should give up.

I tried to ignore the sharp pinches of pain in my thighs. Each twinge was like the snap of an elastic band against bare skin, but I was not going to stop. I was going to be a centurion! Or a centenarian …

The wind picked up around the 100th kilometre and the sky was grey and ominous.

The pain in my legs mutated into something ferocious that screamed my name. My fingers ached from gripping the handlebars, and the pinky on my right hand was numb. Dimly, I wondered if it would ever regain feeling. If the searing misery in my legs was any indication, I hoped not.

What are you trying to prove?

The question pricked at me. Would 160 kilometres be far enough to outdistance the feeling that at 33-years-old my best days were already in the rearview? Or would I arrive in Falcon Lake, bitten up by blackflies, with dust in my teeth, only to find the same anxious person I left in Winnipeg?

It was just past 5:00 when I pulled off the highway. To call the sensation in my legs "pain" was laughably insufficient, like saying that an amputation without anesthetic felt "not great." Small burrowing creatures devoured me from the inside out, gnawing through the muscles of my thighs with wicked, pointy teeth and, oh, did I mention the creatures were on fire?

My body was cannibalizing itself. I was out of food. I had a litre of water left and 30 kilometres to go, but I couldn't spend another moment on that bike. The voice was right. I was too unprepared to complete a century ride. Manitoba is a flat province, but in that moment, I knew I was over the hill.

The voice purred with exultation. *It's okay to give up. It's the right thing to do*.

And I almost did. But then I felt it. A familiar tickle, a growing urgency in the bladder. I could scarcely believe it, but there it was: I had to pee.

Under normal circumstances, not a cause for celebration. Sitting on a rock in the ditch on Highway 1, moments from giving in to my whispery-voiced inner demons, it was sheer triumph. I was hydrated enough for my body to produce urine. I had done something right.

I answered the call of nature with gusto, then climbed onto my bicycle like an aging warrior mounting up for one last battle. My legs still burned and raged, but the torment had become familiar. The pain was part of me now, like a parasitic twin. We were indivisible.

The last two hours and 30 kilometres are a blur. There was nothing left but exquisite agony, the grey sky lowering overhead and the wind whistling past my ears. I was empty of thought. The voice was silent.

I rolled to a stop in Falcon Lake just after 7:00. I was covered helmet-to-heel in a slick of DEET, sunscreen and sweat, but I was not the same person I had been when I left Winnipeg. I had pushed beyond the limits of my endurance and, though I was sheet-white and shook with exertion, still I stood on my own two feet. My imperfect body, with its 10 extra pounds, carried me all that way despite the mental and physical abuse I heaped on it. And I kept that body hydrated enough to finish a century ride.

Grace is found in some unlikely places. That day, I found it along a desolate stretch of Highway 1 as I crouched behind a scraggly bush, awed by the realization that my worth does not rest in what I do or how I look, but in who I am when no one is there to see.

And I was a centurion!

… Centenarian?

Wednesday Commute

Cath Nichols

1

I rev hopelessly on the platform: carriage entrance
and ramp too steep. Get out, switch to manual
so the guard can push my wheelchair up.
I tell him *where* to push but he does not listen
and grabs the chair the best he can and shoves.
My power chair is not designed to be pushed–
there are no handles, the seat folds down
with pressure on the back. I hear grating.
This train is too old, the guard admits, and should
be out of service, but the stock gets revived
when other engines fail. My reverse has dwindled
to next to nothing and may be damaged. I am
required to reverse into a designated
safe spot – except on this first train where there is
no designated safe spot.
The Transpennine train is safer, but still my day
compresses from hard to infinitely hard.
The narrow lift in the Parkinson building must be
entered front on and exited in reverse.
No wriggle room whatsoever. I am
eternally slow. Doors shut on me.

2

Chair is fixed! It was only the joystick
crushed into the arm restricting my reverse,
nothing major needing a spare part
(or money spent). I am lucky. Still,
unnecessary stress.
Today, my train is late arriving in Leeds
and the booked taxi did not wait.
I cried.
I have lost my phone and threw myself
on the mercy of a stranger.

3

A woman I see each Wednesday with her toddler, sighs.
'If I know you're going to be here, why don't they?'
The next train's on time; it's my taxi that's late.
He parks at an angle that does not acknowledge
this tarmaced square has kerbs. Why?
Why?! Questions involving taxis, trains, worsening
timetables, the fact I do not even qualify
for a Disabled Person's Railcard ferret through my head.
I wish there were a real, tame ferret sitting
on my lap, soft, content to be.
Stroking lowers stress, apparently.

Tracks

Byron Rempel-Burkholder

A streak runs south to north as straight as a ruler, black as coal, disappearing into the flat horizon. I'm walking in the middle of the line, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch under a sea of cerulean noon sky. Green wheat oceans flank this stripe that never was until some surveyor created it in this last nanosecond of geological history, maybe a 150 years ago, to exercise dominion over the earth.

There are no footprints here except my own. What I see are the caked tread marks of a mega tractor that must have passed through after the last rain, after the sun and wind had dried the Red River gumbo just enough to keep vehicles from becoming hopelessly mired. The moulded interlocking rectangles, now crusted to a crisp, have their own industrial beauty, rolled out by a machine that now sits in a distant Quonset.

The sun, the waving wheat and the fluttering cacophony of a few Sandhill cranes might define this as a nature hike in this vast flat valley, the fertile floor of ancient Lake Agassiz. But there is no escaping that this is something else, more layered, a weaving of melancholy and joy.

I'm a few kilometres north of Niverville, beginning day five of the Crow Wing Trail from Emerson to Winnipeg—a 195-kilometre blip on Canada's 24,000-kilometre Great Trail, a coast-to-coast route for hikers, cyclists, and canoeists. I have chosen to walk, to let the encounter with the soil ferment in my soul, in all directions, in every tense, in each shifting hue. And it has all come down to this: What does one make of the lines, these grids of mile roads and farm tracks built upon the labours of those surveyors? Are they beauty or scourge?

There used to be no straight lines. The Red River Ox Cart Trail, the old name for the Crow Wing, angled crookedly from St. Paul on the Mississippi to Fort Garry on the Red in the early days of white settlement. The rutted tracks divided and reunited, constantly detouring around swamps and beaver dams. They followed the scrub brush eskers ridging the Red River Valley as far as possible, and then angled across the gumbo-soiled prairie to the Red and on up to the Fort, bearing cloth and beads and guns north, and furs and pemmican south.

Those rutted routes have now disappeared under the plows of settlers, the hoofs of cattle, the mile road grid, and now the ever-larger colossi of John Deere on the ever-larger fields worked by ever-smaller teams of farmers. The grid keeps it all neatly efficient, marking territory and facilitating quick transport of grain to elevators, children to hockey, combines to crops.

The Crow Wing honours the legacy of the Red River Ox Cart Trail and intersects with the tiny fragments of the original trail that remain. The path of gravel, dirt, and grass passes along the eastern ridge of the ancient lakebed, through grain fields, and along picturesque banks of the Roseau, Rat and Red Rivers. Anishinaabe elders and cooperative farmers have graciously let hikers use their trails and ATV tracks through pastures and beside ceremonial grounds. There is much to ponder and love.

Even so, the straight lines of human progress are ever present. Day one took me through Fort Dufferin Provincial Park. Here, in the 1860s, the North American Boundary Commission planted its headquarters as it marked out the 49th parallel, the new international border stretching from the Lake of the Woods to the West Coast—one stroke separating two colonizing powers.

Day two began with a 12 kilometre, grass and dirt path east along the border ditch—level as a table, straight as parallels must be. When the elevation was about to tip up toward the ridge, the trail turned north, following the mile roads, occasionally right-angling east and north and west and north again, following the ridge toward St. Malo. The roads straitjacketed the geography. Relief came when the trail would rise 20 to 30 feet in elevation, or begin to curve around, down, and up the Roseau River Gorge, town dykes, or Winnipeg's Red River floodway. Even then, the lines of industrial efficiencies confronted me at every turn.

For instance, the railway that runs from Emerson to Winnipeg. On day four, approaching Otterburne from St. Pierre-Jolys, the sound of a whistle stabbed the quiet expanse of crisp morning air above wheat and canola fields. I jerked my head up from contemplating the gravel at my feet and surveyed the landscape to the west. There, crawling along the horizon, an entire train—distant enough to look like the toy models of my childhood, so loud in the rumble of steel wheels on steel tracks as to seem a block away. I counted more than 100 cars, all in a chain

occupying a foot of my vision, moving north in the obedient service of commerce. Checking my map, I figured it was two kilometres away.

The earth throbbed with energy, the air charged with technological wonders. Something like pride rose in my chest as Gordon Lightfoot's Railway Trilogy echoed from my teenage memories. "We have opened up the soil / With our teardrops and our toil." Look what my ancestors have accomplished! So many miracles since the necessities of the fur trade mothered the invention of the ox cart, whose greaseless wooden wheels also creaked so loudly the sound travelled for miles. A century and a half later, exponentially more goods and services now ran along direct highways of steel, north-south, east-west. Pioneer hardship had given way to convenience, health, opportunity, security.

Accomplishment, yes, but at what cost? In 1871 Treaty One laid the cynical foundation of Indigenous dispossession. Seven years later this stretch of rails from Emerson opened for business, accelerating Canada's western settlement, replacing the sluggish, meandering ox carts and Red River steamers. One hundred forty more years of ever-smoother colonization chugged by.

Anishinaabe nomads, conveniently set aside on the Roseau River reserve, saw cities and towns dot their prairie—Europeans building a country, Indigenous sifting through dumpsters in search of their stolen dignity. The once-ubiquitous tall grass ecosystem dwindled by 99.5 per-cent, museumed in a few isolated, fenced pockets near Stuartburn. And now, lately, among settler and Indigenous alike, an awakening to an urgent need for repair—of the climate, of their relationship, of Mother Earth.

I watched as the train approached the grain elevators of Otterburne, but not stopping that day, apparently packed with goods other than grain for the city just beyond. Two generations ago, trains would have stopped for passengers; today, people travelled at their own convenience in their own cars, on dozens of roads of dirt, gravel, or tarmac that linked farms and villages, towns and cities, straight as an arrow, at a 100 kilometres per hour, not my 33 kilometres a day.

The train was long gone by the time I reached the outskirts of the Otterburne. Then, a rare sight on this trek: another walker. A 50-something man in shorts and tee-shirt appeared on a driveway ahead of me and turned south toward me. He was barefoot.

Hungry for human interaction, I spoke. "Out for a stroll, I see."

"Yup. Morning routine," he said.

"Isn't this hard on your feet?"

"Well, there's something therapeutic about having nothing between the skin of your feet and the earth."

"So cool," I said as we smiled and parted.

I remembered tales of pilgrims walking hundreds of kilometres in their bare feet on Spain's Camino de Santiago. It seemed like cruel penance—or was it a life-giving connection to the earth and to the soul? Either way, the coincidence of this meeting in the wake of the train's passage seemed ordained.

So now, on day five, approaching Winnipeg, the juxtaposition stays with me. Ahead of me, emerging faintly to the north, another wonder of human ingenuity: the even ridge of the Red River Floodway, and beyond it, the tip of the Investors Group field poking the horizon. Beside me, Sandhill cranes screech their awkward calls across the prairie as they have done for centuries, asserting that this is still their home. Other birds loop through the air, going about their avian business and drawing my eyes to the overwhelming sky above it all. Oh yes, the wide, watching sky.

Movement

Jenean McBrearty

During the Great Depression, thousands of young people said good-bye to their families and changed the meaning of home forever. Henceforth, America would all be anomic, looking always at the horizon and asking, "What is beyond?" The exploratory urges of Columbus and the possibility of moving away from that which makes you unhappy, like the Pilgrims, has evolved into perpetual wanderlust, and there were many casualties.

Imperial Valley Slabs

Caleb and Jacob came west with their praying parents in '33.
Caleb barely remembered the family farm, but Jacob
Had seen the green fields turn yellow and choked on dust.
The only green Caleb knew was Valley lettuce, the hay fields,
and the money that changed hands when the hands got paid.
On one of those Fridays, Jacob collected his green and left for Los Angeles,
saying good-bye the night before,
though Caleb didn't know.
He talked about his dreams again,
told Caleb that life's too short
to toil in the sun every-all-day.
"The old man is broken, Caleb. None of us can fix him.
He lost the family legacy to a force no one could fight.
Foreclosure.
It's too much for any man to bear."
Losing Jacob was a bigger hurt, than losing another pair of hands
or even an acre of land.
Caleb no longer had his brother's dream;
he'd have to find one of his own.
Yet, all he knew was desert sky
and had no map to chart the Hollywood stars.

After the war of '41, maybe because there were so many like me, there wasn't room for giant oaks so much as there was room for tumbleweeds. The frontier may have been closed, but the automobile made it possible for me to criss-cross the country. Meeting the ocean only meant it was time to turn around.

Youthful Reflections on the Eternal Past

I live in the world of the old California
of yesterday's music and slang.
I speak a different dialect
I remember sights and smells
of my individuality,
and yearn to meet others who understand
what it means to traverse a landscape
where everyone is from somewhere else,
and feeling the endlessness of the universe
painted in rust, red, and sage,
sharing the details of life before age:

Old Spice aftershave
English Leather cologne
Duck tails and pompadours
Cheaters and Cuban boots
Patchouli and sandalwood
Green apple splash and Cashmere Bouquet
Petti-pants and pleated skirts
And a blue Chevy Malibu meeting
An old white Impala at a drive-in movie
Dancing that fueled passion
Coke and Winston cigarettes
And a busted condom that killed my dreams

I drive north on the Coastal Highway,
up the middle to Bakersfield
east to El Centro,
There's nothing like laying "tunes"
and just driving
through the desert space oddity that was cruisin'
with Mary Wells in the Mojave,
learning survival skills
and to this day I go nowhere
without plenty of water.

For Boomers, disaster struck in '87. Mired in the expectations of the young about what parents were supposed to be like, free spirits had become passé. Economic security outweighed curiosity. Love meant willingness to attend PTA meetings, coping with other people's adolescence. Adventure disappeared. I was nostalgia. And I raged against the inevitable.

Chasing Childhood

No, no....stave the coming illness of age,
the dreaded adulthood that casts a pall over delight
and the newness of things and senses,
that settles into the familiar safety of routine and keeps us from testing our wings
because we know they cannot fly.
Memories ache and we yawn,
bored with wisdom and longing for a desert dawn.
Let us keep childhood as long as we can,
like Christmas that we pretend is every day in our hearts,
for all too soon we will hang on our cactus and die.

Eventually, age demands I stay put. Limitations finally intrude on the sense of future tense. I woke up one day and realized that it's not energy and unwrinkled skin I miss. It's what I find beautiful that I cannot capture that causes me regret. Now my poetry rhymes.

Honest Ode to the Desert

I think that I will never see
the beauty of a Joshua tree
in southern states where magnolia grow,
tobacco and corn, row on row.
Prisoner am I, of Kentucky green
where tumbleweeds are never seen,
where winter white covers all,
each breath reveals the freezing pall,
gray skies birthing daily dread,
makes you think you'd rather be dead
than spend another day confined
in landscapes mapled, dogwooded, pined;
nice place to visit, I agree,
but I'd rather be where I feel free
to breathe the air and roam the land
vast enough to shake God's hand.

Henderson Hwy Blues

Emma Durand-Wood

On Henderson, I can't hear my children speak. I hear the high notes of their voices, I see their mouths moving and their young faces tilted upwards towards me, but I can't understand what they're saying. The noise from the traffic is too loud. We just keep going until we reach our destination, and exchange our words when we arrive.

It is our neighbourhood high street, the place we come to visit the optometrist or massage therapist, to buy stamps or grab a burger, get a haircut or go to dance class. There could always be more, but really, there's a decent number of useful, everyday stores and services on our little stretch of south Henderson Hwy. It's a remarkable feat when you consider that this highway is configured for driving through, not coming to, this place.

Often when we're on Henderson it's because we are waiting to catch a bus. We do this more often now that our family doesn't own a car anymore. It's a long story why, but for a variety of reasons we found ourselves driving less and less and living more and more locally, to the point where we decided we would try living without owning a vehicle. Our family of five (three kids, nine and under) has lived a "car-lite" life for more than a year now, survived one Winnipeg winter and find ourselves in the midst of another. It can be done. Obviously. We are doing this by choice; the only other person in our circle of family and friends who doesn't own a car is my great-grandma who is well into her eighties. She recently retired her Smart car and is tickled that we have car-free status in common.

For the most part, living without car ownership has been pretty straightforward. Logistically, it sometimes presents challenges, most of which could be significantly mitigated by having access to a co-op car. There isn't one in our neighbourhood (yet), so we sometimes get a car from the rental place up the street and that works out pretty well.

On the balance of things, not owning a car has been a positive, or at least, just the new normal in our lives. It has made me more mindful of my shopping and consumer habits, and helps me value my time more. We're saving a not-insignificant amount of money. We do a lot more

walking, biking and public transit, which is good for our health and good for the planet.

The biggest downside to this whole open-ended experiment is not actually anything to do with the car, it's that my eyes are now wide-open to the built environment and all the ways it discourages those who move throughout the city *outside of* a vehicle. Now that I've seen the city through that lens, I can't un-see it. I can't go back. And the place that it feels the worst, like the biggest betrayal, is a place I spend a lot of time: Henderson Hwy.

***

Walking along the tree-lined residential streets inside our little neighbourhood, it's hard not to be in a good mood. We've lived here for a little over a decade and know a lot of people here now; it's rare not to bump into someone we know, or at least recognize a familiar face while on the way to the park or to a friend or family member's house. We're not dog people, but I'm grateful for the multitude of neighbours who are: their routine walks bring more eyes on the street, and more opportunities for those mood-boosting chance encounters. Deep boulevards separate small front yards from the road and our children play with the neighbour kids and grandkids, floating from one front yard to another, building giant snow slides in winter and having bike and scooter races in the summer. The rhythms of the neighbourhood are comforting, too. Steady streams of people heading towards or away from Henderson at the start or end of the day. Packs of kids walking to and from school morning, noon and afternoon. The student patrols and the adult crossing guard on Hespeler. Even the inevitable street parking pinch on Thursday nights when folks come from around the city to the coffeehouse music night at the church. The predictability of all these waves of movement remind me of all the people that live in and come to this place, and how we notice each other, how we're each other's keepers.

Inside the neighbourhood, it is so pleasurable to be out and about on foot or on bicycle. In the shady windbreak of the elm canopy, hearing the bells from the cathedral from across the river, the happy chance to run into a friend or acquaintance and pause for a conversation—often the mundane act of walking becomes something interesting and uplifting.

But to venture to the edge, to Henderson, all of that pleasure is instantly stripped away. Often on the way to the bus I'll listen to a podcast, and the second I round the corner off my street and onto the highway, I have to turn the volume in my earbuds to 100%—and I'll still struggle to hear. The kids and I once happened to cross paths with my brother-in-law and his family on Henderson. We stopped to say hello, the young cousins delighted at the surprise encounter. But once we'd shouted our initial greetings, we realized conversation was futile. We mimed exaggerated shrugs—"what can you do??"—and continued on our way. No place for a conversation—or for restless children.

On Henderson, it's every man for himself.

***

We hear it all the time:

Sitting is the new smoking.

Kids don't get enough physical activity or time outdoors.

Just get up and go for a walk!

Get on that bike!

If you won't do it for the environment, do it for your health.

And here we are, doing just that. But if these things are supposed to be so good—for our bodies and our wallets and the city and the planet—why don't they feel better than they do? If we want more people walking and biking and taking transit, which we say we do, if these are desirable behaviours in the midst of public health, climate and municipal finance crises, then why isn't the city doing anything to make its built environment less hostile, less dangerous and less unpleasant?

When tempted by the idea of owning a car again, I remind myself that the places that bother me most are so close to home that I would never drive to them. Getting a car doesn't solve the problem.

***

We cross Henderson at Johnson, seven lanes wide. First we wait for what feels like an eternity for our walk signal, then get our 20 seconds of opportunity to cross. Even though we have the green light and walk signal, I check the lanes frequently, making sure approaching vehicles are actually going to stop at the red. Then I have to watch the cars turning against us to make sure they see us and yield to us. I know I must look like a lunatic, keeping exaggerated tabs on our surroundings, but I can't not. "Let's go! Come on! Hurry up!" I bark at the kids, hating myself for it, but that countdown goes so quickly. My two-year-old would love to be walking on her own instead of strapped into a stroller, but there's not a chance I'm going to let that happen on Henderson for a good while yet.

Sometimes rather than waiting at the intersection, we walk a block over and cross on demand at a pedestrian corridor. Hit the button and try to confirm that it has triggered the flashing lights. We can't really see the flashing lights from our position and angle at the curb, especially when the sun is glaring down at them, and we often can't hear the rapid beeping either; the traffic is that loud. We wait on the corner to make sure the cars in the first two lanes stop, then carefully make our way into the intersection. Reach the median, then repeat to get to the other side. *Breathe.*

Just yesterday a pickup truck barrelled through the flashing lights in the third lane, closest to the median. My husband and kids were already crossing and would have been hit if they weren't watching that lane carefully. We witnessed the same thing happen last summer, a car that didn't stop at the flashing lights, despite having ample warning. The driver slammed on the brakes as he nearly hit a kid on a bike, just metres from us on the sidewalk.

I see vehicles blow through activated pedestrian corridors on Henderson regularly. I don't know whether the drivers aren't paying attention, or just don't care. I have no idea how old my kids will be before I am comfortable letting them cross there on their own.

I'm thinking constantly of Surafiel and Galila, two children who were killed in crosswalks here in Winnipeg over the last three years. I didn't know them, I've never met their families, but their stories haunt me. If them, why not my children? Why not me?

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You really don't understand how safe or unsafe a street feels until you walk alongside it with young children.

We wait for the bus as cars and trucks whip past us at 60 km/h. The kids know not to go onto the street, but still, I'm always telling them to step back. In winter when piled up snow and ice are utterly irresistible for climbing, I'm especially nervous. I worry constantly that someone will slip and fall onto the roadway. Even looking at the schedule mounted on the bus stop sign feels too close to traffic.

We are sandwiched in the clear zone, the designated "recovery area" for cars to regain control if they must leave the roadway, an area in which ideally there are no fixed objects. If this road was being designed today, the buildings would probably be set further back to allow a sufficient clear zone, but grandfathered in, the sidewalk with humans on it takes its place. No wonder I'm always on edge.

Although we're crammed, we're also exposed. If we're lucky, there's a crumbling bench to sit on while we wait for the bus or a doorway in which to get a little shelter from the sun or wind. There are a few trees left in the centre median, but none lining the sidewalks. An urban forester told me that it's almost impossible to get new trees to grow alongside major streets because the de-icing salt is so harsh.

The sidewalks on Henderson are an okay width and have a sort of line running down the middle of them. Instinctively I make the kids walk between the line and the buildings, rather than the line and the road. In commiserating about how awful Henderson is with other neighbourhood parents, I discover they do the same thing.

If we're going more than a block or two, often we'll just take the alley that runs parallel, rather than walk on Henderson. It's quieter, that's the main thing. The kids are always finding gross treasures in drifts of litter. We have to stay in a tight pack; no stragglers allowed. Cars deke out of the back lanes too quickly and I find myself giving lectures on blind corners. What a childhood we are giving them.

Still.

Is it better than a childhood being shuttled everywhere inside a vehicle, which is statistically the most dangerous place for children to be? Spewing carbon into the environment?

That's the question I wrestle with every time we venture onto Henderson on foot. Are we foolishly brave for choosing a life on foot? Or bravely foolish? Is it rich, precious, martyr-y to be writing an essay about the trials and tribulations of living car-free by choice when for so many families it isn't a choice, it's a financial reality?

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We are walking to dance class on Henderson, a quick five minute stroll from home, and the kids are asking questions, wanting to continue the conversation we started before we got to the highway. For the umpteenth time, I lean down and say as loudly as I can, "Love, I can't hear you. I'm sorry. Just wait until we get inside." I find myself thinking, "This is insane. Why are we doing this? Who are we doing this for? Who in their right mind signs up for this?"

Do the parents who park in the lot behind the studio have these thoughts?

But of course, it's this, or drive somewhere else. We would never drive two blocks away for dance class. So it's this reality, these conditions I can't un-experience, this bleak and hostile high street that we're trying to support, trying to keep businesses alive on, desperately trying to embrace. So why do I feel like a glutton for punishment? When you have a car, you can go anywhere. And so usually, you do.

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South Henderson has so much potential. It's got amazing bones: lots of modestly-sized storefronts close to the street, relatively few surface lots, parks and buildings both historic and new. It wouldn't take much to make it a great street; that's what is so discouraging.

Once while admiring the new protected bike lanes in the Exchange, my son looked around and remarked wistfully, "I wish our neighbourhood was like this." I asked him what he liked about it. He noted that there were not that many cars, and the streets weren't so noisy and they were short to cross. Lots of trees. And of course, the bike lanes.

"I do too," I told him, "I really do."

The Dancer

Laura White

The dancer bends, the dancer leans
The dancer bleeds behind the scenes
On pins and needles, shards of glass
The dancer turns on toes of brass

Emboldened bones, on golden pointe
The sprightly dancer does anoint
The hallowed stage with wordless prose
A flowing fable; bloodied toes

That do suspend the tired limbs
The heavy shoulders, the airy whims
Held hostage by melodic cage
Til time has come to disengage

The final note, the curtain falls
The claps that shake the dusty walls
Aroused from heavy reverie
The dancer breathing heavily

Praises sung, the masses leave
Into the black and navy eve
And left alone under the beams
The dancer bleeds, the dancer dreams

Double Blades?… Well Maybe

Yvonne Kyle

I have always been leery of kayaks. A near-drowning incident when I was a child—I had to be resuscitated and was likely only a minute or two from not surviving—left me with an intense phobia of being underwater. I am an active member of the local paddling community, so I know lots of kayakers—'double-bladers,' we canoeists call them. Most of them are folks who chase the adrenaline rush of charging through rapids, dropping over waterfalls, and squeezing through seemingly impassible river gulches, all of which has the frequent consequence of capsizing the boat. While I recognize the tremendous skills river kayakers demonstrate, both in the way they successfully negotiate difficult waterways, and in their ability to safely right themselves when things go awry, it strikes me that they spend far too much time submerged beneath upside-down boats, and I don't want to be there. Despite thousands of kilometres under the keel of my canoe, I have never seen anything about kayaks that might be construed as alluring. Terrifying? Yup. Insane? Definitely. After all, why would anyone of sound mind subject themselves to the risks double-bladers accept? Tempting? No way.

Enter the Park Project. My bucket list includes a visit to all 47 of Canada's national parks. About a third of our country's most treasured natural spaces are on or near oceans or the Great Lakes. As I perused brochures, photographs, and trip logs of the places I want to spent the next 20 years exploring, it became increasingly obvious that to do the Park Project properly, I would have to suck it up and get into a kayak. I couldn't get to some places any other way. So, I took the plunge, figuratively speaking. I contacted an outfitter and arranged for my first kayak expedition, a four day sojourn in the Broken Group Islands, one of the three units that comprise Pacific Rim National Park on the west coast of Vancouver Island. I've heard since that many serious sea kayakers consider the Broken Group as a kayaking Mecca, a dream destination they include on their own bucket lists.

With the trip booked, and the non-refundable credit card transaction complete, there was no turning back. Now I needed a kayak. The play

boats that I had watched river kayakers flip over in so many times were not the same as the sea kayaks we would need for this adventure. Our outfitter offered two boat options, both longer, narrower, and more inclined to move in straight lines than their river-travelling cousins. The double version, with its larger hull and space for two paddlers, would be more stable, certainly a desirable feature for a nervous first-timer. Even so, my husband and I opted for single-seaters. He wasn't much enamored with kayaks either—a tighter space than he'd have in his canoe made him uncomfortable—and single boats meant we could both face our personal demons without the constant worry about how our partner was coping. Three other couples in our trip group opted to share their boats, while our erstwhile guides, Angela and Phil, and the fifth couple were paddling solo.

The outfitter provided a water taxi to transport kayaks, paddlers, and a mountain of gear from the small town of Ucluelet across Barklay Sound to Dodd Island, our party's introduction to the Broken Group. Here we learned that a kayak trippers' first challenge was to get all that gear into our boats. This is a simple task in a canoe. With 16 or so feet of space, fitting in tents, cooking pots, personal items, and even the dog, is rarely difficult. But kayaks only have small hatches in the bow and stern for storage. It was a game of Tetris stuffing all our swag into the single hatch allocated to each of us. Angela and Phil used the remaining hatches to stow our food, water, and community equipment.

With the load secured, there could be no more delays or excuses. It was time to go kayaking. With the support of a stabili-buddy holding my kayak in the upright position, I managed to get into the boat while remaining out of the water. So far, so good. Much to my surprise, I felt fairly stable, even after my stabili-buddy set me loose. Still, I was sitting awfully close to the water and the risk of slipping below seemed far too real.

Like me, most of my trip-mates had limited kayaking experience, and Angela patiently steered us through the basics of how to kayak, hold the paddle properly, position our bodies, and use the rudder. There would have been merit in me taking a course to learn these skills before I left home, but the syllabi for available courses in my hometown all mentioned learning to roll the boat. That meant being under water. The course didn't happen.

Once we'd had an opportunity to get our sea legs, we set out to do some exploring. Many of the islands in the Broken Group are small, just a few hundred metres or less across, with rugged shorelines littered with massive driftwood logs, and covered in colourful shells and naturally polished rocks. Pebble beaches separate the sea from the old-growth forests that cover the larger islands. Crossing clear waters near the shore, I watched the variously-coloured starfish, clams, and an occasional fish beneath my kayak, and I marvelled, as I do with every national park I visit, at the stunningly beautiful country I live in. Alongside my appreciation for the place where I was travelling, grew an unexpected easiness with the kayak I was using to explore it. No bad things were happening, and it occurred to me that this beast I was riding on was maybe not so scary after all.

For the first night we camped on Clark Island, sharing our site with half a dozen other travellers. A fearless deer and some banana slugs joined us as well. Phil prepared a scrumptious salmon dinner and we spent a pleasant evening relaxing on the rocks and enjoying the view. The conversation focused on the topics people getting to know each other are wont to choose—family, work places, past adventures and future ones.

The next morning the marine weather forecast was calling for heavy winds. Our guides suggested a short paddling day; we would check out the waters around nearby, well-protected islands, then do some land-based exploring before returning to Clark Island for a second night. Early in the day, while the winds were noticeable but still light, we paddled around a long rocky point with waves crashing against the shore. The pronounced ocean swells were certainly not as relaxing to paddle on as the previous day's calm flat waters. We would lose sight of each other as one boat rode the top of a wave and another dropped to the bottom of the next one. Coupled with a broadside breeze that had my kayak rocking from side to side, the wave action made for some nerve-wracking paddling for rookie me, and it tested my tentative belief that I might actually succeed in keeping the boat top-up.

By lunch time the forecast had changed with lighter winds now expected all day. We limited our on-shore adventuring to a short visit to the remains of a Tseshaht village. None of the Broken Group Islands are currently occupied, but there is a long history of habitation by the

Tseshaht people, as well as a shorter European presence, making the cultural experience of the islands —from the midden dumps where lush green grass grows on the fertile remains of oyster shells and meat bones left behind by ancient inhabitants, to the dilapidated chimney that was once the heart of a brothel—as intriguing as the landscape.

Back on the water I was feeling increasingly comfortable in my kayak, though I was a long way from competent and still needed lots of coaching to get where I wanted to go. We paddled around a few more islands, enjoying the scenery and the conversation with our trip-mates before heading back towards Clark Island and our campsite.

As it turned out, the original wind forecast was more correct than the revised one and we had to make a two kilometre open crossing directly into a 20 gust, 30 knot headwind. To make things worse, the fog rolled in, and we could no longer see our destination. What was I doing in the middle of the ocean in a hurricane? My own sanity was now suspect. How could I have ever thought I could do this kayaking thing?

A head wind is indeed a fear-inducing tough slog, but it was while making the crossing that I realized the biggest difference between the sea kayak I was getting to know and the river kayaks I had always so dreaded. My boat was designed to do exactly what it was doing—cutting through waves in open waters. It wanted to stay upright as much as I wanted it to.

The fog lifted as we neared our campsite. I was exhausted, but resting before reaching shore would mean being blown back and having to do it all again. So I powered up the jets and sprinted the last 200 metres to get myself out of the wind ahead of the rest of the group. As we lifted our kayaks above the tide line, Angela admitted that our crossing was certainly more than they would normally ask of rookies and was, in fact, not far from the limit for experienced paddlers. A teeny bit of pride in the accomplishment pushed my ever-present, but receding, fear further into the background.

We all found dry clothes and spread out across the beach for a rest and some hot chocolate. While we were relaxing, three other kayakers left Clark Island. Sadly, the young men were quite drunk. We watched as one of them was blown down-wind, one disappeared behind an island, and one capsized, then drifted out of sight. Angela headed back onto

the water while Phil contacted the coast guard. We couldn't see all that was happening, but when Angela returned she reported that while she was dragging the boater we'd seen to safety, the Tseshaht patrol had rescued a second capsized paddler. When the coast guard arrived, they picked up all three men and escorted them directly to jail, charged with impaired boating. We on the shore were glad that even in their drunkenness, the three had donned their life jackets. The story would have ended differently had they not done so.

The last two days of our trip were without high drama. The weather was glorious–clear, calm, and warm. We visited the Tiny Group, an aptly-named collection of rock islands surrounded by clear shallow water —the part of the Broken Group that I liked best. We watched the full moon rise over the ocean, waded our boats several hundred metres across a shallow sand bar, and paddled through a herd of seals whose heads popped up and down like a Whack-a-Mole game, before we finally pulled out our kayaks at Secret Beach and headed back to Uclulet.

My kayak and I became pretty good friends. By the end of the trip, I had managed a couple of entries and exits without a stabili-buddy. They were not graceful, but I stayed dry. Angela's paddling tips improved my efficiency, which also boosted my confidence. She almost convinced me that with a bit more practice, I could handle Park Project kayaking sojourns in the high Arctic.

I'm not totally sold. I saw that capsized guy, and it took a long time before he came out from under his over-turned boat. Sure, he was totally hammered. But if my boat was upside down, I'd be terrified, and probably wouldn't be able to think any more clearly than he could.

It was a good trip, and I'm willing to entertain the thought of more double-bladed adventures.

At least I think I am.

Imagine ...Memories of a Child

Izzeddin Hawamda

Today, I will drive from Nablus to Haifa. I will get a rental car and plan out my road trip with precision. I will have a good idea of when I will be arriving in Haifa. I can do that now because the checkpoints are removed from the West Bank. I won't be stopped at five different checkpoints, only to get to the sixth one only to be told to go back because I don't have the proper permits to enter Israel.

Today, I am going to go for a bike ride, I will be using the alternative mountain highway. Until now, Palestinians have not been allowed to use theses designated 'settlers highways.' But today, I will bike up and down the hilly roads. I will greet every tree, have tea with every cloud, and touch the face of the soil.

Today, I will take a long walk up to my grandparents' land that we haven't seen since '67. There used to be a settlement on our land but with the removal of the barriers, I am free to visit. Today, I will plant a lemon tree and an olive tree. I will sing the song of sage!

Today, I will visit Jerusalem, I will start with the west side of the city. For over forty years Arabs have not been allowed to enter this quarter of the city. But today, Jerusalem is just Jerusalem. I will have a meal, preferably shakshuka, with a Westerner, a Jew and a grandmother.

Today, I will swim in the Dead Sea and I won't notice any flags or signs indicating where the Arab or the Jewish beaches are. I will swim freely, anywhere the current takes me. I will write my name on the face of the sand and share a secret with the sun.

Today, I will go to a Hebrew class at a local Palestinian university. Until now, Hebrew wasn't allowed to be taught in Palestinian schools, despite the similarities between Arabic and Hebrew. I will learn to write a memoir about the face of this land. I will write it in Arabic and Hebrew so the world can see how the damask rose blossoms into a bridge between our worlds.

Today, I will travel freely from my city to another, I won't need to carry my green Palestinian ID with me as I have before. I will travel freely. I

will greet the mountain side and write poems on the shadows of the tall pines. I will look for an old brick home and open its window, inviting the sun to enter, warming up the old walls of the house. I will ignite my feelings in a broken rose so the word 'Salam' can be served from its leaves, so a bird can come and transfer pieces of my story all around the world.

Today, I will spend time at the wall. Oh, the wall! It has stood as the barrier between me and the sun! Today, I will open a thousand windows in the wall. I will paint each window with a different colour: green for the tall grass, yellow for the saffron, and red for blood as it flows through my veins. I will feel my heart merge with the Mediterranean Sea, solidifying that we are the 'Ramush Aleayan,'[1] the protectors of Palestine. That we are one.

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[1] In Arabic the literal meaning of the word رموش العين (Ramush Aleayn) is eyelashes. Despite being delicate, the eyelashes stand together to protect the eye.

The Climb

Kevin Strong

I'm gonna do it.

I know it's crazy, but I'm gonna climb that mountain.

It's not a real 'mountain' with glaciers and a tree line. I won't need climbing gear or a Sherpa to reach the top, but it's still a mountain. Even compared to the mountains that surround it, it seems more of a big hill, but it's big enough for me. I come from the Canadian Prairies, where a garbage heap with grass growing on top is a mountain to us. I've flown south across the border on a business trip and I want a little adventure.

Yes, this is a mountain perfect for someone like me; someone who is middle-aged and out of shape.

Am I really middle-aged? Already?

I always thought middle-age started in your late thirties and I'm closing in on 40.

I'm always trying to prove something to myself, but constantly over-estimating my abilities and limitations.

Even finding the path entrance is difficult as I troll around in my rental car. I pull over to ask some teenagers for directions and they tell me that I can probably find the trail up a nondescript residential street. Since they live here, I wonder why they don't know for sure because this mountain is staring every resident in the face every day. They are kind of laughing as they tell me, and I'm not sure if it's because they think I'm stupid to climb the mountain at this time of day or at my age or in my physical condition. Maybe it's because they are giving me the wrong directions on purpose.

I drive until I see the side of the mountain and I park my temporary white gas-guzzler on the side of the street close to a path into the bushes. I pause before getting out to consider whether I am really prepared for this or not. I'm wearing jeans, a sweatshirt and runners meant for fashion (not for running). I'm alone and I don't really know what to

expect. No one even knows I am here.

Who cares? What am I afraid of?

Just do it.

I stick my cell phone in my pocket just in case.

Table Mountain still looks cool, but it appears far more imposing up close. It has a round, flat top surrounded by sheer cliffs. It reminds me of a larger version of the hoodoos in Drumheller or the rocky pillars you see in movies set in New Mexico or Nevada deserts.

The blue sky is dotted with a few clouds. It's late autumn, so it is a bit chilly and the sparse bushes are dry and yellow like tumbleweeds. Actually, the bushes probably always look like that because this is a high elevation desert that gets almost no precipitation.

It's around 4:30 pm, so it should get dark soon. A co-worker told me that the hike takes around 20, 30 minutes each way so I convince myself that it should be okay. Again, I make a mental note that there is no one visible on the path or on the mountain. A dog in a nearby yard barks at me as if to tell me, "Stay away, you fool" or "Beware." I wonder if there are any wild animals up there. So many things could go wrong.

Who cares? Am I a big baby or a man?

Go for it!

The first steps are easy. I enter a two-foot wide path made by thousands of feet before mine. The path is made from crushed dark red rock. A nearby sign tells me that the rock is from a volcano erupting millions of years ago.

Oh, shit. Are my expensive runners going to be ruined by the red dust?

I walk on. There is a slight upward gradient, but easy enough to manage.

As I walk I wonder if the cell phone battery is very low. I can't remember for sure, but I think I would have enough power to make one last phone call if needed to 911 or even another call to my family to say good-bye as I lay dying.

I've done crazy shit like this before. Like the time I went skiing down a double black diamond ski run at breakneck speed, while extremely

fatigued at the end of my first day ever skiing, and could have broken my neck. Or the time I went hiking alone in the mountains near Kananaskis, Alberta in a deserted area where I could have been attacked by a cougar or eaten by a bear. I think we've all had that dream where we die from some totally avoidable situation and as we die we wonder, *how stupid of me,* and *what a waste*. I hope this journey doesn't end that way.

Oh, well. I've started, so I may as well go on.

As I walk on, the slope gets steeper and the path crisscrosses horizontally across the mountain. The path gets narrower and at certain junctions I am not sure which way represents the safe beginner's path. I see some obvious short cuts to save hundreds of metres of walking side to side, but my legs are starting to get tired and I don't want to climb a steeper incline, so I stay on the widest path. Two roads diverged on a hill, and I—took the one more travelled by (as usual).

Why must I walk so far in the opposite direction from my ultimate destination? Am I even on the right path? Get real. What else would people climb up a mountain to see?

After 10 minutes, my breathing is getting heavy and I begin to sweat.

Already? I am in worse physical shape than I thought. Take deep breaths.

Maybe there is less oxygen in the thinner air at this elevation. I'm used to being 800 feet above sea level, but I am now more than a mile high.

My feet begin to drag and I trip over a few large rocks on the path. I am so lazy that I don't even try to step over those rocks anymore; I just walk around them. I have to keep my eyes on the path now. I can't even enjoy the surroundings anymore.

Soon, I'm really panting like a dog in the sun and I can feel my heart pounding as if it wants to leap out of my chest.

What if I have a heart attack? Will I have the strength to call 911 or will the next hiker find my corpse?

Maybe this wasn't such a good idea. They always tell you to consult a doctor before starting an exercise program and I haven't been to a doctor in years.

I look back at the miniature model of the rental car. I am one-third of

the way up and it already seems so far below. I see two people walking near the car and I hope that they are going to climb up after me. At least then, if I have a heart attack or slip and break my ankle or back, I can call out to them and they'll find me quickly. That is all the reinforcement that my will needed. If they can do it, so can I.

I move forward; one foot after the other.

Keep on trucking.

This is way harder than a step machine or inclined treadmill at the gym, but at least I am breathing fresh air and there's a breeze to cool me down. Well, the air is fresh except for the smell of malt in the air from the brewery below.

I'm almost halfway up and I see a small bench and a sign telling me that I am leaving the "open recreation area." Now, I take a seat so that my shaking legs can rest while my speeding heart slows down. However, from this point forward it is clear that I am proceeding at my own risk.

It's getting a bit colder and darker and I will have to hurry if I want to get to the top and down again safely. After a few heavenly minutes, I decide to move on.

I plod up the narrowing path and come to some areas that are slippery and hard to ascend because of steeper angles combined with loose dust and rocks. I guess it's time to get my hands dirty and climb like a gorilla on all fours.

I climb up some walls through a narrow crevasse and I am surprised at how easily I handle this tough part of my journey. I never was good at rock climbing on those rock climbing walls, maybe because the harness removes the risk and prevents the adrenaline and survival instinct from kicking in.

I finally reach the top only to find that I am still 700 metres away from the peak, so I walk on. There are many paths that seem to lead to the summit, so I scan them to find the one that seems to be the least distance and effort. My second wind has come and I march on at a nice pace.

Near the peak, someone has been nice enough to install concrete steps leading to the summit. The summit has a flat top and it looks like a giant helicopter pad. As I am about to climb the steps, one of the other

hikers jogs past me to the top with little effort and no sweat. I wish that I was in that kind of shape. Oh, well. At least I made it. His goals and expectations are a little higher than mine. I theorize that he may have taken a much easier route up an access road on another side of the mountain, but it's probably wishful thinking.

I make quick work of the steps too. At the top there is nothing. No signs, benches, drink machines, or garbage cans. It looks like the inside of a volcano. All I see is dusty red sand. There are no plants and there are even a few mini-craters scattered around.

I wander dangerously close to the edge to peer down. A strong gust of wind blows hard enough to move my considerable mass, but thankfully it blows me back and not forward. My sanity returns and I crawl to the edge and lie on my stomach to look down the steep, high cliff. I realize that a fall would have been fatal (and still would be), so I back up five feet from the edge and survey the small, charming town below. A few lights are on and the people in tiny cars are heading home from work for a nice dinner.

Unfortunately, there is not much of a sunset to view with all the mountains around getting in the way.

Hey, look at me.

I wave my arms wildly in the air in case anyone below is looking at the peak at this exact moment. I am certain that lots of people are looking because I have looked at the peak many times myself in the past few days and I have seen people at the top. I wanted to feel what they felt and now I am here. I feel tired. I feel proud, but lucky to be uninjured. I breathe deeply and look at the surrounding mountains. I finally allow myself to feel a tiny bit of exhilaration, but I quickly wonder how I am going to get back down. I think about my life and how lucky I am to have a good job and a wonderful, loving family. I can't wait to get home and see my beautiful wife and two precious, amazing kids. My business travelling is never easy on any of us.

I feel gratitude to my parents for helping me become the person I am, and make a mental note to visit them when I get home. Sometimes life gets in the way of cherished relationships.

I ponder the symbolism of this climb and the steps along the way.

At what stage of this journey is my life? Am I just starting out, with little idea of what lies in front of me? Am I still climbing and striving and looking for ways to reach the summit of my career, my personal interests, my family and my marriage? Am I "over the hill?" What parts of my life have plateaued with nowhere to go but down? Once I peak in various aspects of my life, will the descent be slow and easy or hard, fast and painful? Do I always take what appears to be the easiest path? What risks would I take to reach a higher summit? Do I have the energy and ambition?

It is now much colder and windier. It is starting to get dark, so the treacherous parts of the path will be hard to see. In my fatigued state, I can easily misstep and go for a tumble.

I sit for a few minutes more and decide it is time to go. I wish I could leave a mark behind to prove that I was here. I don't want to desecrate such a natural beauty by carving my initials in the rocks, so I go on my cell phone and update my Facebook status to tell the world that I am at the top of a mountain. I casually notice that the battery is almost half full, which removes one of my worries. Then, I simply get up and walk down the stairs.

The second hiker is now arriving and both of them are at the top. It's weird, but I thought they'd acknowledge me or say "hi." I am sure that they do this simple climb every day for exercise, which I admire. I wonder if they feel exhilaration or gratitude for being unhurt as I did. Probably not.

I am a bit worried about my descent, so I walk close to the edge to try to find a shortcut down. Down is supposed to be easier than up, right? What goes up must come down and all that. I see several paths leading over the edge.

I explore one of them, the apparent lesser of several evils. I even climb down a small ten foot cliff to a narrow ledge. I peek over the edge and see a sheer wall at least 30 feet high. I can't imagine how anyone could climb up or down without proper rock-climbing gear. I am in a hurry and I foolishly think I can keep going down.

Why not? Others surely have done it. I've gone this far. Go down or go up? Down or up?

I shimmy down the ledge to try to find an easier way to climb back up to where I started 10 feet above me. That tells you a bit about me. I am

glad to see a few rocks to grab and use as footholds. I hug the rock close to my body and climb slowly and carefully because I worry that I don't have the skill or strength to climb back up, and I know that if I fall I will break something. In my mind I constantly replay a movie clip of me falling and breaking different parts of my body. It's not like my whole life flashes in front of my eyes, but I have visions of my wife and kids during some good times back home. Motivation. My laziness and rush to get down has put me in real danger. After a few exacerbating slips, I get to the top. I feel happy, but also tired from the stress and exertion.

I walk a bit further and try another shortcut with similar results. I shake my head and laugh out loud at how stupid I am being. I am being too risky. I don't have a harness to protect me.

How much time have I already wasted on these deadly dead ends? How much time in my life has been spent exploring dead ends and making and correcting wrong decisions?

I don't exactly remember how I got up here in the first place. I follow the edge until I see a familiar crevasse. This terrain looks harder to descend than climb. I slip on some loose rocks and fall back on my keester, which is much better than rolling down the slope. The next time I slip and fall, I reach back to break my fall only to grab small cactus plants with both hands. *Ouch!* I take a few minutes to pluck out the needles, but I can't get them all.

Going down is not as easy as I thought, so I slide most of the way on my ass. I know it is degrading and nothing to be proud of, but it is safer, especially now that it has rapidly become dark.

I get more confident with my footing as I get closer to the bottom and I actually jog down in places. I take many of the shortcuts down that I was too lazy to take on the way up.

The dog barks nearby as if to say "welcome home, you ignorant fool."

Funny. I feel just as much exhilaration knowing I am safely at the bottom as I felt at the summit. There has got to be a guardian angel watching over me. The mini-mountain must have been in a good mood today.

I get in the car and drive away none the wiser. I think I'll have Mexican food with a nice green chili sauce for dinner.

Walking

Laura McMaster

Shall I walk? Move through space mechanically, ordinarily, boringly?
No, a hike. Determinedly, ruggedly, with only the best of equipment.

Perhaps a stroll? A lazy, slow, directionless stroll? Would you like
to hold my hand? Or a ramble, my feet create rhythm, a sprinkle of
purpose.

Not a trudge, my boots caked with mud, heavy and slow.
Nor a tramp, dark and lonely, with no home to go.

I suppose I might traipse, temporary, a log in my way.
Am I jaunty enough to jaunt, smiling, a hat on my head?

I don't step. It's a process, not a series of bits.
Nor pace, the stress, it's over and over.

I will tread, but lightly.
Ambling could serve on those certain hot days.

A saunter is almost a swagger, don't you think? Me, swagger?
Not all those who wander are lost, but still, let's be going somewhere.

A trek is too much for me. Up mountains, through snow?
A tour I could do, circling round to finish again.

Will I roam instead? Searching with purpose?
I could rove, set off at random, romance.

Call it what you will.
The mind is a landscape of sorts. Walking – it crosses my mind[1].

[1]After a quotation by Rebecca Solnits: "the mind is also a landscape of sorts and that walking is one way to traverse it"; from *Wanderlust*

Pilgrim on a Freedom Machine

Bob Armstrong

I'm holding a foot-long looped steel cable from which dangles a stout brass padlock as I prowl downtown Annecy, France, scanning for a cinnamon metal-flake Miyata touring bike. My wrist flicks side to side, whipping that shiny brass padlock back and forth. I am a force of righteous justice. I am somebody's worst nightmare. I am more than a little ridiculous.

This was not how my bike tour was meant to end.

In my last year at the University of Calgary I had decided it was time to see a bit of the world. I'd worked for a few years before university, then every summer of my student days. When other students were flying to Puerto Vallarta, my reading weeks had been spent reading. Except for two years living in Washington State as a kid, my travels outside of Canada added up to two afternoons in Montana.

In my last year of studies, I asked my friend Andrew if he'd like to join me in hiking across France on one of the *Grande Randonée* trails I'd heard about.

He didn't jump at the idea.

"It'll be a lot of trudging across farm country."

Much better, he argued, would be to bike across the country. On bikes, we'd move slowly enough to savour the countryside and the culture and fast enough never to feel stuck. He knew what he was talking about; he'd toured Provence by bike.

I became a convert after we returned from Calgary's Travel Book Store with a stack of 1/200,000 scale Michelin maps covering the scenic (read: hilly) bits of the country: Brittany, Alsace, Burgundy, the Massif Central, the Pyrenees, the Alps. I'd never seen maps this detailed, with hatch marks to indicate the steepness of hill climbs, green shading to mark especially scenic routes, and little black dots at every rural crossroads to indicate the location of a barn on one side of a road or a church on another. France is almost exactly the same size as Manitoba, but where the Manitoba highway map is a single piece of paper, it took

35 of these maps to cover all of France. We took the maps back to Andrew's house and unfolded an intoxicating vision on Andrew's living room floor. You could kneel and focus on every little bend and country lane, then stand and, godlike, survey half the country.

Maps were one thing, but we needed, as Andrew put it, a *telos*. That's a goal, for those of us who, unlike Andrew, don't have a degree in philosophy. Wandering around on bikes would be fun, but it would be more satisfying if our actions were imbued with what he called "goal-directedness."

We worked out a rough plan for a seven-week trip, starting in Bordeaux and ending in Geneva and featuring a series of goals. Instead of aiming directly for Geneva, we'd loop south to the Pyrenees, bike over the mountains at Roncevalles, where French knights fought Moorish armies in the medieval epic *The Song of Roland*, then travel west through Spain's Basque country to Guernica, destroyed by fascist airpower during the Spanish Civil War. Then we'd cross the Pyrenees again and France's central highlands, pass through Avignon, home of one of the dueling popes during the Catholic Church's 14th century Great Schism, and cross the French Alps in the shadow of Mont Blanc, the birthplace of mountaineering and the highest mountain in western Europe.

Our trip would span three mountain ranges and a millennium of European history. I was finishing a history degree and Andrew eventually followed his BA in philosophy with a master's and a PhD in history. This was the kind of route that a couple of goal-directed, mountain-loving would-be historians would come up with.

Once we landed in Bordeaux and assembled our bikes, I saw that touring by bike really was the best way to see a country. We cruised through throngs of pedestrians and other cyclists in the heart of Bordeaux. We hit the wine-producing countryside and felt free to detour toward every small family winery or Romanesque village church that caught our eyes. Our detailed maps allowed us to cobble together routes where the only traffic was the occasional farmer hauling chickens to market. The perfume of spring flowers filled the air, along with the manure that made them bloom. When we'd pass by the first village of the morning, we would smell fresh baking from every *boulangerie*. When the wind was at our backs and we were in the mood to cover ground, we could rattle off 60 km by lunch. When we arrived in a larger town or small city,

we could bike right up to whatever we wanted to see: no searching for parking, no bumper-to-bumper traffic.

When you're in a car, you're essentially seated in a small room, facing a television tuned to the Local Geography Channel. But when you're on a bike, you're part of the environment you move through. And the bike is part of you, an extension of your own body. You feel the road. You steer as much with your mind as with your handlebars. A bike isn't just a mode of transportation. It's a freedom machine.

I might have realized that my vision of freedom as defined by speed and the ability to travel long distances independently was coloured by my own good fortune to be able-bodied and (increasingly) fit. But I was young and self-absorbed and unlikely to put this good fortune into perspective, even when our route through the Pyrenees took us to Lourdes, where the Virgin Mary appeared to a 14-year-old miller's daughter named Bernadette in 1858. We rolled into the pilgrimage site, decorated with a century's worth of crutches, canes and wheelchairs abandoned by those who had come seeking miracles. We stuck around for one of the dozens of daily multi-lingual healing masses, listening to the priest intone: "Lord, that I might walk. Lord, that I might see."

Pilgrims certainly are goal-directed. They have a *telos*, whether it's a miraculous cure or eternal salvation or just personal transformation.

We'd thought of ourselves as pilgrims of a sort ever since a visit the week before to Notre Dame des Cyclistes, a church dating back to the Knights Templar in Labastide-d'Armagnac. It had been locked and we'd admired it from outside until the caretaker showed up, smiled at us and held out his key, saying *"Je suis juste comme Saint Pierre."*

He let us in and told us the story of the bike-loving priest who, in 1958, asked the Pope to designate the chapel a national shrine where cyclists could get the blessing of the Virgin Mary.

Andrew, a devout atheist, even lit a candle and made what he called a "subjunctive" prayer: "Lord, if thou were in heaven, I would ask for your blessing."

Whatever kind of pilgrims we thought we were, in Lourdes we saw the real thing. We had, however, both grown up in a secular environment where faith healing was the province of televised mountebanks and grifters. The acts of faith we witnessed left us wondering. Did the

pilgrims really believe in magical cures? How would they react when they returned home and the bottles of holy water they filled up from the mountain spring at the site of the visitation were useful only for watering plants?

Andrew spotted one group of families of children with Down syndrome and whispered: "I guess they're asking God to remove the extra chromosome."

In isolation, I suppose, Andrew's remark suggests insensitivity and lack of empathy, and to some extent he *was* a believer's stereotype of an atheist: logic-loving, proud and snide. But he'd lost both parents to cancer within the previous two years, so perhaps his harsh view of faith-healing is understandable.

If the afflicted of Lourdes had made us at all self-conscious about expressing our joy in able-bodiedness, you wouldn't have guessed afterwards while watching us race each other up switchbacking climbs, then drop low over our handlebars and coast downhill with the wind forcing tears from our eyes.

One day in the Pyrenees, Andrew pointed to a winding road on the map and the words Col d'Aspin and noted: "This one's part of the Tour de France this year."

Just what our trip needed: another goal! We had to test our lungs and legs against one of the long, arduous climbs from the world's most famous bike race. We climbed into chilly mist and clouds that scudded along the 1,500-metre pass. As we rested and refuelled with chocolate and canned tuna, we watched a man chug his way to the summit: silver hair, lined, leathery face, probably the age I am now. When he reached the top, he produced a tabloid newspaper from the back pocket of his cycle jersey, pulled up the jersey and stuffed the newspaper underneath. Pulling his jersey back down, he gave himself a little tap on the chest to feel the centimetre of insulation that would keep his vital organs warm in the wind-chill he'd create bombing back down. He disappeared in a blur.

Of course all that mountain and hill riding carried a whiff of danger.

In Spain, as we neared Guernica, we began one day in a light rain on a winding seaside road. Andrew tapped his brakes just before an unexpected corner, went into a skid, fell and slid into the oncoming lane, his body clearing a path on the rain-slicked pavement. The crash left Andrew with a couple of patches of road rash, but it probably also took a mental toll on him. Later in the day, when we took a break to watch surfers on an isolated beach below, he absent-mindedly let his bike fall. It wasn't much of a fall, but the impact broke spokes on his back wheel.

Metaphor alert. A bike wheel only works if the spokes hold opposing forces in perfect balance. Break a spoke on one side and the imbalance of forces will make the rim bend and rub your brake pads. Bike mechanics use what's called a trueing stand so they can adjust the spokes, give the wheel a spin and see if the rim is getting straighter or more bent. It's harder to do that at the side of the road. Andrew would tighten a new spoke and find the wheel out of alignment somewhere else along the rim. One section out of alignment would throw another section out. Soon he was trying to adjust spokes along the whole damn wheel.

An hour later we were back on the road. That night we walked around Guernica, which had just held an international congress of "martyr cities" to mark the 50th anniversary of the bombing by Nazi Germany's Condor Legion. I found a wall poster for a play about the bombing, carefully removed it, rolled it up and carried it through another 1,500 km of cycling to bring it home.

The next morning, Andrew spent more hours trying to true his wheel. And yes, I'm still going on about what a nightmare broken spokes are while I ought to be reflecting on a visit to one of the 20th century's enduring symbols of suffering and injustice. I told you I was self-absorbed.

Andrew's ministrations still didn't get it right, so a day later, when we arrived in the small industrial town Durango, he sought out a bike mechanic. There wasn't one, despite one of the town's main industries being a bicycle factory, but an auto mechanic offered to give it a try. The Durango's mechanic's fix lasted half way to the next small industrial town, a hazy place in the mountains called Beasain. Here at least there was a bike mechanic, but he was booked up, so he said he'd get to Andrew's wheel in a couple of days.

That led to a bike-less interval. While we waited, we decided to travel by train to Madrid, which made me appreciate even more the freedom our bikes granted us. The train stopped briefly at the historic cities of Vitoria and Burgos, but we couldn't get off, let alone leave the station to explore. Then we caught brief, tantalizing glimpses of the rugged, semi-desert mountains north of Madrid. In Madrid, where we were mesmerized by Picasso's Guernica at the Prado museum, travelling at walking speed felt like a great evolutionary step backward.

When we got back on our bikes a few days later, it was like being re-united with my other half.

We now had one more crossing of the Pyrenees ahead of us and our route would take us through the heart of Basque country. This, in 1987, was still a little like going through a potential war zone.

This was not the colourful, gay-friendly, feminist, modern Spain of Pedro Almodovar movies. This was a Spain where scars from the repressive Franco era were fresh, where the nation's democratic constitution was less than a decade old, where only six years before, the Guardia Civil had stormed into the parliament and attempted a return to dictatorship. Outside Pamplona a Francoist slogan was painted on an abandoned building: "*Nada sin dios. No a la constitucion!*" (Nothing without God. No to the constitution.) The paint didn't look all that old.

The Basque country was home to the violent separatist group ETA, which carried out assassinations and set off bombs, prompting the government to respond with assassinations of ETA members. Guardia Civil members stood with machine guns outside government installations and power plants, an unfamiliar sight to a Canadian 14 years before 9/11. We didn't know it at the time, but ETA was then preparing for a shopping centre bombing that would kill 21 people just a week after we left the country.

As we climbed past Pamplona toward the French border at 1,766-metre Col de la Pierre St Martin, we passed a fortified Guardia Civil post, giving the Spanish side of the Pyrenees a more ominous feeling than we'd had at the Col D'Aspin.

Adding to our anxiety was the possibility that the pass might still be blocked by snow. Our Spanish being fairly rudimentary, we asked a French-speaking Spaniard if the road ahead was open and he gave us

the impression that it was blocked by an oak, though we could probably get through.

"Maybe there was a windstorm," I said, suggesting that perhaps a tree had fallen across the road. Odd that the Spaniard was so species-specific, though.

After grunting up a dozen switchbacks and scattered snow patches, we were pleased to discover what the Spaniard actually meant.

The way was blocked not by *un chene* (an oak) but by *une chaine*.

If we'd been driving we would have had to turn back and find another pass. But no border guards were watching, so we just lifted our bikes over the chain and put them down on the French side. Then we coasted downhill, through some of the last remaining habitat of the Pyrenees brown bear, a relative of the grizzly.

We now found ourselves with two weeks to cover the entire mountainous south of France. Fortunately, the Pyrenees had whipped us into shape for a string of 100 km days, climbing up and over ridges, winding along the rims of narrow canyons and aiming steadily for the Alps. We didn't have time to visit the medieval pope's palace in Avignon, and instead crossed the Rhone River further north, passing through the pretty little Alpine town of Die, whose off-putting name was actually pronounced "dee." Three more 100-kilometre days, each with at least one big mountain climb, brought us to the beautiful lakeside city of Annecy, just three days ride from Geneva.

Throughout our trip we'd been camping in good weather and staying in cheap small-town hotels when it rained. The hotels nearly always had a storage room where we could keep our bikes. On this night, we were too tired to camp and instead pulled in to the Annecy youth hostel. There was no storage room, so we just locked our bikes to the rack outside.

When stocking up for the trip, I'd had to buy everything—bike, rack, panniers, helmet and bike lock. Newfangled Kryptonite U-locks were expensive and heavy and we would be off the beaten track where we figured theft wouldn't be an issue. I opted for a long, flexible, reinforced cable and a padlock, which I rationalized as not just cheaper but more versatile than a U-lock.

That morning in Annecy I found out just how reinforced my cable was.

Which brought me to my homicidal quest on the streets of the resort town, wielding a cable-and-padlock bludgeon that might have brought down a Pyrenees brown bear if one had dared pull up on a cinnamon metal-flake Miyata touring bike.

Seeing no clues myself, I spotted the police station and reported the theft to a plainclothes cop straight out of *le casting central* –cigarette, brown leather jacket, philosophical expression. He took my report and said the theft was unfortunate, but reminded me that: "*Ces choses arrivent de temps en temps*." These things happen from time to time.

I had to continue by train for the final leg of the journey. I limped, staggered and shuffled to the train station, my handlebar bag hanging from a strap over one hip, my sleeping bag hanging over the other hip, and the narrow fabric handles of my panniers cutting into my palms. The detective's stoic words were no consolation for being robbed of the final two mountain passes and rolling triumphantly into Geneva.

Sometimes the goal of a pilgrimage is to meet a guru who will impart words of great wisdom. You could do worse, I guess, than "*Ces choses arrivent de temps en temps*." In the two days of hiking I had before my rendezvous with Andrew and our return flights, I had views of the glaciers and spires of the French Alps I'd never have had if I'd spent the final few days staring over my handlebars.

In the years since, I've biked for work and pleasure in Calgary and Winnipeg and I've rented bikes on vacation wherever my travels have taken me, including a stretch of road in the mountains of Chiapas, Mexico, where two cycle tourists were later robbed and murdered.

I've scanned the pre-Kijiji classified ads in search of my wife's stolen bike, replaced a front wheel stolen during the Winnipeg Fringe Festival, and intervened to stop a street addict from stealing somebody else's wheel outside the West End Cultural Centre, statistically, probably more dangerous than anything I've ever done on two wheels. I have a separated shoulder resulting from my only bike accident, a foolish mistake caused by carrying a plastic shopping bag that jammed in my front spokes.

I now make a point of parking in a secure place, with a U-lock for the frame and cables to secure both wheels. But I won't let Winnipeg's endemic bike theft stop me from riding. *Ces choses arrivent de temps en temps*.

I'm a careful rider (no dangling plastic bags) and I wear a reflective vest and lights when I bike at night and I advocate for improved bike lanes, but I know that a driver could always do something idiotic or I could hit a slippery patch and slide into the oncoming lane. But I won't let that thought stop me. *Ces choses arrivent de temps en temps*.

I'm still goal-directed enough that I keep track of my biking distance as I aim for a seasonal target of 2,000 kilometres. I'm a little stiffer in the mornings and a little less inclined to measure life's joys by my ability to rack up 100 km days and knock off mountain passes, but I can still ride all day if I feel like it and I still get a kick out of racing down a hill, even if it's just that little one on Red River Road where you zoom down from the level of the Floodway gate. Someday I won't be able to do things like that; my doctor told me that despite all my biking, my family history gives me a 20 per cent chance of a heart attack in the next 10 years. *Ces choses arrivent de temps en temps*.

Senior Strength Class

Tricia Knoll

The trainer times us at each station. 30 seconds after a count to five
and then a backward count to end at that place. He says that's how long
it takes for lactic acid to build up in our muscles. I remember mile 20
in the Nike marathon. Reserves used up. One of my dead babies
started to whisper that another child would come my way.
That was forty years ago. How strong do I have to be?

Wait, he says, for a brief recovery and start the circuit again.
Two women in the class can't keep straight where they go
next. Dumbbells? Lats? Squats? Leg thrusts? Gentle reminder
to move clockwise. Then he says red meat rebuilds muscles
torn down when little thistle cells ride against the grain of
another muscle. I have leftover tofu stir fry in the refrigerator
for dinner, the red cabbage gone blue purple and limp,
the whole of yesterday soggy with Bragg's Amino Acids.
I ask him to explain how muscles get bigger.

I'd like to do balance exercises this morning. Stand on one
leg on the stability ball. Kick with a left leg, swing right arm.
Keep the ankle shifting to compensate. Old people fall down;
it's what we do, how we sway to each side and bump
into things. Leg raises: it astonishes me that I don't remember
ever kicking anyone in my life. I'm sure I have wanted to.
We don't do balance; today it's abs. Crunches. Twists.
Or tighten the glutes. I do what each teacher tells me
to do. I was raised that way.

My tai chi teacher Elizabeth mentions we are swirls
of electrons moving as energy moves up and down
soles, ankles, fingers, arms, legs, spine, neck.
Do not create blocks. Relax into being.
Open arcs to embrace the moon,
spread our white crane wings, be both
a single whip or the fair lady at the shuttle.
When necessary, repulse the monkey.

Through a Child's Eyes

Binh Pham

One of my earliest memories was the urgent sound of drums and marching soldiers while playing at the Temple. I was four-years-old then, while my sisters Trinh and Lan were eleven and ten respectively. Every day they allowed me to tag along with them to the Temple that was a few doors away from grandfather's house at Nam Dinh, in North Vietnam.

The Temple was our refuge. I had such a vivid memory of its graceful curvy roof lines in red tiles, with dragons stretching regally along each edge and their oval white scales gleamed in the bright sunshine. Majestic stone lions were on guard on both sides of the steps leading to the Temple. They were cold to my touch when I ran my fingers gingerly around their eyes, then their backs and their tails.

I breathed in the aroma of incense that was burning gently in huge copper urns in the middle of the courtyard. Beautiful big tubs of kumquats with gorgeous round orange fruits were scattered along the sides, sandwiched by smaller pots of flowers in vivid colours. I desperately longed to touch those inviting tiny orange fruits and scented fresh blossoms, but it was forbidden.

The Temple's huge doors, composed of many heavy brown wood panels, were wide open.

"Let's climb up and explore," Lan said. We ran up the steps, then peeped in.

A huge sitting gold Buddha statue dominated the room. His eyes were hypnotic. My heart beat faster as I dragged my eyes away towards the front altar that was covered with a bright yellow cloth. I gawked at two urns of incense, two enormous vases of flowers and numerous plates of mouth-watering cakes and fruits. A few long red panels with black squiggly characters were hung down from the high ceiling. The floor was shiny polished wood. I wanted to take off my sandals and run inside.

Suddenly, Trinh nudged at my ribs and whispered, "Let's get out of here before we get caught. You can hop down the steps if you want to."

I felt her warm affection.

The ground was huge and empty most of the time we were there. Only occasionally, as the bell chimed, I saw some monks in drab brown smocks strolling slowly across the ground. The first few times we stopped and stared at them apprehensively, expecting to be chased out of the Temple. However, the monks kept solemn faces; the old ones stared straight ahead, but the younger ones stole a fleeting glance at us and then quickly averted their eyes to follow their elders. We learnt to keep out of their way.

"It's a nuisance to have to look after a four-year-old girl!" My two big sisters often complained, but they were resigned to their duty and allowed me to tag along with them. Once, when I was a bit younger, I tried hard to climb up the big stairs to catch up with my sisters but only managed to tangle my clumsy legs together and fell into a big copper pot below, to the surprise of startling servants who were working in the kitchen.

At the more mature age of four, I felt privileged to be included in their circle and I tried hard not to do anything to annoy them. I was just as content to be allowed to watch when they played games that were beyond my reach.

There were special occasions when the Temple was closed to us. We stood on the pavement outside the Temple to watch a continuous stream of people arriving in colourful ceremonial robes, carrying shining copper trays of offerings of fruit, flowers and cakes wrapped in red cellophane. These were happy festivities to celebrate harvesting seasons, or the remembrance of ancestors.

Sometimes we sat quietly in the courtyard to listen to Trinh telling stories about our family life in the village.

"Grandfather was the head of the village and many people came to visit our house every day. They often brought presents and special food. I liked living there with Grandfather and Grandmother," Trinh said wistfully, with much longing in her voice and a faraway look in her eyes.

"But then things changed. People no longer brought presents. They cried and asked Grandfather for food. I had to hold onto the rice pot. I was afraid Grandfather might give it all away. It was very sad," she sighed.

"That's why Grandfather left the village. That's why we are here in the city," Lan chipped in.

"But I like our house and the Temple too!" I declared, having no memory of the village that Trinh and Lan were so fond of.

"There were more interesting things to do and many places to explore in the village," both my sisters insisted in unison, "you do not know anything better."

Mother said we were free to roam in the courtyard with one strict rule– as soon as we heard the sound of marching drums in the distance, we had to run straight home. The sight of huge soldiers scared the life out of me. They carried guns and marched to loud instructions in a strange language that I could not understand.

The sound of drums and marching soldiers was getting louder.

"Run! Quickly!" Trinh called out in a panic while dragging me along. I tried to run as fast as my little clumsy legs could carry me, but I kept on falling over.

"Get up! Hurry! Soldiers will be here soon. We will be caught!" Trinh whispered urgently.

I knew she was scared too. So was my second sister, Lan, who was the bravest among us. We had forgotten the time. We must get home before the soldiers arrived.

"We don't want to get into trouble with soldiers." Mother's repeated order was ringing in my ears.

We managed to get to our door just as the first drum soldier appeared in the street. A servant pulled us quickly inside and gently closed the door. She was not pleased. She had been waiting anxiously but did not dare to go into the street to look for us.

The soldiers marched past our house. I peeped through a little gap at the window and stared at their huge feet in laced up boots, moving up and down rhythmically. Then they suddenly stopped in front of the big house at the end of our street.

We heard the banging noise of drums and guns crashing onto the pavements, then bursts of laughter and loud music. Boisterous, shrilled

women's voices were mingled with excited men's voices. Later in the evening, there was an awful din as drunken soldiers were tossed out of the house by other soldiers. As they fought with each other, singing loudly while tumbling along the road, people stayed quietly within their closed windows and doors, waiting patiently for the commotion to stop.

Instinctively I felt the tension and saw worry and disgust on the adults' faces. Together with my sisters, I quietly went to bed, wondering what was going on in that big house.

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One morning I woke up to find the house in chaos. Everybody was rushing and talking simultaneously in a hushed tone.

"Your Grandfather has passed away," a servant whispered.

Nobody paid any attention to the children, so Trinh and Lan got some food from the kitchen, then quietly dragged two small cousins and me out of the house and headed to the Temple. They did not say a word about Grandfather and I did not dare ask any question. They just invented games for us to play at the Temple all day as if nothing unusual had happened. However, we were in a subdued mood when we returned to the house. We tiptoed quietly to our beds without being told.

During the next few days, many more people that I had never seen before came to the house.

Grandfather was put inside a yellow wooden coffin that was placed in front of the altar.

I stared at the red suckling pig on a large black lacquered tray that was placed in the middle of the table at the head of the coffin. Surrounded at the four sides of the pig were numerous trays of gorgeous fruits and cakes, and bowls of steamed rice and sticky rice.

The children were fitted with new clothes, made of thin white hessian, with long white bands to be worn across our heads. The bands were knotted at the back with two long tails hanging down. We glanced at each other and tried to suppress a giggle with our hands. How funny we all looked.

First Aunt told us to walk quietly in a single file towards the altar. I was suddenly gripped with fear. I grabbed Lan's left hand and stared at the carvings as we passed the coffin.

I found Grandmother surrounded by many female relatives in the back room, all in white hessian robes and white headbands. They whispered and cried mournfully together.

I spotted some head bands with no tails. I wondered why. Maybe they were not as close to Grandfather as we were. Some men wore black bands across their arms.

Then came the funeral.

As I could not walk a long distance, I was not allowed to join the procession. A servant held me in her arms and we watched from the balcony. There was a lot of commotion while the procession was being organized. People called out for each other while swapping places.

The drummers and cymbal people were leading, and then came the chanting monks, then a small cart carrying the coffin, followed by family members in mourning clothes. Other people in ordinary clothes joined at the tail end of the procession. They must be people who had known Grandfather. So many people I had never seen before. Where did they come from? Everybody was wailing loudly. People lined along the street to watch, some with their heads bowing low.

I was allowed to stay on the balcony and watch until the procession disappeared down the street. The house was empty and unusually quiet. Feeling a bit apprehensive, I wondered if things would remain the same when everybody was back home again.

***

I often wondered why I had remembered very little of our torturous journey passing through many towns and villages on the way to South Vietnam, even though it lasted for such a long time. From overhearing snatches of worried whispers between adults, I gathered that it was not safe to remain in Grandfather's townhouse in Nam Định although I did not understand why. We were no longer allowed to run to the Temple. Instead, we were told to sit together at a corner in the kitchen so that the servants can keep an eye on us.

My sisters and cousins started to play some complicated games that I could not join in. So every day I watched in silence as the servants packed into large wooden crates the heavy copper pots and frying pans, then those lovely ceramics and porcelain dinner sets that I adored, then clothes. They even tied thick ropes around the heavy wooden plank beds to make them easier to carry.

The preparation for the trip seemed to go on and on, but finally the day came when the whole extended family set out together with the servants. Worries were etched on the adults' faces. I clung to my big sisters, seeking comfort. They just stared in silence. All my cousins behaved extremely well, no fighting or jostling with each other as they usually did. Each of us was given a little cloth bundle containing a change of clothes and two big balls of pressed steamed rice for our lunch and dinner. We stood on the pavement to watch the servants loading the heavy wooden crates onto the ox cart. I had never seen an ox before and was fascinated by the way it stood patiently, only shaking its head occasionally to shoo buzzing flies away from its eyes and mouth.

"We'll walk to the bus stop now. Hold each other's hands and stay together," First Aunt ordered as the last crate was being loaded.

The bus could accommodate all of us and our belongings. I had mixed feelings as the bus headed out of the city. I felt sad and apprehensive as I looked back at our house and the Temple, but I was also curious about the new adventures. The bus drove quickly passing many buildings, shops and people strolling on the sidewalks. How exciting it was to see new things. Very soon, the shops thinned out, then disappeared altogether.

"Look at that boy on a buffalo," one cousin shouted suddenly. I craned my neck to look. The boy gently urged the buffalo forward by pressing his knees to its sides.

I saw numerous men and women in black or brown pants and blouses, working in muddy rice fields. Some were bending down to plant new green shoots, others were swinging baskets to scoop water from the side creeks into the field. My eyes started to feel heavy as the fields rolled on and on. Suddenly I felt a nudge in my ribs.

"We have reached a village. Wake up!" Trinh said loudly.

We were quickly herded out of the bus. The servants unloaded the crates

from the cart, moved our belongings out of the bus, and placed them under the bamboo trees.

"Hang up the big cloth. We will sleep here," First Aunt directed.

The first night spent under the makeshift tent was such a novelty that my siblings and cousins started to invent new games. Boisterous laughter continued until dark. I tried hard to keep my eyes open. I was waken up the next morning by a commotion. The drivers were arguing with First Aunt.

"We can't take you further. There are many people to be picked up from the city. We have to drive back," they insisted.

"But what can we do?" First Aunt pleaded.

They just stared at her in silence, then got into their bus and cart, then drove away.

"We cannot stay here. We'll have to walk on," First Aunt declared.

She always seemed to know what to do, so everybody just obeyed without question.

The servants were laden with the heaviest things, but they did not complain. They just lowered their heads, glued their eyes to the road and pushed on. Occasionally, a servant let me have a piggyback ride when my legs started to wobble on the road. I hugged her gratefully.

We travelled for many months from place to place by various means—bus, ferry, ox cart, and foot—whatever the adults could find. Their tasks were not easy because there were increasingly many more people on the road. Whenever a new town or village was reached, I saw my parents, uncles and aunts scattering to find other adults to talk to.

"We need more information so that we can decide whether to return home or continue the southward journey," First Aunt instructed.

Throughout the ordeal, we children just watched in silence. It was strange how we did not cling to our own parents. There was always a big gap between the adults and the children. I did not even remember clearly how my parents looked at this time. They disappeared in a sea of uncles and aunts in our large family. We children took great comfort in each other's company, inventing games to amuse ourselves, talking in

whispers and occasionally exchanging a quiet grin. We felt content and secure because we were still being fed every day and the whole extended family was still together.

I noticed that our family started out strong, healthy and full of hope too. However, as months went by on the road, things began to change drastically. I watched mournfully as our belongings were gradually abandoned. There were more and more people on the road who were fiercely competing for food and means of transport.

One day, uncles and aunts conferred with each other.

"We'll have to reach the destination quickly. There were rumours that it was no longer safe to remain on the road."

"We'll have to split up into smaller groups," First Aunt said. "It will be easier to find transport and food. Each group will try to reach Saigon as fast as it can. We will re-unite in Saigon."

Although everybody was apprehensive about losing the extended family's support, nobody was prepared to argue with her. Father looked worried while Mother was dejected. I looked around at my uncles and aunts and saw distress and worries imprinted on their faces. We all looked unkempt and thin. Lack of food and rest had begun to show.

After a sombre farewell, each individual family was preparing to move ahead on its own. Although nobody spoke aloud, I imagined that everybody wondered quietly if we would ever see each other again. My sisters cried loudly when Mother told them to stop clinging to the two cousins we have been playing with throughout the trip.

"You'll see them again in Saigon," Mother pleaded gently.

I looked away. Father carried my younger brother, Vinh, on his right shoulder while Mother nursed my baby sister, Mai, who was happily tugging at Mother's hair.

We continued to move on our own with sinking hearts. Every day was a big effort. Everybody was so unhappy. We were no longer able to smile.

***

My heart leapt as the bus driver announced roughly that we were about to arrive at the refugee camp in Saigon. Everybody was craning their

necks to get the first glimpse of the much-awaited camp. Everyone breathed out a sigh of relief. It did not matter that we were filthy, hungry and exhausted. We had arrived.

The camp was huge, full of people in drab clothes, some standing in queues, others moving about purposefully in groups. The longest queues were in front of those buildings with shining curved tin roofs.

"They were made out of old bomb shells," somebody shouted from the back of the bus.

"Oh!" the children cried aloud in unison. The bombshells were huge.

There were brownish tents dotted across the field, everywhere, in no obvious order.

The field was unevenly covered with brown dry mud, mingled with dirty ponds of stagnant water that must have been left over from recent rain. I saw many children darting here and there aimlessly. At least we could run in fresh air now instead of being squashed between smelly adults inside an over-crowded bus.

The bus stopped just after the gate and we were herded towards the farthest building with a tin roof. The queue seemed to go on interminably. After fidgeting for a long time, clinging to each other, all children were set free to run around the field.

It was a long time before our parents came to get us, waving some papers in their hands. The sky had already started to turn grey. Father herded our family to find the tent with the allocated number pinned on its front flap. He mumbled greetings to a man standing inside the tent and we were directed to a far corner that was not yet occupied. We put our bundles down and looked around us. Where could we find some food?

A middle-aged woman who was sitting on a nearby mat stretched her right arm out and waved to Vinh and me. We walked slowly towards her. She broke a small ball of squashed cold rice into two pieces and gave them to us. We started to bite gently into the rice ball, savouring every grain.

We returned to Mother who has just spread out a thin cotton cloth on the floor. My big sisters quickly sank down at the far corner. I took their cue, curled up beside them and immediately fell into a deep sleep.

I was woken up the next morning by happy loud chattering. We quickly caught on to those simple camp routines. Soft bells rang for food, and loud speakers announced activities that adults needed to attend to. As adults attended meetings, children were left to themselves. Vinh and I were happy to follow my sisters to explore the camp.

"Let's have a look at other tents at the far end first. We might find our cousins," Trinh said.

"Yes! Let's run," Lan exclaimed eagerly.

We ran zig-zagging across the field, avoiding muddy pools. I began to enjoy this game.

"Trinh! Lan! Over here!" A loud shout suddenly reached us from the left.

"Oh! That's them! They are here," both Trinh and Lan shouted.

I turned around and smiled happily. We have found our cousins. They looked the same as before. All six of them. We hugged each other, giggled and swapped stories. Some had arrived before us, others just after.

"Can we stay put for a while?" One cousin asked anxiously.

"I hope so," Trinh said softly, tenderly reaching out for her hand.

I looked up at them, murmuring to myself, "I hope so too."

Transplant

Steve Abbott

It's warmer where she's come from.
Here, autumn's leaves describe
a temporary loss, something
replaceable in the next cycle of sun.
Unlike the even-toned story she told
of men in street clothes forcing the door,
beating her father into a dark sedan.

My friend spades a neat circle around
the sprout, deep cuts clear of root ball
and its tortured push through Ohio clay.
She's already dug a new hole, bowl
extra-wide to keep the transplant from
drowning in a place like the impermeable
cup it came from. She works without gloves.
Dirt inks her fingernails. A worm drops
from her hands like a forgotten scar
into a patch of earth scabbed with graves.

The postman arrives, notes the change
in weather on his way to the mailbox,
drops a bundle of letters with unfamiliar
stamps whispering through the slot.
Nothing survives dangling in air,
unrooted, she says. Her fingers pack
new soil with peat, press the plant
among what already thrives. She says,
Everything needs a place to stand.

The High Pass

Brendan McKay

I

It was midday and the sun was peeling the skin from my nose. I made a grave error in judgment in deciding not to bring a brimmed hat with me. I also forgot to wear sunscreen. I know. It was around lunch as I walked into the small village of Ngawal in the Annapurna region of Nepal, finding myself, I guess. What I found out that morning was that I am still the type of person who can't remember to protect their skin, doesn't matter if I'm at home on the prairies or on the other side of the world.

I was too tired to be choosy about where I ate so I stopped at the first place I found. The proprietor was patient with me as I butchered the most basic phrases in his language before he responded in English. He directed me to the waist-high bench for trekkers and porters to unload their packs and I breathed a sigh of relief as it meant I'd finally be able to unstrap myself. The weight lifted from my shoulders and as I undid my hip straps I noticed my right hip had started to bleed through my shirt. Not good.

I was the only person in the dining room and I was grateful. I hadn't come out this far from everyone I've ever known to meet people. I'd chosen this trek at this time of year for solitude. Despite this, I was bound to my life back home through satellites and Wi-Fi and worried loved ones. I never updated the tribe back home that morning and I figured I should ask for the Wi-Fi password for a quick lunch update. It was around 11:15 pm in Manitoba so hopefully they'd be up. The first person I messaged was my partner. She told me the cat hasn't been eating and he's been throwing up and she's taking him to the emergency vet clinic. "What am I doing? Why am I here?" I thought to myself.

My hip was bleeding, my toenails were falling off, my skin was burnt to a crisp, my knees aching, my traps were mush and I hadn't had a solid shit in four days. And now my cat was sick and I couldn't do anything about it. The dreadful feeling of helplessness I'd tried to leave behind began to creep back in.

II

"I just bought a plane ticket. To Kathmandu."

I needed to tell somebody what I'd done to make it real to me. It was mid-July and I'd just bought my plane ticket from my computer at work.

"I'm proud of you."

My best friend's simple words spoke volumes. There were two people in the world that knew what I was going through and what it was doing to me, and he was one of them. He really didn't need to say anything else. I wanted to tell him more but there was nothing else to tell. I didn't have a plan. I didn't have an itinerary. I just wanted to be far away. He understood.

Fifteen minutes earlier I sat down at my computer, coffee in hand, knowing that I had to be at court in half an hour. I knew if I didn't make a decision in that moment that I would overthink everything and not do anything. I still had two tabs open when I messaged him. I had a flight itinerary for Winnipeg to Victoria, BC in one window and my confirmation for one ticket to Kathmandu, Nepal in the other. I've tried since then to remember what exactly led me to choose Nepal over BC or anywhere else in the world, but truthfully couldn't say what it was. Maybe I'd seen a nice photo on the internet. Maybe it was the distance from home. Maybe it was the Himalayas. Part of the truth is that I needed something, anything, to look forward to.

I was getting burnt out at work and I knew I had enough vacation time built up. I was in a depression I could not pull myself out of. My relationship was falling apart and I didn't have the energy to put in the work to keep it together. I was at a point where I didn't know what I was doing with my life or even who I was.

I worked as a social worker in child welfare, and that summer I had seen enough to make me go home to cry every night. It wasn't because of what I was seeing every day at work, not that it wasn't heartbreaking. It was because despite what I was going through in my personal life, no matter how bad it was, there were people that were dealing with far worse. They were struggling every day with things I've never dealt with. I'd had it easy, I can say that much. I grew up in a loving family, I was a good student. I never really got into serious trouble as a teenager or even as a young adult. I always worked and was never really wanting for

much. I always knew where my next meal was coming from. I had no *right* to be sad. I truly felt that. I asked myself every day how I could think it was my place to go into work every day and try to help people with their problems when I was coming apart at the seams from a little adversity.

Every day I woke up sad. There were ups and downs for years, then it was all down. I would go for drives into the country only so I could scream at the top of my lungs. I would scream until my throat hurt and my voice was gone. Some nights I would wake up in the middle of the night and cry. I cried because I was sad but also because I didn't know why I was sad.

I'd tried therapy. I'd tried drugs. I'd tried alcohol. I hurt the people close to me as I self- destructed. I was out of ideas. I needed a change. Maybe this was the answer.

My parents were worried. My brother was a little offended I did not ask him to come with me. My partner was shocked and upset at first. In the months leading up to my departure things improved between us and she understood why I needed to leave. Still, she was hurt that I had made the decision in the first place because of what it represented.

It didn't take me long to figure out what I wanted to do in Nepal. I was going to walk. Just walk. I had done some reading and learned about a teahouse trek through the Himalayas. It was the Annapurna Circuit, a 15 to 20 day trek that would cover over 160 kilometres and take me over one of the highest navigable mountain passes in the world, the Thorong La, at an elevation of 5,416 metres. The views were lovely, the route was well travelled but not overly busy, there were small villages along the trail that provided accommodations, and it was the perfect length for my stay in Nepal. There was one issue, there was simply no way I'd be able to handle the trail, physically. I was far from the best shape I'd ever been in and I had not even the first clue on what I'd need on a 15 day backpacking trek.

But I was determined. I had a goal. Something to look forward to.

III

My cat turned out to be fine. To this day my partner maintains that it was because he missed me, but I don't think he'd ever admit to that so I like to think he just had an ill-timed cat flu.

Two days after finding out about my sick cat I found myself taking a bite out of a tough piece of Tibetan bread, which tasted almost exactly like fried bannock, sitting on the muddy shore of one of the Kicho Tal at the highest elevation I've ever been at in my life. I was sitting at 4,600 metres above sea level, on the other side of the world, looking across the lake at the tallest mountains I'd ever seen. I'm sure everyone says the same thing, but I had never felt as small as I did in that moment. I was supposed to be resting that day, one of two rest days that I had planned to take in the town of Manang. I knew that I did not want to spend the entire day in town and I made a last minute decision to make the day hike up to Kicho Tal. On the shore of that icy lake I knew I would need that rest day tomorrow. My knees screamed in pain and I had one of the worst headaches I have ever had. I could scarcely enjoy my time up there because I became frightened that I was experiencing symptoms of altitude sickness. I finished my bannock— I mean—Tibetan bread, and packed my bag for the descent back down to Manang.

Somehow the hike down to Manang managed to be more physically demanding than my ascent. Even with my trekking poles and my careful footsteps the relentless descent felt like it was doing real damage to my ankles and knees. The wind was picking up in the valley and the already tender skin on my face was beginning to dry up and flake off. I stopped to refill my water and rest my feet at the teahouse on the way down. Not much bigger than a single room with a stone patio, the teahouse was the only stop on the way up to Kicho Tal and sometimes offered porter services for weary trekkers. There was a group of trekkers sitting on the patio in complete silence. There were five middle-aged men, sitting facing the mountains as their guide drank tea inside. The sun was behind the mountain by now and god's rays burst forth from behind, illuminating the clouds around its peak. I'd seen the mountain on my way up and all the way down and still I wanted to see what they were seeing in that moment. What did it mean to them? I sat there for 10 minutes and not a word was spoken. When I put on my pack to continue downwards I made eye contact with the man nearest me. The subtlest of nods. Turning back to the mountain, I realized it only mattered what it meant to me.

IV

It was early enough in the morning that the sun had not cleared the highest walls of the valley of the Marsyangdi. Manang was engulfed in smoke from the early morning fires and there was a mist further down the valley. The hazy morning sun bathed the valley in gold. Every day of the Annapurna Circuit was full of these stop and stare moments but after ten days on the trail this one really hit me. All those fires and the people around them. I think it was the first time on my trek I was truly lonely.

I arrived in the small village of Yak Kharka just before lunch and I had the energy to press on to the Thorong La base camp, but I had read that late arrivals to camp sometimes end up sleeping on benches in the dining hall instead of proper bunks and that just did not sound like a good time at this stage of my trek. I was also exercising caution at the time as there was lingering paranoia from my major headache at Kicho Tal, and I did not want to contend with altitude sickness this close to Thorong La.

I walked another five minutes past Yak Kharka and stayed at a cute little teahouse called the Himalayan View Hotel. The name could have been applied to any teahouse along the trail but being the last teahouse on the hill up from Yak Kharka this one lived up to the name. I sat in the sun while my room was prepared and drank black tea for a break from the weak Nepali coffee I'd been having every morning. Once my room was ready I put in an order for lunch and went down to the shower. I nearly cried when I found out their water heater was working and I had the first hot shower since I was in the village of Chame several days ago.

The guesthouse was nearly full by dinner time with organized expeditions of trekkers from all over the world and their guides and porters. There was only one stove in the dining room and I had managed to get a close seat where I sat with my nose buried in a book to avoid any sort of social contact. I came out here to be alone, but I think that a small part of me had been entertaining the thought that I'd come out of my shell at some point during my trek and I'd make lifelong friends or just *be social*. It had always been this great source of anxiety for me; I would feel this immense pressure to be social and go out of my way to talk to people and connect and when I didn't I would get upset with myself. If I went to a party the only way I'd be able to function properly

was if I had been drinking. That night, ignoring everyone else around me but just being there in the same room with no perceived obligation to converse with anyone, the anxiety dissipated and I felt lighter. I had started to realize that just wasn't who I was and flying to the other side of the world was not going to change that. Maybe it was time to stop trying to change that part of me.

I went to bed early that night only to wake in the late evening to the thunderous sounds of clapping and stomping in the room beside me. It was the porters and the expedition guides. They were singing traditional Nepali folk songs and after realizing that I was not going to be getting back to sleep I decided to step out into the night to use the washroom. The acetazolamide I had been taking for the last two nights to help with altitude sickness symptoms ensured I needed to take frequent bathroom breaks, sometimes in the middle of the night. Aside from a tiny sliver of light spilling from behind the curtain of the porter's quarters, it was pitch black. There were no outdoor lights at the teahouse and no lights in the village down the hill. When my eyes adjusted to the night I was able to make out the silhouettes of the surrounding mountains, and behind them, the night sky full of stars.

That night was not the first time I saw the Milky Way, but it was the brightest. The Nepali songs in the guest house were a low roar behind me. I wasn't a part of it, but I wasn't alone. It was comforting, and I didn't feel so lonely anymore.

V

"Caution: Landslide Area"

This type of sign turned out to be a lot more common that I thought it would be when I started my trek, but this was the first time there was actual visual evidence of several landslides both along the trail and on the other side of the valley.

I left the Himalayan View Hotel in a hurry that morning in order to get to the Thorong La basecamp early to ensure I got a bed. As I side-stepped on narrow sections of trail around boulders and scree slopes,

I was grateful for the early start because it also meant I didn't have to endure the constant leapfrogging that tended to happen on busier sections of the trail. It would have been outright dangerous on the eroded scree slopes leading to basecamp.

The stretch of trail between Yak Kharka and Thorong La basecamp was the first time during my trek that I really felt like I was *in* the mountains. I didn't feel like I was trekking with mountain views anymore, I was among them. I believe the true challenge on the scree slopes of this section of trail was trying not to fall to your death because you've got your head in the air and mouth open wide in awe of the behemoths that surround you on every side.

When I arrived at basecamp I learned my early morning efforts were all for naught. The basecamp was already packed and private rooms were booked solid. This was one of the downsides of travelling without a guide. I did not have someone to call ahead for me at every stop to ensure I'd be accommodated. I was placed into a communal room with four beds and two other guys, a father and son from British Columbia. The basecamp was insanely busy due to a mountain bike race that was happening on the trail. It was the first time I'd encountered the participants who slowly filled up the teahouse over the course of the afternoon. Thorong La basecamp was nothing more than a collection of two or three teahouses built on a small plateau on the side of the valley. Straight up on one side and straight down on the other. One way in and one way out. The only traffic up there was trekkers and porter animals, and of course the mountain bikers. I spent part of the day walking around the area but there was nowhere to go after walking the perimeter. I briefly entertained the idea of walking for another hour or so to reach what they called the High Camp, but I decided against it. The air was thinner up there and I read it would be harder to sleep.

The Thorong La Base Camp Hotel was by far the busiest teahouse I'd stayed in throughout my entire trek. By the time supper rolled around the entire dining hall was packed with people, group expeditions, groups of friends, couples, and the odd sole trekker like myself. I had my usual supper of bottomless dal bhat with a Coca-Cola. It was the last night before my trek over the pass and I was already fighting off a cold so I didn't want to take my chances with any food that might make me sicker. I was exhausted so I put my breakfast order in for 4:30 am and went to sleep by 7:30 p.m.

Sleep did not come easy. My entire body ached, my feet were beaten to a pulp, and my hips and heels were bleeding. I was having trouble breathing and I woke up several times to catch my breath in the night. I had a pretty bad cough by this point and my nose was stuffy. I didn't want to disturb the two roommates either with constant sniffling. Having two other people in the room did keep the room nice and warm, however. Eventually, I was able to sleep through the night.

VI

I landed in Kathmandu close to midnight local time. I had a room booked at a homestay that was a short walk from the busy tourist district of Thamel. Getting around was not a challenge. The cab driver at the airport spoke a little bit of English, but he appreciated my attempts to speak Nepali before politely informing me that he was Indian and while he did speak Nepali, Hindi was his native tongue.

I had made it. I was in Nepal. I stayed at my homestay for two nights. The day after I landed in Kathmandu I headed to the tourism office to pick up my hiking permits and picked up some last minute trekking equipment in Thamel. I had never been in such a chaotic city before. I was clipped by scooters and rickshaws on multiple occasions and witnessed some of the most hectic traffic I'd ever seen. I was accosted by tour guides, shopkeepers, "holy" men, drug dealers, and stray dogs. On my first day in Nepal and every day after people would come up to me and speak to me in Nepali. The interaction was nearly always the same. First, they would approach me while speaking in Nepali and finally, after seeing the blank expression on my face or my frantic flipping through my phrase book, they would apologize and say that I looked Nepali. Even after explaining to them my indigenous Canadian heritage many remained skeptical.

From Kathmandu I took a 10 hour bus ride along some of the steepest and narrowest roads I'd ever seen in my life. I vividly recall looking out the window from my seat on the bus and staring straight down off the edge of a cliff and nearly shitting myself then and there.

On my first night on the trail I met a travelling couple from Poland who I ate supper with in the villages on the nights I was able to catch up with them. They moved much quicker than me and actually ended up a full day ahead of me at one point. Those first few days were through

lush rainforest and low valleys. The days were hot and the nights were mild. I was almost thrown from the trail by yak, donkey and by horse on multiple occasions. I almost gave up on my first full day of trekking when I nearly fell backwards to my death trying to scramble up a steep rock wall that I thought was a shortcut. I cut that first day short when my legs gave out beneath me and I fell to my knees in the middle of the road.

The next few days were better and my muscles gradually got used to the constant pain. I just kept moving forward. There were sections of the trail where I knew that if I had stopped to rest I might not be able to get back up to my feet so I pushed through. I surprised myself every single day with what my body was capable of.

By the time I had reached the town of Chame I was confident out on the trail and I was moving at a good pace every day. That night in Chame at the Eagle Eye Hotel I had my first heated shower of the trek and I indulged at dinner with dumplings and an Everest beer. I met a group of trekkers from California led by a man and his son. He had trekked the Annapurna circuit five times and every time he came back he brought someone to experience it for their first time. Later that night I laid awake in bed messaging my partner. She was just waking up for the day and I was just going to bed. I missed her and I wished that she could have been there with me to see it. As much as I wished I could have bought her a last minute ticket to come with me, I knew that I needed to finish this alone. I needed to keep moving.

That morning in Chame I took some time to just stare out the window in the dining room. The Himalayas. The sun had risen over the valley and was just touching the tops of those giants. That was the moment I knew that if I made it through the rest of the trek, I'd be back someday. I didn't realize it then but I was consciously making plans for myself in the future. By telling myself I was going to be back there someday, I was giving myself something else to look forward to.

The trail after Chame continued to provide one new challenge after the other. From the frequent suspension bridges that had seen better days to the constant ascents that seemed to go on forever only to crest and reveal a descent that would undo the last few hours of elevation gain. A few hours after Chame, the Paungda Danda rock face dominated my view until I reached the village of Upper Pisang. The 1,500 metre tall formation was a smooth curved wall of slate rock and resembled a wave.

I could not have imagined a more calming view more suited to that particular section of trail. From Upper Pisang to the village of Gharyu I struggled with my first set of steep switchbacks that almost cost me my life after a clumsy step threw me to my hands and knees. I kept moving forward.

VII

I had breakfast at 4:30 a.m. and I was on the trail while it was still dark out. The only light was from the headlamps of myself and the other trekkers as we ascended the switchbacks up to the High Camp. Along the way I ran into my Polish friends; I was now keeping pace with them and we hiked together in the darkness for a while. At High Camp the sun was starting to come up over the sides of the valley and I needed to stop to catch my breath and take it all in. The air was so thin that I found I needed to stop for air every five minutes. I was now on the final stretch before the Thorong La Pass.

As the sun came up and lit up the valley and the trail up to the pass, the layers came off as I tried to stay cool without exposing too much skin to the frigid air. Behind me the view was like something from a movie. The trail was desolate, winding up from High Camp along ridges and across bridges. There was no more room for doubt. I was a couple hours away still but I knew I was going to make it, it was just a matter of time. My legs had never felt stronger. The aches and pains that had accumulated over the last 12 days were now giving me strength. My cold was nothing more than the sniffles from the cold air. Every step I took I was higher than I had ever been in my entire life and all I had to do was keep putting one foot in front of the other. This trek had gone from the hardest thing I'd ever done in my life to almost too easy.

After several false summits I saw the prayer flags that signified the Thorong La Pass. I had made it. I was at the top. Everything I'd been through to get here was worth it. Everything that had happened in the last 12 days was leading up to this; everything that had happened in the last 12 months was leading up to this. I'd put my body through hell and back on this trek and pushed it further than I'd ever thought I would. I was nearly 30-years-old and had felt like my best days were behind me, a naive and arrogant thought.

It was a quiet triumph. I took it all in for a moment before putting down my pack and heading into the highest tea shop for a cup of tea and a chocolate bar. I felt good. I felt happy. I thought about it for a long time as I sipped my tea, grinning from ear to ear. I was smiling.

"We both step and do not step in the same rivers. We are and are not." – Heraclitus

Heraclitus tells us we cannot step into the same river twice because the river is in a constant state of flux. The waters are always flowing and the water you stepped into one moment is gone the next. But the river is still the same river, and only by continuing to flux and flow can it remain that same river. Heraclitus says we are the same. We are different from one moment to the next but we are the same person. Only by changing can we remain who we are.

My river had stopped flowing. I travelled to the other side of the planet to set it in motion again.

VIII

The rest of the trip is a blur to me. I have detailed journal entries but they are not as important to me as what I learned about myself on the trail and on the Thorong La Pass. It was another two days getting down the other side and a sketchy flight through the mountains followed by a 12 hours bus ride to get me back to Kathmandu. I spent another week in Kathmandu visiting temples and soaking in the culture. I went back to the homestay where I spent my first two nights in Nepal and they treated me really well for that final week.

More than anything, I am glad that I chose Nepal. The flight I was booking to British Columbia was a one-way flight with a purpose and a plan that didn't involve coming back.

Nepal saved my life. The Annapurna Circuit saved my life.

From Birth to War, from Army to Prison Camp, from Music to Canada, from Marriage to Israel, from Romania to Kaddish

In memory of Sam Knacker, artist and friend, 1921–2016
Ron Romanowski

Bulgaria is a garden you once told me when I'd asked.
Sam, maybe my memory of you is like a crystalline star
suitable for a snowy people, fragile, but if I'm careful
it will even hold all the tomatoes of Israel you gloried me with.
Somehow I also want to patch on that time at the lake deck
when we drank all the wine. I had brought bottles for six

it still wasn't enough, intoxicating Australian bubbly Shiraz.
Is that because I need a potion to stay with you on this star?
It's only a snowflake, because it suddenly snowed the day of your
funeral. And my winter tires held against the snow after a fast U-turn
to park right in front of the Temple which seemed when inside almost
as spacious as your melodious Romanian soul.

I want to hear you singing somewhere, your high tenor.
I will follow the words of the rabbi at your funeral. You are
with us as we go, as long as we remember you, and I still hear
you standing on one of the melting points of this crystalline star.

Your high tenor may be reaching up to where the snowflakes are made
somewhere where they are sent down with a certainty we don't have
where Bulgaria is a garden written on a snowflake.

The Battalion

Donald Vogel

"Open country isn't much different than open water, long and monotonous to traverse."

These are the words of Mike, former Navy CB, Construction Battalion, half sailor, half marine, the guys who hit the beach right after the grunts to rebuild what they destroy. Mike had fallen into home building after his discharge in the early 90s.

"Both can change on a dime with the weather, only one swallows you and the other snatches you up."

We were in tornado country, cutting across a swath of Mississippi on I-75 on our way to Houston from Long Island, New York. I'd spent the majority of the trip trying to get a reticent soul to think of me as a companion rather than a reporter. I wasn't totally successful, although I was able to eke out a bit of a profile on him. As happened often on the journey, we were discussing the vistas we passed, and those we wouldn't. One gets a different perspective when not actually flying over this vast country. You didn't need roots to be shaped by the physical world.

"I once knew a guy in basic training who had graduated from the same high school as me. Tough, calloused soul. Hitched across country a few times. He cried in Kansas. Said he felt ingested by the flat forever."

Stories were circulating about groups of contractors who made a living from one natural disaster to another. It was said that some remained in New York for the long haul. My editor wanted me to explore what motivated people with no connection to any particular region to drive thousands of miles to help total strangers in need, and in this case, stay for years. I was to write something that went beyond the puff pieces seen on local news programs, months after public attention has moved onto the next image of a meteorologist among bending palm trees.

Here's what I've learned: it started out as roving groups of AARP age men who couldn't afford to retire with a smattering of displaced do-gooders looking for purpose. Some keep wandering, others get tired and stay in place figuring to call anyplace USA, home. Overtime, it has

come to incorporate growing groups of immigrants—Vietnamese in the Northwest, Somalis in the Midwest, and Latinos everywhere else—all of whom as Simon & Garfunkel once put it, 'Have gone to look for America."

The first group I encountered one might call 'salty dogs,' temporarily sheltering at a defunct funeral home in Bay Shore, NY. It seemed apropos, as they continuously joked about ghosts of the departed who'd populated their environs on their way to dirt. In reality, the only phantoms present were the subjects of their life experiences. Among Caucasian Americans, it was war stories, both foreign and domestic, coalesced around complaints about illegals stealing work from them. The immigrants' stories often involved authoritarianism and opportunity, imagined or actual. What they shared with the WASPs, but didn't bond around, were damaged psyches and a world weariness that suggested the wisdom of the ages limited by vocabularies or cultural perspectives.

Mike's was the most prominent ghost and the first interviewee on what was an extended assignment taking me across the country. I started with him because he was the unofficial commander of what some called 'the battalion'; a progenitor of a small army of roving contractors, traipsing the country everywhere the FEMA and insurance money flowed. In appearance, he was someone I'd call war torn: 6'2" when he isn't hunched. He has a bad hip that he lives with, as many in the battalion do with varying injuries occupying a world of cash transactions, tax evasion, and no healthcare. Mike doesn't walk so much as lope, with long tattooed arms and hands a linebacker would envy.

"Some poets wax rhapsodic about man and the landscape," I said to prevent the conversation from waning into one of our long silences, when music from his iPod Classic filled the void. That shuffled across 10,000 songs and was occasionally jarring—Frank Sinatra doesn't transition seamlessly to Fleet Foxes.

I was fortunate that Mike agreed to continue this story about the men like him. His extended stay five years after Hurricane Sandy wasn't unusual. I was fortunate to hitch a ride when he decided to uproot himself for Houston, victim of Hurricane Harvey. It was agreed that I would find my next interviewee after the ride there.

"Not sure I know anybody who's rhapsodic, but I think I know what you mean. You see a lot of Golgothas here in the Bible Belt." Mike said as

we passed yet another hill with crosses and "Jesus Saves" sign.

There are indeed a lot of crosses out there: totems warning off any liberals or progressives foolish enough to enter these parts.

"I once had a professor who thought anything artificial, even crosses, was imposing meaning on a landscape."

"So's building a home."

I paused for a moment.

"Will it be a cultural shock for you now that this is Trump's country?"

"I don't know about that. There's strong sense of community here."

I admired Mike's blissful disconnect from the cacophony life has become in the world of 24-hour, op-ed blathering through screens in every pocket. He uses a flip phone and has no electronic foot print that I could find, unless you count the last time he downloaded any music. His iPod seemed to me in this era of streaming services like a cultural bog, an ecosystem in which no fresh water flows and plants are carnivores.

"Well it's certainly church centered." I said.

"It's centered. That matters."

He was right. I, like many nowadays, want to burst with opinions on how the religious right had sold its soul to a guy who for me and many of my colleagues in the media was the equivalent of the Anti-Christ. However, I know it's not that simple and could use a bit of centering myself.

"Is grounding something you need?" I asked.

"I didn't say that. Not everyone is a bible thumper out here is all."

I had to be careful with my questions. If I was to travel with him I'd had to promise that I wouldn't probe too deep in our discussions. The 'old salts' had shared that he lost a wife and son to carbon monoxide poisoning in the late 90s. They said that once during a drunken tirade he'd wailed that no one wanted to buy his house of death. With a little digging, I'd found a brief mention in a local paper about a grief-stricken homeowner who had signed the property over to Habitat for Humanity, a charity that re-furbishes homes for the poor. He's been on the road ever since.

"Have you ever been a religious man?"

He glared, reached across me, yanked open the glove compartment and pulled out a book and tossed in my lap. It was a red, Revised Standard Version Bible; one of the cheap ones they give to kids at confirmation. This one was dog-eared and taped at the binder, with loose pages yearning to be free from their imprisonment in the text. I gently flipped through it and saw yellow highlighting on some of the pages. I wanted to see some of the specific verses but didn't want to disturb the fragile artifact.

He said, "I like to read and figured that, lacking room, that's the book I should keep. It helps me get to sleep some nights."

"Any favorite passages?"

"I didn't do any of the markings you see there. That's someone else's handiwork."

I thought I knew.

Mike added, "I like Job and Ecclesiastes: shit happens and there's nothing new under the sun. Period."

I put the bible back in the glove compartment and we both stared out at the road. I got to thinking that just as middle America is littered with Roman torture devices, it is also marred by darkened storefronts and defunct industrial sights. Mike and I had seen too many. Religiosity hasn't saved the Main Streets our interstates have decayed, diverting shoppers away from downtown areas and directing them to convenient rest stops festooned with every soul killing, heart-attack inducing brand of corporate fodder. Online shopping only completed the demise.

I wondered if climate change might be producing a new business model, the one adopted by Mike, and maybe a social one as well. It has become hard not to think of a moment when there isn't a weather disaster. Forget hurricanes and tornadoes, a simple passing thunderstorm can level communities. While it spurs investment, residents are displaced by the 'foreigners' working to help them. One can already see a form of Social Darwinism at play in communities of colour or those of lesser socioeconomic status.

"Why'd you stay so many years in Long Island?"

"Work."

"I know, but I thought that is what kept you on the road."

"Consistent work."

"Sandy was five years ago. Did you start growing roots?"

He looked at me. "I worked the south shore, which isn't all McMansions. There are towns where people can't afford to abandon their properties. So they took longer to get their homes up to code. Many still haven't"

I wondered about the futility of it.

John continued, "I also did some work for Habitat for Humanity. Met Jimmy Carter, was inspired, and so I stayed."

"He certainly has a greater legacy as an ex-president."

"I'm not a student of history. He's real. That I noticed."

"Why did some of the others on Long Island stay?"

"Mostly road fatigue. It's like when I was in the Navy. Guys would fall in love with the first girl they fucked after extended sea time. Some went AWOL. Others married and brought them back to the States."

"All of those guys on the Island met someone?"

"There's disaster fatigue, too. You guys in the press must know what that is."

I nodded.

Things clang in Mike's van as we hit bumps. He claims that all he needs is a hammer, saw, and screwdriver and he could build or fix anything. However, he had pipes held by brackets in the overhead, shelving and cubbies with a variety of nails, screws and fasteners, and a few pneumatic devices, including a nail gun. In the middle was a Navy sea bag which held Mike's clothes. During overnights, I would stay in a hotel room while he stayed in the parking lot.

I had asked Mike about his Navy days. He was stationed in San Diego and had seen much of the West Pacific. He got drunk in Japan,

Singapore, Hong Kong and Australia and laid in the Philippines. In fact, most of his stories were focused on sexual exploits. Dope was rampant as were various STDs. Shipmates typically came back from liberty stoned, married or with the clap. He said things were probably very different now, with the U.S. actually being at war nearly 20 years in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mike had a deep respect for those vets. He grew up with an uncle who was a drunk, having served as an MP in Vietnam. He couldn't imagine what the future held with the current PSTD mills producing an inverse Great Generation.

My business is full of their stories, featuring the tragic and patriotic, mixing and mingling spousal abuse, suicides, and opioids. In addition to the burgeoning healthcare crisis we face with the aging baby boomers, we have become adept at producing souls who are truly damned. They've graduated from the horrors of war with the mandate to integrate into a society with ever widening wealth disparities, and many of them being on the lower end of that spectrum from the start. Mike's generation is sandwiched somewhere between the Mekong Delta and Mosul. He'd told me stories of Russian Bear aircraft, their version of the B-52, buzzing within a 100 feet of his ship's mast, but that was only cold war play. The dangers are still apparent, only the weapons have changed.

The true cold war is the one we're fighting now, each other and the weather, which is why Mike's Battalion is so interesting to me. He and his cadre are a collaboration of hands in a land sorely in need of people who think kinetically as opposed to just thinking. There is an irony there as I am one who makes a living on the latter group. A graduate of the humanities doomed to perpetuate his kind, because the opportunities for folks like us are diminishing. We are scattered across multiple platforms in a disunity of disparate voices, our blogs and tweets the acid eroding the common social mores cementing the bricks of society.

I asked Mike what he did in his off hours when on the road.

"I sometimes do touristy stuff."

This was both surprising and disappointing. I'd at least thought that a former Navy man might stake his claim in the narrative of sexual exploits so common among those separated from the opposite sex. I'll admit that I wax a bit nostalgic for the once dependable thread of male bonding rituals around patriarchal indulgences. Boredom prompted me to push back a little.

"Any of those touristy things related to some of the other sea stories your shared?" He took the bait, but not as the fish I wanted to catch.

"Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Only in those Henry James wrote about."

He looked at me, then back at the road.

"Yep, so there are people in other countries who believe that if you take their picture, you steal a piece of their soul."

I thought a minute. "You're not saying that there are people in the U.S. who believe the same thing? My question was about the link between here and overseas."

"I once attended a ghost tour in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. It was between disasters I can't even remember. Probably local river cresting."

I was the fish now.

"The tour started after dark, outside the fence where the Gettysburg Battle dead are buried. Lincoln gave his speech there. We then walked over to an adjacent strip mall and descended an old basement, supposedly the former site of an orphanage."

I thought to myself, 'ah yes, that old trope,' but then remembered some of the stories I covered as a beat reporter in the Bronx.

"The guide shared accounts of cruelty to kids and we crawled into a small, cold dungeon with a chain. He spoke about strange occurrences when the lights went out."

"And I'll bet they turned them off next."

"After telling the group to get camera phones ready. One gasp and it was a chaos of flashes. Of course, people are going to record specters. That 'evidence' perpetuates the myth.'"

"Interesting, but what's the connection between stolen souls and fake ghosts?"

"Cell phones."

I laughed. He smirked.

Mike and I were reaching the end of our journey. I finally understood I wasn't going to get the pathos or the catharsis I thought he might need. I would be left to wondering about the failure of my provocation over the success of his reticence as I moved on to seek another battalion member for my journey. I regretted not blowing the dust off my own iPod for this assignment as there are still places where streaming doesn't reach. I thought for a moment how crosses on so many rural hills might serve as surreptitious antennae.

Still wanting to get more information from my chauffeur, I had to ask that of the smorgasbord of disaster occurring at any one moment, "Why Houston?"

"Dunno. Perhaps to help the doubly displaced. Many refugees of Katrina fled from New Orleans to Houston and never went back. I'd like to build permanence."

"Sounds like consistent work."

"Unfortunately, it is."

self, in motion

Korellia Schneider

if they tell you that
you're hearing things
insist that the wind spoke
out of turn
while hearsay has been
squatting in the
kitty-corner apartment for weeks

and they want to silence
the *you*ness clawing to release

you have two feet, two wheels
to spirit away to a place only you
know

if, now, it is too much
you can retreat
leave breadcrumbs or
a trail of flowers or
the shards of broken records to
reach this point again in
the labyrinth at
the deepest part of yourself

those days
when it is one shade short of
taking a cleaver to a carcass
you are surviving on sawdust
and you are so tired
of educating those who want to be
informed

trying to tenderize the truth for
everyone else
when the brine has never left
your innards, your narrative
wending downstream to
open ocean

it is not wrong
to press pause
to align with the beach over
the battlefront
to ponder two-thousand
adjectives in witness of
sand refracting light

and the million ways
you come back
regroup and reform
out of the stardust of
the ancients
alight the whole of your resolve

the water washes over or
lets you meld with
the birds racing the tide
and their minding of
the speckled eggs
somewhere far off

if you keep in frame
hold the angle just right
you may look to boxes to
keep yourself contained or
think of the stars as the divinest of
safety pins strung together in charade

they have spoken to you of divinity
but you do not have to
tap into the well
if you are not ready

there is room for *you*
and the words, the stones
you clutch in your palms
you slip in your pockets
smooth and unnoticed

on your mark
when you wish to move
through the mountain pass
or the forest of jade
your feet touch the earth
and imprint the loamy soil

the scenery is
but a reconciliation of
wide and narrow
hurt and heal
all you've come
to be

Invisible Disabilities

Jim Ross

"I'd like to use the elevator," I say.

"The elevator's only for people with disabilities," says the attendant. "The stairs are right around the corner."

"I can't do stairs," I say. "I have a valid excuse for using the elevator."

"Are you deaf? If you are, that's a *real* diss-ability. Except, I still couldn't let you onto the elevator. If you insist on using it, come back with a wheelchair."

I've had similar conversations more times than I can count. It seems some facilities explicitly train their attendants to permit elevator access only to people with *visible disabilities. At most,* they readily offer access only to people who are wheelchair-bound or who walk with heavy braces, a walker, or a white cane.

One day last year, my wife and I agreed to visit a restaurant we had avoided for a decade because I couldn't handle going up and down 24 steps to the restroom, especially since the kitchen was upstairs and the wait staff didn't slow down because a customer was on the stairway. We agreed to return after my wife confirmed the restaurant had a first-floor restroom. The problem was, after we arrived and I told the host I needed to use the first-floor restroom, he insisted all restrooms were upstairs. When I persisted that I needed to use the one on the first-floor, he said it was reserved for the handicapped.

"Are you handicapped? Because you don't look handicapped."

Five minutes later, when I exited the restroom, he was lurking outside.

"Show me proof that you're handicapped," he demanded.

I wonder, what do they stand to gain by restricting access to a first-floor restroom or to an elevator when someone says they require access? What's the skin off their teeth to just back off? Millions of people don't always *look* disabled because their disabilities are largely invisible.

What if, instead, facilities posted signs and trained their employees more inclusively by following the principle that, 'people in wheelchairs and who walk with assisted devices get priority, but anyone may choose to take elevators rather than stairs or escalators.' Following the same logic, those who are visibly handicapped should be invited to use accessible restrooms, but anyone who chooses to use such restrooms should be afforded access without having to disclose *or prove* their disability. I've been negotiating access to elevators and to first-floor restrooms for over 20 years. We've made progress in expanding awareness of the range of disabilities people face, many of them invisible, but we still have a long way to go.

What's behind my stairs climbing disability? I shouldn't have to justify myself. Nobody should be forced to justify why they might need certain accommodations. Once anyone says, "I require an accommodation," that should be sufficient. Nobody should be told to "Prove it."

My stairs climbing ability is impaired because key muscle groups needed for normal stairs climbing have a propensity toward spasticity. This means that when affected muscles are supposed to stretch, they contract instead. I've found this is more likely to occur after prolonged periods of standing, walking, or sitting, or generally as the day progresses, even when I've taken appropriate meds. Spasticity also tends to alter gait and impede walking. It potentially can impair functionality of almost *any* muscle group. A while back, for the first time, I woke to find the biceps of both arms curled in a continuous contraction, with my hands resting on my shoulders. I've decided, "That was a fluke." Quote me on that. Overall, I consider myself fortunate. So far, my spasticity primarily affects select muscle groups. On bad days, I feel like the Tin Woodsman before he's been oiled. On better days, I still feel like the Tin Woodsman, but after he's been oiled. My neurologist says that most people with invisible disabilities come up with accommodations for them, but as they age they become less able to maintain the accommodations, so their disabilities become more manifest and vexing.

About 25 years ago my primary care physician commented on my extreme hyper-reflexivity,

"You probably have a mild form of cerebral palsy, a birth accident. Tell your mother it's her fault."

Subsequent doctors disagreed with her glib diagnosis. They've concurred that my spasticity results from decades of intermittent spinal cord compression, exacerbated by falls and an unintentional encounter between the wind-blown trunk of my car and the back of my head. In short, spasticity is a manifestation of spinal cord injury. I'm told it's an upper motor neuron phenomenon, meaning that when the upper spinal cord is injured, the injury tends to reveal itself in the lower body in the form of hip and leg spasticity that can get progressively worse.

Conversations like mine with the elevator attendant occur thousands of times *hourly* to the tens of millions of people with *invisible* disabilities. This term refers to any ongoing impairment not readily apparent to onlookers in an individual's ability to perform certain functions—seeing, hearing, talking, walking, climbing stairs and lifting and carrying—or activities of daily living, or social roles. It can refer to disabling forms of pain, fatigue, and dizziness, cognitive dysfunctions, learning differences and mental health disorders. All conditions, including visible ones, can have invisible components that limit daily activities.

A close friend, a war veteran who served as a medic/conscientious objector, has no visible disabilities, but has several invisible ones resulting from his service, including hearing loss and PTSD that still has multiple triggers. I got him to write about it a couple of times and succeeded in getting his work published and then redistributed by a vets group, but he said he couldn't write anymore because, "It revs up my PTSD and makes me feel nuts."

A few years ago I was walking the hills of my neighborhood with two walking sticks. A woman stopped her car and said, "You're doing a great job recovering from your stroke."

Unfazed, I said, "I haven't had a stroke. I'm not recovering from one."

She persisted, "Well, whatever you're recovering from, you're doing great."

I silently applauded her cheering me on. After all, aren't we all always recovering from *something*? Still, why did she assume I had a stroke? Apparently, she regarded walking sticks as assisted devices, which she felt the need to explain as visible disability resulting from stroke.

My former employer once asked all employees to record on a non-anonymous questionnaire all their disabilities, visible and invisible, and

to specify any accommodations needed to perform their jobs. With good reason, many employees reacted with paranoia. Some wondered, "How are they going to discriminate against me if I tell them I have disabilities they don't know about?" I believe my employer's motivation was to avert future legal action by going on record as having made an honest offer to accommodate even invisible disabilities. In other words, if somebody complained down the road, my employer could say, "Hey, we asked." I also believe the paranoia of employees who hesitated in being forthcoming was fully justified.

Significant progress has been made in according accommodations to people with *visible* disabilities. *Some.* We've scarcely begun to accommodate *invisible* ones, including the invisible disabilities experienced by people with visible ones.

When we see someone with handicapped tags and no visible disabilities park in a handicapped parking space, many of us still whisper, "There's another cheater." There are probably people who whisper that about me. However, we all need to remind ourselves, there a lot we don't know. No, there's *most* we don't know. We have hardly any basis for rendering such judgements. We need to work together at creating a more compassionate, less judgmental world, based partially on acceptance of each other's invisible and usually undisclosed disabilities.

My Mother's Bike

Karen Solomon

My mother's gold bicycle belongs to me now. In 2011 my mother died suddenly and unexpectedly, just four days after her 80th birthday. Among the many people whose lives she touched, the members of her cycling group were a vital part.

The Leisure Cycling Group (LCG) was formed in 2000 by a retired nurse who lived on my mom's street. My mother was excited to join, as was her partner Harvey, as they were avid cyclists. Every Tuesday and Thursday morning the group met at Assiniboine Park. An informal ride on Sunday mornings was a brunch ride. Regardless of the weather, the group cycled from May through October. Mostly 'young' retirees in their early 60s at the time of the group's inception, they cycled 30-60 km each ride.

My mother and some members of the group went on various cycling trips throughout the years that followed—to Greece, Holland, and the annual fall trip to Walker, Minnesota. I looked at my mother's photos from these trips and hoped that one day I too could have these amazing experiences.

Closer to home, the group cycled at Birds Hill Park, Falcon Lake, Hecla, and along River Road to Selkirk. The Sunday brunch ride to Headingly from Assiniboine Park was always popular.

I was always interested and inspired by the stories about the group. As a recreational cyclist, I could hardly fathom such long rides undertaken by people so much older than me. On weekends I often went cycling with my mother. Once I accompanied her and Harvey on a particularly long ride (for me) and struggled to make it back home. Of course, for them the cycle was almost effortless.

My mother didn't slow down as she approached her 80th birthday. In fact, a year earlier she had purchased a new bike. Most of the original members of the group, who were now in their 70s and 80s, were also continuing to actively cycle. Over the years new members were welcomed into the group; with a cap of around 40 there was usually a waiting list.

Upon retiring in 2014, my husband Jon joined LCG. At 60, he was the youngest member. Harvey was 87!

Still working, I enviously listened to Jon telling me about the cycling adventures he had with LCG. When I retired in 2016, I joined the group. My first cycle with them was on River Road, from the south end of the road by Larters to Selkirk and back. On the return cycle, into the wind and over many hills, I was exhausted and struggling to keep up. I kept repeating to myself, "You are 25 years younger than these people, you can do it."

LCG has evolved over the years. Tuesday rides are now short (20-30 km) and Thursday rides are long (30-50 km). Members volunteer to lead rides and monthly ride schedules are circulated ahead of time. In this way, I have discovered wonderful neighbourhoods in Winnipeg that I could never experience otherwise. Riding a bicycle allows you to see houses, parks and neighbourhood amenities in a way that being in a vehicle would not allow.

Some of my favourite routes include: 1) Assiniboine Park to the Forks via Wolseley and Assiniboine Avenue, and then on to Kildonan Park via Point Douglas and Scotia Street, returning via Kildonan Drive and St. Boniface to the Forks; 2) the Yellow Ribbon Trail (it starts on Silver Avenue at Berry) to Sturgeon Creek, going past the Living Prairie Museum, and returning to Assiniboine Park via the beautiful neighbourhood of Woodhaven; 3) the Preston Trail through Assiniboine Forest, connecting to the Harte Trail (an old rail line in Charleswood that is an absolute gem in our city), cycling to its end, and then back through Charleswood to Assiniboine Park.

It has been four years since I joined LCG. I was initially introduced as "Maxine's daughter" and that is certainly how I feel today. And those longstanding LCG members, some now in their late 80s and their 90s, who continue to get on their bikes and cycle all over the city, remain an inspiration to Jon and me. As our LCG friends have told us many times, cycling and the friendship that has resulted from their many rides together have contributed greatly to their health and longevity.

After my mother's sudden death, I received one particularly moving letter with the following inscription: "I will always think of your mother every time I cycle, I can visualize her on her bike, smiling and greeting every person that she passed."

Every time I'm cycling, I'm wishing that my mother could be there too.

Independence

Robert Beveridge

The air breathes, jagged, hitched.
Explosions, twice as loud as
anything else in the soundtrack.
A vessel of soap with a cargo
of mead, a golden river
with a legendary city at the end.
What makes a man sell his home,
his family, his things? What makes
a woman sign her life away
for a berth, volunteer as a deck hand
just for a glimpse of earth that
breathes like air? We cannot know.
None have returned to tell us.

Southeast by Southwest

Vincent Ternida

1. Filipinix-Canadian Kerouac

My only exposure to Jack Kerouac was *Maggie Cassidy*, a pretentious film adaptation of *On the Road*, and peer editing a screenplay my classmate wrote back in 2007. Prior to that I had little knowledge about the beatnik movement and the romance of the American road. Two years after my failed engagement, I took up a new hobby of jumping on the Greyhound whenever I felt like it. Whenever I'd saved enough from my grocery job, I took quick trips to Bellingham from Vancouver and as far as Portland for the weekend.

The Canadian border guards, however, didn't seem to appreciate my hobby as much as I did. They were curious why I travelled south of the border to watch a special screening and to eat at a diner. It was a minor annoyance but my trailblazing behavior almost seemed to spark curiosity, mostly from immigration agents. My passport was Canadian, I earned it. I travelled with a Filipino passport in the past and the questions were much longer. My dad told me to shave every fiber of facial hair and get as clean as possible. Without a beard, the untrained eye mistook me for a random Asian. With a stubble, it swung Hispanic. With a beard, I was a terrorist. I was invisible or a threat, nothing in between.

The same tough as nails border guard interrogated an Asian pro gamer the same way she interrogated me. Lugging large swag bags with the gleaming *League of Legends* brand advertising his 15 seconds of fame, the gamer quipped about his winnings being larger than the border guard's yearly salary. My father taught me to respect the badge and most of my trips were pleasant. The border guard took the youth in question for secondary inspection and the Greyhound left without the pro gamer.

2. Waiting for Rain

I brought the rain each time I visited Austin, Texas. They said that no matter where I travelled, I could never escape myself. My parents told me it stormed when I was born and I believed that even if it may be a false memory. The rain and I had some sort of connection; unlike people who hated it, I embraced it.

For two years in a row, I was first in line at Franklin's Barbecue. Not even Kanye West could claim that feat. The only person who ever cut the line was Barack Obama and he had to feed the first three guests. My buddy Chris introduced me to Texas Barbecue at The Salt Lick and I was floored. However, when I had Franklin's, somehow the barbecue gods of old and new whispered in my ear. I lost that power when I helped myself to local barbecue in Vancouver during my sister's wedding rehearsal dinner.

After landing in Austin-Bergstrom, I took a University bus with the intention to stop at Kerby Lane Cafe for some migas tacos and loaded pancakes. Anne Marie, my server, was a petite blonde lady who lit up when I arrived.

"Where y'all come from?"

"Vancouver."

"Seattle?"

"Canada."

"They got great sushi there."

"I heard."

She broke into a hearty laugh with some snorts in between. I knew an Anne Marie back in the day, it was 2013 and she was the reason I kept coming back.

It rained in Austin on a warm Friday evening. Last time I saw Chris was back in high school student council. It was a potluck party for "former third culture kids" or something like that. I was at Austin for a screenwriting conference and I promised Chris I'd hang out and meet his wife. I could count two brown people in the group, myself and Chris' wife, Mich (she's Sri Lankan). It was fine. I've known the feeling of being the only person of colour in a party and not being weird about it. Cool part was with everyone being a third culture kid, I didn't get any curious stares. I noticed Anne Marie, who narrated her experience in Beijing as an exchange student. One thing she missed living in Texas was the accessibility of dancing. When we spoke, she promised to show me around the following Sunday. I expected and assumed too much from the exchange.

Anne Marie showed up on Sunday with her boyfriend Justin. We drove off the beaten track of the regular 6th and Congress comfort zone into a homey area near a dollar store where a Mexican food truck was perched in its natural habitat. Two beef fajitas and a horchata later, I was feeling a little sugar high and 15 pounds heavier.

"Anything going on?"

"I'm moving to Shanghai at the end of the year," Anne Marie said.

With that statement, Justin pursed his lips.

"What are your plans?"

"Ultimately to get a screenplay picked up," I said.

"Sounds ambitious."

"Yeah, I do love to write."

"You have someone in your life?"

"Dunno. I'm a little up in the air for that to be honest."

Justin took a big swig from his horchata and interjected.

"Yeah, I lived up in Washington for a while, people were cold. Cold in Canada?"

"Yeah, a little. People here sure are friendly."

"You'll find someone," Justin said.

All that evening did was instill a stronger temptation for wanderlust.

I got a text from Chris that Ray Prim will be performing a little ways outside of town. I went because I wanted to enjoy South by Southwest as the locals did. The smooth blues singer sat on stage and charmed the crowd with his tunes.

"Writing is easy, booking gigs is hard," Ray Prim said.

The themes in his lyrics carried a deep vulnerability that translated into a deep sentiment. His backup singer, lovingly dubbed Mexican Chocolate, provided the harmony to match Ray's melody in staccato. It left an imprint of the struggle of a live performer in Austin. It correlates

to the struggle of unknown writers like myself—a dime a dozen, each with a shtick, sometimes comes out with a hit, most of the time struggling to make ends meet. Afterwards, Chris and I had dinner at a specialty hot dog restaurant where we had gator dogs.

"You seeing anyone?" the dreaded question popped up.

"I stopped caring about dating," I said.

"What do you want?"

I didn't remember what topic I changed it to, but both the gator dogs and the conversation left an unpleasant aftertaste.

3. All Come to Look for America

I realized that my long haul trip from Montreal to Austin would have multiple bus switches. One thing I learned during the second leg of the trip from Toronto to Detroit was that it was a complete bus change. It meant that when I switched buses at Nashville, I had to stay the whole five hours at a Greyhound station because the chances of the bus leaving without me was high. And unlike a plane trip, the drivers didn't give a rat's ass. It meant I had to nix my impulsive plans to grab some hot chicken and listen to good country.

There were many things to learn from a 48 hour bus ride. The bus stopped between three to five hours; I learned to take two hour naps. When the bus left after midnight, the turnovers became eight hours, and I ended up catching four to five hours of sleep. I learned how to control my bowels. Kept myself hydrated, but not too much. I learned to eat a meal every 12 hours. I listened to the bus driver, they didn't repeat themselves. Every three stops, I didn't have the same bus mates, so I avoided the herd. They made some drastic mistakes.

My sister speculated my sudden wanderlust was due to high exposure to Paul Simon and John Denver as a child. I never cared much for folk, to be honest. Out of all the folk my parents played on repeat, I only enjoyed Cat Stevens (Yusuf Islam). Paul and his buddy Art, I learned to appreciate as I got older. Especially on this trip, I also learned that the free subscription to Spotify only had six skips per hour. Even then, I only heard *America* three times those 48 hours. That was one *America* in every 16. However, I heard *Homeward Bound* 13 times, and it felt more

poignant than the other song. While the previous song was nostalgic and involved packing pies and crossing the New Jersey turnpike, the latter was nuanced and really brought forth feelings of regret. These trips, what were they for, why did I obsess myself to a crucible of discomfort and pointless wandering?

My privilege was in full view as I became more of a spectator rather than a participant. I overheard a conversation between a newly freed prisoner and his seatmate. The ex-con chose to be incarcerated because he couldn't secure a loan for his parking tickets. A teenage runaway partook in a cocktail made of 7 UP and cough syrup that had a bad reaction with her medication. She ended up being taken away by paramedics an hour away from Memphis. I observed an Amish family awaiting their next bus at Nashville. A few hours away from Austin, listening into a conversation between passengers, I realized that I had the option to fly any time I felt overwhelmed by the road. Some people didn't have this choice.

I was alone at the Driskill, probably on my eighth Fireman's Blonde Ale. Surrounded by strangers, I barely struck a conversation. For the first time in Austin, I was invisible. The wait staff did not have time to coddle me. I bumped into partygoers. None of which were local. Who was I kidding? I was the worst kind of tourist: the kind who pretended to be local. Stripped down of everything, I was still just an insecure man trying to run away from myself.

Anne Marie randomly texted me a video and said that it reminded her of me.

"I was just thinking about you too," I texted.

"You liar," her text arrived a few minutes later.

"Anything exciting planned for the future?"

"I'm going to LA," she said. "For work."

"Done with Shanghai?"

I finished my beer and headed outside. There was a Chipotle on every corner, it even killed a burger joint I liked.

"China's different. It wasn't exactly all that I thought it to be. How's

Vancouver? I hope you finally found someone. I'm moving to LA to be close to my new boyfriend."

I switched off my phone. At that point, I realized I wasn't in Austin from 2013. I was away from Congress, away from Dirty Sixth, and Rainey Street. The rain poured down as I walked back to my hostel. I brought the rains to Austin one last time. I called an Uber and made my way to the airport. The dream of the road was over and it was about time I woke up.

Legends from the Trails: Shelby Encounters the Memegesi

Janell Henry

"Bus is here!" Mom yells from the kitchen.
We're the first ones on and the last ones off. I'm pretty sure the bus driver feels bad for us because we get home nearly two hours after school ends.

"SHELBY! THE BUS IS WAITING." Mom yells again.

It will take her one more minute of me not answering before she comes stomping over. I run out. Of course Jessica, my sister, is already in her spot glaring at me. She's never late. She's probably excited to go to school because the teachers just love her so much, the love she so desperately seeks.

"I heard you laughing in your sleep again this morning," Jess says as I'm getting on the bus.

"Why do you get up so early? Stop being such a creep and listening to my life!" I defend myself.

"Child. I was getting ready. As if I'd waste my time to creep on you. It's not my fault the wall is paper thin. I was just wondering though, you're not playing with little people again are you?" Jessica laughs hideously.

I should have never told her that YEARS ago. She's a jerk for saying it on the bus even if it is just the bus driver around. I see him look up at us arguing through the mirror, and he smiles and adjusts his hat.

That whole day things make me mad, and when I get home mom and dad are gone and Jessica is 'babysitting.' I don't want to be around the house with her, so I go to my spot by the river, my quiet, get-away-from-the-world, spot. Except I'm not supposed to go there alone because it's near the water.

Just as I am passing the thick bush, I see a red fox. He is jumping like a kangaroo! I follow him down to the bottom of the hill. There are piles of rocks going down the trail and they get bigger as we get closer to the river. When we reach a big pile of rocks that kind of look like a little house, the red fox disappears. The wind picks up and carries away all

other sounds. I lie flat against the earth and close my eyes. I'm about 60 percent certain this is not a dream.

"Ambe daga Wiijiiwishin," Oshkabaywis says in Ojibwe, meaning come with me.

I know who it is right away. It is the groundskeepers of the earth, the little people. My grandma told me these are known spirit helpers. It is said that the older you get and the more materialistic, the less visible the people become to you. You are not supposed to speak about them much or wish to see them. But if you happen to catch them before they can hide, you can talk to them, as long as you don't show your whole body. My grandma also said if you leave shiny things near the river, the spirit helpers will protect you.

Definitely, no one is going to believe me.

"The land goes deeper, *Ambe daga Wiijiiwishin,"* Oshkabaywis says again, "If you come with me, you no longer have your own personal responsibility, you will be one of us. We have our own trails below the rivers and the rocks."

I think about my ugly sister and how mean she is and how my parents are always gone. That doesn't mean that I could leave forever.

"But if don't go back, I won't see Jessica's dance recital," I say.

The Memegesi understands and leads me back to the top of the hill. When I look behind me, Oshkabaywis quickly turns to the side, shapeshifting into a long blade of grass. On top of the hill, Jessica is looking for me, furious that I disappeared.

"SHELBY, you know the rules," she complains. "Are you trying to get me in trouble?"

"Sorry, I got comfortable and I fell asleep," I mutter back.

Never will I ever tell her I followed a red fox that was jumping like a kangaroo.

La texture de l'écorce

Laurence Ammann-Lanthier

Lourde neige sur leurs branches, les pins s'inclinent.

Au ras le sol autour du tronc, il y a une tanière ou nichent les lapins. On ne les voit pas mais on le sait par leurs pattes qui ont pesé sur la couche égale de la neige, recueils d'ombre bleue depuis le trottoir.

Les glaçons, immobiles et acérés, accrochés solidement aux toitures des maisons, vivent dans le silence de leur chute à venir.

Il vente et il fait trente degrés sous de zéro.

Dans cet espace harmonieux de blanc et de bleu, la banane que j'épluche m'apparaît comme un détail quelque peu incongru.

L'air clair de l'hiver et le soleil qui touche l'écorce du dos des arbres : ce sont les images qui me viennent de par la fenêtre. Moi, je suis au chaud dans mon salon. J'ai le champ de vision meublé de tous les produits tout aussi étrangers les uns que les autres : Made in China, Product of El Salvador, Made in Bangladesh, Product of Peru. Table, peinture, livre, tapis.

Ma banane. Elle a passé par des centaines de paires de main et elle en est venue à former mon quotidien plus encore que les écosystèmes mêmes de ma cours arrière, plus que nos forêts urbaines, qui sont pourtant à portée de main.

Nos arbres, nos prairies et les pousses de la Terre sont devenus des commodités que l'on met sur le marché. C'est ça. Au mieux, ce sont des espaces sacrés que nous empruntons, une fois de temps en temps, pour échapper au traffic et au gravier. Pour échapper à *la réalité*, qu'on appelle ça.

À l'instar du lapin qui émerge de son antre et qui interagit avec son écosystème, je me déplace dans l'aisance, le confort matériel et le divertissement. Je demande: à quel prix ?

On vit désormais à l'intérieur; on m'a dit que l'Halloween se court dans les centres d'achats et entre le Safeway, la job, la maison et les factures

à payer, il y a peu de place pour parcourir les sentiers de chez nous de façon plus permanente, profonde et respectueuse.

Nos arbres, nos prairies, les pousses de notre Terre : ils pourraient bien être aussi loin que le bananier de ma banane, tant nous nous mobilisons si peu pour former des liens avec eux. En même temps, ce que nous consommons se déplace pour nous, et souvent en transformant radicalement les paysages et les modes de vie d'ailleurs.

Nous ne voyons ni les empreintes digitales laissées par toutes les personnes qui ont acheminé le fruit jusqu'à nous, ni les impacts de ce commerce sur leur qualité de vie.

Nos estomacs en digèrent les centaines de milliers de kilomètres.

Est-ce qu'on pourrait se déplacer un peu plus intentionellement chez nous, avec nos corps, nos esprits et nos portefeuilles, pour bien vivre sans que les fruits de la nature n'aient à traverser le monde ? Est-ce qu'on pourrait recréer des schémas équitables d'autosuffisance alimentaire régionale pour combler la distance entre le pommier dans ma cour et moi, entre le jardin communautaire et moi, entre l'agriculteur du sud-ouest de la province, et moi ?

Les pelouses de gazon rasé qui sévissent sur nos propriétés privées. Qu'on arrose régulièrement.

Les piles de produits passés la date de vente, inaccessibles dans les poubelles vérouillées des supermarchés.

On les connait, ces incohérences.

Le trajet de la banane, autant de courbes et de détours sur la carte. Autant de camions sur la route, de cargos sur la mer, de gaspillage laissé dans leurs sillages. Connectés par nos commodités, habitués à consommer, un tour de maître qui nous a éloigné des terres sur lesquelles on vit. Qui a effacé ce que c'est que de vivre en harmonie avec tout ce qui est vie, autour de soi. Je demande, à quel prix ?

The Accidental Walker

Nancy Wick

When I leave my house on an early summer morning, the air is still cool, a few clouds persisting in the otherwise blue sky. I take my well-worn route down the sidewalk-less street that borders my home. It is narrow and not heavily travelled, flanked mostly by houses built in the 1950s and 60s. However, new houses have cropped up in the last five to ten years; I've watched them being built—large, two-story structures replacing one-story, two-bedroom 'starter' homes that once sheltered young couples. I shake my head when I look at the 'for sale' signs and see prices far exceeding what any of the older houses could claim.

But rising home prices soon float out of my mind. And that's perhaps what I treasure most about my walks through the neighbourhood—no particular thing can lay claim to me for very long. I'm free—to settle into my own internal world or wonder about sights around me.

I don't know the people who live in the houses on this street, but I imagine their lives based on what I see from the outside. I pass by a white frame, two-story home with a porch, for example, that far predates the others. I imagine it as a farmhouse in the days before this area was annexed to the city. There are signs in the yard during every election—always supporting the most conservative candidate on the ballot—leading me to picture (am I being ageist?) an older couple living there. One of the newly-built houses across the street, in contrast, has a laughing Buddha statue in the yard and a boat in the driveway. Perhaps its occupants are young professionals who have found financial success and a religion more appealing to them than that of their parents.

Down the street I come to a smaller house whose dimensions haven't changed in the 25 years I've been walking this route. But almost everything else about it has. It was sold back when I began walking, and the new owners—an older couple—set out to transform it: new siding, new roof, new deck, renovated garage storing not a car but the tools I see the husband using for his construction projects, like the decorative glass designs integrated into the fence and the wooden trellis arching over the front walk. The biggest change, however, is the yard itself. It has blossomed from an open stretch of grass into a garden full of flowers and shrubs.

I often see the woman who lives in that house working in the yard. She looks to be in her sixties, a short, squat woman with a huge mane of curly gray hair. She's usually on her knees weeding, or standing with a hose watering her plants. We always say hello. At some point in the past she asked if I walked to work because she often saw me pass by early in the morning. I said I did, that I worked at the university. She said she worked there too. After that, our greetings turned into brief chats; eventually we told each other about our retirements. She hasn't become a friend, exactly—I still don't even know her name—but I look forward to seeing her and, not being a gardener myself, I appreciate the beauty she is able to create in her yard.

My walks are precious to me, but they didn't start out that way. I began walking because of the money. The university where I worked decided to raise the parking rates…a lot, from $35 a quarter to $60. I looked at our tight budget and balked. How could I afford to pay that much? But what other choice did I have? There were never any parking places available in the immediate area surrounding the campus.

On the other hand, I could easily find free parking, I knew, if I went into adjacent neighborhoods—a plan that would mean I'd be walking about 20 minutes to get to my office. It took only a moment's thought for me to decide that was worth it. I bought a good pair of walking shoes—a reasonable investment, I figured—and began my new routine. The surprise was that I liked it.

I relished the 20 minutes I got to spend outdoors before being stuck in an office all day—even if the weather was bad, which it often is in Seattle winters. The physical exercise jump-started my brain in the morning—helping me get going when my sleep had been less than restful. Most of all I treasured the time of solitude between being with family and being with work colleagues—time in which I could think, dream and plan. Sometimes I thought about stories I was working on for the faculty-staff newspaper I edited. More than once a lead paragraph that had eluded me suddenly became clear. Other times my thinking was more wide-ranging; I hatched the idea of hiring a company to sell ads for the paper on one of my walks. And I often contemplated ways to deal with my son as he navigated adolescence. I could even indulge in fantasies about my future or nostalgic looks at my past. I found that I arrived at work feeling more energetic and ready to dig in.

Thus began the walking life I accidentally stumbled into—with 40

minutes (about two miles) every workday. It wasn't long before I was adding similar walks on the weekend—just because I liked doing it. And since these were later in the day, I saw more people—moms with strollers, people walking their dogs, bicyclists and runners. Walking for pleasure or exercise, I thought, is more common than walking for transportation. But sometimes the two can be the same.

After two years of steady walking, the flu threatened to derail the routine that had become so central to me. It struck three times in rapid succession, and in desperation I consulted a doctor, even though I knew there was probably nothing he could do for me. When he walked into the exam room I was surprised to be greeted not by my regular doctor, who had gone to a conference, but by a substitute. He was an older guy, with receding, curly dark hair and an avuncular manner. He put on a pair of reading glasses that hung from a string around his neck and peered at my chart before turning to me.

"I can't seem to stay well—I'm really frustrated," I said.

He did the standard exam, at the same time asking me questions about my life, which I answered; I told him I was married and had a young son, and that I worked as a writer and editor. He nodded. Then I told him I was working on a doctorate in addition to my job.

Now the doctor smiled, as if he'd just found the answer he was looking for. "Okay, listen, I'm going to order a blood test to make sure there's nothing else going on, but I suspect your problems are caused by stress. It can really mess with your health."

"But I do all the right things," I protested. "I get enough sleep, I try to eat right, I exercise."

The doctor was writing out his orders for the blood test now. "What do you do for exercise?" he asked.

"I do yoga and I walk."

"How much do you walk?"

"Twenty minutes morning and evening."

He shook his head. "That's not enough. It takes 17 minutes to get the endorphins going. You need to walk 30 minutes at a time to get the stress-reducing benefits."

I was skeptical. How could 10 more minutes make a difference? But I was also desperate. So I began parking farther away to increase the walking, and within a few weeks I began to feel better. I never saw that doctor again, and to this day I don't know if his pronouncements about endorphins are scientifically accurate, but the extra walking certainly seemed to improve my health.

I might have gone on with this routine indefinitely, but three years later my car broke down. The mechanic told me I needed a new transmission—an expense I simply couldn't afford. So I began taking the bus to work, getting off early to get in my walk. I continued to enjoy the walking, and the bus ride brought me a new gift — the time and space to read novels, a pleasure I had given up for lack of time years before. What a revelation that was, to immerse myself in fictional worlds, to find myself eager to return to those worlds as I waited for my bus. I began to wonder if I could try writing a novel myself after finishing my graduate program.

Then came the day it snowed. In Seattle, snow is rare and the city is thrown into a panic. In fact, it only takes a few inches to snarl traffic and delay buses. Not wanting to wait around at a bus stop wondering when or if my bus was coming, I asked myself if I would be able to walk all the way to work—a distance of three-and-a-half miles. It seemed worth a try, so I dug out my seldom-worn boots, donned an extra sweater under my trusty raincoat and trudged off. To my surprise, I covered the distance easily in an hour. So I began walking all the way every morning, taking the bus home in the evening.

It didn't take long after that for me to come to the conclusion that my car was an unnecessary expense. Most days it just sat in the driveway, and my husband had a car for the times I did need one. So I had mine repaired and, with some trepidation, sold it. That was in 1994, and I haven't owned a car since.

I'm retired now and most days I don't have to be anywhere in the morning. But I still walk—about five miles a day, six days a week—because it's become a part of my life, as essential as brushing my teeth. I walk to the library, to the bank, to the post office, to the drug store. There's something so freeing about arriving at a destination on foot. I don't have to stress about traffic, fret over parking, or worry about bus schedules. I time things according to the distance and my walking speed, staying as long as I wish.

Today my errands have been minimal; mostly I'm just walking. And I'm on the home stretch now, heading north on the same street I started out on. In the past hour I've learned that a house down the street is newly for sale, that it was built in 1966 and occupied by the same family ever since (so the real estate flyer says). I've watched crews completing a sidewalk installation on a stretch of the busy street I cross. I've pondered an idea I have for a new essay and dreamed about an upcoming trip during which I'll reunite with a friend I haven't seen in more than 25 years. I've enjoyed the blue skies and bright sun of summer without the excessive (to me) heat I know will come later. Oh, and I've also picked up a library book I had on hold.

I check my fitness tracker. I don't have 10,000 steps yet, but I'm close. More importantly, I feel whole, knowing my walk has given me whatever I need to face the day ahead.

Paddle on Paddlers

Carol VandenEngel and Glenn Green

"What have we gotten ourselves into?" we shouted to each other as we struggled through the cresting waves to maneuver our canoe, which was loaded down with 200 pounds of gear. With Glenn in the bow and Carol at the stern, Glenn said, "Let me know when we are not having fun and we will turn around and go home."

While paddling along the rugged shoreline of Nova Scotia, we knew we would have to get off the water soon as the wind was continuing to build with each passing hour. During the past few days we had enjoyed the sight of pods of seals following us, ever curious to see what was encroaching upon their territory. They would playfully sneak up behind the canoe, break the surface of the water and slowly turn their heads left and right to survey their surroundings. At one point a grey seal with long white whiskers and a drawn face appeared beside our canoe. The seal had a striking resemblance to our elderly neighbour, George. It only lacked round spectacles perched on its nose. It is funny how your imagination wanders when you have long periods of time to reflect.

As we continued along looking for a safe haven to land, to our amazement, a small bird dropped out of the sky from nowhere to land on the splash deck directly in front of Carol. Seconds later we noticed a hawk circling overhead and surmised it must have been chasing after its prey, the little bird. We were comforted to know that we could offer some type of refuge for this little bird who seemed to be tired and in obvious distress. Carol could actually see the little creature breathing heavily as it scrambled closer to her seeking her protection. Carol felt a motherly bond with this little bird and felt the need to protect it from harm. Seeking safety from the increasingly steady rising of the wind and waves, we continued along for at least another hour until we spotted what we thought was a breakwater entrance to a fishing harbour. With the seas being as turbulent as they were, it was difficult to visualize that there could actually be an opening among the towering cliffs of this section of ocean coastline. As fate would have it, we were second-guessing ourselves only to realize it was indeed a narrow opening. Inadvertently, we had lost the opportunity to enter safely into the harbour, as we had already passed the point where the direction of the waves would take us

safely in. We discussed whether or not we should risk turning around in the heavy sea and head back out to make another attempt, or continue down the coastline. We made the joint decision to attempt to enter the harbour. This meant we would have to bring the canoe around in the heavy seas and attempt to line up to the entrance again. It was going to be a "Hang on. We are going for it," moment.

We knew it would take a great deal of skill and timing to control the canoe to avoid being hit broadside by a cresting wave and risk capsizing. With adrenaline pumping, we managed to position the canoe so the tailwind and direction of the waves lined up into the entrance of the harbour, and Carol 'threaded the needle' as the boat rode on the top of a cresting wave. Mere feet from the breakwall we lunged forward through the harbour entrance. Having narrowly missed the rocky cliff entrance on either side, we breathed a sigh of relief to be in the protection of this well-hidden cove (although our little bird flew away to seek its own safety in the trees). You would never know we had left a raging ocean behind us.

Passing a colourful array of fishing boats, we paddled to the end of the harbour and tied up to an empty spot at the dock. Grateful to have averted what could possibly have been a disastrous ending, Glenn climbed out of the canoe and kissed the ground. Once again, we asked ourselves, "What did we get ourselves into?"

What we did get ourselves into was a journey paddling our canoe for over 8,500 kilometres, coast to coast from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean. Beginning each morning without a prearranged plan, so that there was no disappointment or failure, we navigated historic voyageur canoe routes with many portages and we walked a 400 kilometre stretch to get over the Rocky Mountains.

The right to move freely in a canoe to explore this wild, free, open land we call Canada was truly an honour and a privilege for us. We enjoyed the freedom to move on any lake, river, road and path, freely and safely, exploring the country by travelling its intricate waterways from one destination to the next, day after day for 11 months. Our mode of transportation was the same that Aboriginal peoples have used for thousands of years. When we once asked a First Nations elder if we could paddle through his traditional lands, he eloquently replied, "Wherever the river flows, it is free for all to use."

At the age of 60, as a husband and wife team, we were on a retirement cruise with a cause. We had undertaken a challenge while we were still physically able to do it. The cruise lasted not three weeks but the span of three exciting years during early spring to fall, allowing us to recharge from the busyness of the lives we had led for so many years. Each season was filled with adventure; we never knew what each day would bring.

Our travels gave us a better appreciation for this country we call home and the diversity that it holds. We left from Vancouver, British Columbia on the Pacific Ocean paddling up the Fraser River and walking over the Rocky Mountains through Crow's Nest Pass into Alberta to find the Old Man River. From there we crossed the prairies by paddling rivers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba through spectacular canyons, silty rivers and Alberta's Badlands, and then on to Cedar Lake and Lake Winnipeg. The beautiful Canadian Shield in Ontario led us to Lake of the Woods, to the top of our vast Great Lakes Superior and Huron and to the towering cliffs of the French River, the Mattawa River and the Ottawa River. Our route continued through busy populated areas of southern Ontario and Quebec, the St. Lawrence River and inland to the St. John River in New Brunswick. We travelled through the Northumberland Straight into Nova Scotia, through the Bras d'Or Lakes of Cape Breton Island and to Sydney, Nova Scotia on the Atlantic Ocean! We traversed rivers, lakes, and oceans; moved through dams, rapids, tides and ocean currents. We saw bears, wolves, seals, mountain goats, antelope, deer, elk, moose, and many species of birds.

In today's time, many of us live fast moving lives in fast moving cities. Living closely to the earth, as we did throughout our cross-Canada canoe trip, we realized that nature is part of us and that it gives back something very special to us. We felt a sense of freedom, purification and an appreciation for our free wild country. We found not only a connection to the land but its people as well. Canadians from coast to coast became part of our journey: by giving us shelter, by allowing us to camp on their property and by feeding us. They drove us to obtain supplies, lent us their vehicles, followed us through social media, offered us directions, waved at us as we walked along the roadways with our canoe, stopped to chat with us, and donated to our cause, Canoe for Change.

Canoe for Change raised funds and awareness for our favourite home-town charity, Loving Spoonful. Loving Spoonful envisions a healthy,

sustainable food-secure community in which everyone in Kingston has access to fresh healthy food—a basic right that all Canadians should have. Every year, Loving Spoonful teaches hundreds of students and adults gardening and cooking skills, and delivers fresh healthy food to shelters and community programs.

We spent our nights in a tent along the waterways, whether it was a protected cove on a windy lake, a city park, an island or a roadside ditch. Big cities sometimes presented challenges, however. Once after a full day of travelling through the Lachine Canal National Historic Site lock system, we reached the last lock at the end of the day and not wishing to proceed into the turbulent waters of the St. Lawrence River, we decided to look for a spot to pitch our tent. When the lock operator informed us that there were no campgrounds nearby, she gave us permission to spend the night on the cement wharf. This location put us in plain view of the many locals and tourists dining on downtown patios, and we are certain that we were a source of entertainment for onlookers who were amazed at the amount of gear we pulled on to the wharf from the canoe. We could see many of them taking out their phones to research 'Canoe for Change.ca' lettered on the bow of our canoe.

Our forward progress each day was heavily dependent on weather and the terrain. Whether a windy-blustery day or a labour-intensive portage, these were all determining factors in how far we moved forward each day. We took it one day at a time. We were extremely careful about our safety and learned to read wind and weather patterns, mostly learning by trial and error. The elements can be totally out of our control and become dangerous very quickly.

We learned this first hand when we capsized on Manitoba's Lake Winnipeg, something we had anticipated could be a possibility. Lake Winnipeg is a vast, shallow, unpredictable, 'hot mess' of a lake that demands respect. Wind causes waves, and the size and shape of a wave depends on how big the body of water is and its depth. Shallow lakes have waves that are steeper, closer together and break more easily, and are difficult to paddle in. We chose to paddle down the western shore of Lake Winnipeg, as wind generally comes from the west and it is best to paddle along the lee shore as waves in the middle of the lake are larger. Having arisen well before daybreak, we set out to take advantage of the early morning calm, making our way onto the water in the darkness, just after four a.m. To our dismay, there was a strong surf and the

shoreline was covered with large boulders and rocks. By 11 a.m. we still had not found an opportunity to come ashore for a much-needed break. Without breakfast or an opportunity to even take a drink of water, we continued paddling in strong wind and waves.

Eventually, suffering from exhaustion, we finally spotted a beach and tried to make our way towards it. But to no avail. A large wave caught us off guard, hit us broadside and immediately flipped us over. How relieved we were to see each other's head above the water. With paddles clutched in our hands, we needed to swim to shore and bring the canoe with us. Fortunately, the canoe's contents remained intact within the splash deck we had specifically installed for the purposes of repelling rain and ocean waves, and to contain our gear. Once we had made it to shore, we were in a state of mild shock as we realized the situation could have been much worse.

We set up camp for the night, amazed when we saw two men with rifles slung over their shoulders, walking towards us. They had witnessed us disappearing and reappearing behind each large wave, and having lost sight of us, they had come to investigate. They told us to prepare a big fire for the night as bears and wolves frequently visited this beach, so we collected as much driftwood as possible and Glenn built a huge fire. That night, sleep came easily for us!

The next morning we departed once again into the surf to continue our paddle down the coast. To our amazement, we found the two men and their entire family had come down the shoreline to see us off. They waved and shouted their encouragement to us and we felt humbled by their presence. These were the last people we were to see for the next three weeks. Because of the intense conditions, we were wind bound for eight of those days. This slowed down our progress towards the finish line considerably. Our journey saw us with no trailing support vehicle to pick us up when we were tired, give us shelter when it rained, or bring us food when we were hungry or comfort and encouragement when we were lonely and exhausted. We did, however, have a home support team that kept an eye on us electronically. Their monitoring of our GPS tracking device to identify our location was constant.

Since there are great distances between communities, we needed to carry all our own food, much of which we had dehydrated over the winter. This included dehydrated bananas, apples, carrots, beets, sweet potatoes, cabbage, mushrooms, chickpeas, tomato sauce, olives and

yogurt! Our meals at times were creative, always flavourful, and when possible, were made with food foraged from the forest or meadows. We had estimated that we would burn 4-5,000 calories per day to keep our energy stores up. We carried enough food for two months at a time, and had arranged for prepackaged boxed supplies to be sent to drop off spots by friends. In addition to our food, our gear, which we placed in waterproof containers, consisted of a four-man tent, a bug shelter, two light weight collapsible lawn chairs, a tarpaulin, pots and pans, dishes and utensils, a small stove, fuel, sleeping bags, air mattresses and clothes for differing weather conditions. We also had a canoe cart, a small sail, an emergency kit, a first aid kit, a bathroom kit, a saw, electronics with a solar panel, an extra paddle, and a bag of wine and Irish Cream for our coffee! Everything had its place, so the load was always balanced.

We found the most rewarding experience from our coast to coast paddle came from the voyage itself, not necessarily the destination. This voyage was like 'life' itself. It started with an idea, it grew within us, and then we made it a reality. Each new experience made us grow. What we had gotten ourselves into was a once in a lifetime journey. A gift we gave to ourselves. Basking in the vastness and beauty of this country we call home, we propelled ourselves forward together, unconstrained, one paddle stroke at a time. Enjoying life and taking each moment in stride. We have memories we will cherish for the rest of our lives.

Your Movement, My Moment

Holly Ferrier Lamont

A bump, kick and spin,
You put on a show.
Are you dancing to my voice,
Or are you uncomfortable?
I see your tiny feet,
Through my stretched, growing bulge.
A miraculous feat,
I splendor in, I indulge.
The sight of you, in me, safe and sound,
Slight movements, but all mine,
For now, until you're world bound.
Then how will you move,
Will you kick, scream and flail.
Or will you come in soft and gentle,
With a glance and low-pitched wail.
Will you stretch in awe of freedom,
Or will you cuddle me strong.
Whichever way you choose to move,
Will not be right or wrong.
It will be you, your mark in the world to start,
Your movements will keep me on my toes,
And steal my heart.
But don't move too quickly, my child, slow down.
Wallow in each movement,
And don't lose the fascination of "how".
How your fingers wiggle with just the thought of it so,
Your mouth, your tongue, your hands, your toes.
Your movements, they're yours, you're in charge of those,
Be grateful for each of them,
And watch as they grow.
I will help you with them, and celebrate them with grandeur,
You will see that your smallest movements,
Are my biggest moments by far.

Roncevaux Roncevalles

Gabriella Brand

The snow came as a surprise. It was the first of May and I was walking alone through the Pyrenees from France to Spain. I reached into my backpack and grabbed some thick Thorlo socks to use as gloves. They were thoroughly wet within half an hour as the snow fell faster and faster. The ground became soft and slippery, but I noticed a few local goats continued to leap confidently from rock to icy rock. Who owned those goats? Did they have a goatherd? Were they wild? I didn't know.

There was a lot I didn't know. For one thing, I thought it would be warmer at this time of year. Just before arriving in Saint Jean Pied de Port, the last big settlement before the border, I was already feeling the cold so I found my way to a second-hand shop run by volunteers from the Eglise de l'Assomption. For two Euros I bought a heavy, navy blue wool sweater which I could imagine a goatherd having the sense to wear while tending his goats through spring snowstorms. This one had a few moth holes but was still serviceable.

The grey-haired woman who sold me the sweater was a walker herself. She'd done the Camino de Santiago, the Camino del Norte, and the Via de la Plata trail too. She told me that the famous pass at Roncevaux might be closed.

"*Passez la nuit à Orisson,"* she cautioned. "There's a little *auberge* there." I welcomed her advice. Besides, I figured that by the time I reached Orisson, I would be more than ready for some hot soup, a *boule* of warm bread, and a tidy bunk with feather quilts.

There's something about starting a long walk, even one where you're not perfectly well-outfitted. I always feel powerful. Alive. My body in sync with my soul. As if every step were bringing me closer to an understanding of the planet, of its history, of my own place in it.

I already knew a little bit about this mystical shoulder of Europe, the point where the Iberian Peninsula hangs off the rest of the continent. As a schoolgirl, I read about the Battle of Roncevaux where Basques ambushed Charlemagne's army after the Franks attacked Pamplona. In French class, I had suffered through readings of *La Chanson de Roland*,

but I always struggled to keep straight who won or lost, what was fact and what was fiction. I knew, too, that there was another Battle of Roncevalles during the Napoleonic era, but I can't say as battles have never really interested me.

As I walked, I kept thinking about how much bloodshed has unfortunately taken place as people have fought over territory, or because of differences of god or tongue, custom or culture. I much prefer to think of the world as borderless, a place where everyone is free to live, work, and wander.

When I arrived at Orisson, my hair a tangle of wet knots and my quick-dry hiking pants soaked through, the innkeepers took me under their wing. Perhaps they could tell that I was a bit of a dreamer. No longer young. Fueled by enthusiasm. Full of sweet memories of a youth spent hiking, climbing trees, and idly looking at clouds.

"Will the path be like this the whole way?" I asked.

"You mean with the snow? *Mais non*, it will be clear. You'll see," they said.

In the middle of the night I woke up to pee, to ponder, and to look out the window. The snow had stopped and thousands of stars were piercing the dark sky.

By morning the innkeepers said that the pass was open.

"Just follow the arrows and you'll get to Ronceveau," they said. "But by then, they'll call it Roncevalles. You'll be in Spain."

After a fat bowl of warm milk, some crusty bread with jam and a slice of hard cheese, I set out again, my boots crunching in the sun-spackled snow.

But I kept wondering….how would I know that I'd made it across to Spain? And would it matter?

I climbed and climbed, first hugged by the trees, then by boulders. I kept looking for markers. Surely there's a stone monument acknowledging the border. Perhaps a memorial to slain Moors, or Basques or Franks.

I wasn't exactly sure where I was, but I felt buoyed simply by the walk itself. The magical effect of "*shinrin yoku,*" or what the Japanese call

forest bathing, was giving me a natural high. At times I passed other hikers or pilgrims and I exchanged greetings. I was delighted to be in motion, my walking stick lightly touching the earth with each step.

After a half an hour or so, I came upon a dazed young man leaning against a rock. His eyes looked hollow and he asked me for water. I noticed that his lips were so parched that little bits of skin flaked off when he spoke. He didn't know a word of French or Spanish, but his English was perfect, even though he was a bit disoriented and clearly thirsty.

I poured some of my canteen water into this stranger's open mouth and handed him a squished pear and a plastic baggie filled with dried apricots. I sat with him for a short time while he perked up. We began to chat. He was Dutch, which explained his mastery of English. He'd been hiking for a few days, got a bit lost and had used up his water and food the night before.

"Do you think we're in France or Spain?" he asked.

"We must still be in France," I said, "Because we're not yet at the pass."

"I'll follow you," he said, as if I knew where I was going. As if anyone could tell where one country starts and another one ends.

He continued behind me, half my age, but half my speed. Now and then I looked back and saw him carefully putting one foot in front of the other on the rocky path.

At last I reach what had to be the highest point, no doubt the natural border. There was a little chapel and signs in Basque and Spanish. From there I began a long descent, waiting first for the hapless Dutch boy to appear from behind.

In the early afternoon in Roncevalles, I stopped at an *albergue* – monastery where plump monks, speaking softly with Castilian lisps, showed me to my room.

"Dinner will be served late, *señora*" they said, "as in the Spanish manner."

With time on my hands, I decided to go exploring. Although I had been walking all morning, I couldn't resist a saunter around the tiny town, thinking about battles and borders, stones and blood, all the lines we constantly draw between ourselves and our neighbors.

Later, at dinner, across the wide wooden tables of the monastery refectory, I met up with my young Dutch companion. He had recuperated fully from his bout of dehydration and he ate a hearty dinner, as did I.

For dessert, we stuffed ourselves with creamy Spanish flan, as thick and soft as yesterday's snow.

Cycling While Female: Barriers to Women's Transportation Independence

Nicole Roach

A bicycle represents liberation and freedom of movement for so many people around the world. However, women haven't always been able to enjoy this freedom in the same way that men have.

Here is the "advice" that was given to women riding bicycles in 1895:

- Don't boast of your long rides
- Don't cultivate a "bicycle face"
- Don't refuse assistance up a hill
- Don't use bicycle slang. Leave that to the boys
- Don't go out after dark without a male escort
- Don't scratch a match on the seat of your bloomers
- Don't appear in public until you have learned to ride well
- Don't appear to be up on "records" and "record smashing." That is sporty

We may look at that now, in 2021, and think, "my, oh my, how things have changed"... but have they really? Women today still face significant barriers to cycling, such as; safety, harassment, and societal expectations. To encourage more women to get on two wheels and enjoy untrammeled movement, there is a great deal of work required to address the patriarchal systems in place.

Women and Representation

Women are largely underrepresented in cycling, whether it be the design process, marketing efforts, or general discourse around this mode of transportation. It is no wonder women are underrepresented,

as there remains a significant gender gap in cities with barren cycling infrastructure, such as Winnipeg, Manitoba.

This underrepresentation is evident as soon as you walk into most bike shops, full of male employees and a limited selection of bicycles made for women. In this environment, women are often made to feel unwelcome, belittled, and their needs go discredited.

All of this is closely linked to women's willingness to ride, largely because people in general only do what they perceive to be possible. Research in San Francisco found that women, especially women of colour, perceived that "people like me" do not cycle. This also extends to older women, women with disabilities, and women who are overweight. Until we see more women of all colours, ages, sizes, and abilities cycling, these important demographics will continue to be underrepresented and their unique needs will continue to go unaddressed.

Women and Safety

Through numerous studies on the gender gap in urban cycling, safety has consistently been cited as the number one reason women do not cycle or do not cycle as frequently as men. This is generally attributed to women lacking confidence, being more risk-averse, and/or having a heightened sense of vulnerability. These may very well be contributing factors to the gender gap, however, recent research from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs found that women have greater safety concerns because they are actually at greater risk than male cyclists. A field experiment found that drivers were significantly more likely to pass a female cyclist closer than three feet than a male cyclist. Of the 33 recorded encroachments that occurred, 24 of them (73%) were on a female riding, indicating that a female cyclist was nearly four times (3.8) more likely to be encroached upon than a male cyclist.

These findings may come as a surprise to a general observer holding the belief that drivers would give more space to female cyclists. However, further research by the Near Miss Project found that female cyclists face disproportionate harassment and bad driving. The women in the study were almost twice as likely to be subject to 'near miss' incidents, which were found to be linked to the lower average speed reported by the respondents. As explained by the project researcher, Dr. Rachel Aldred, "If you're cycling more slowly, you potentially do face greater hostility

than if you're able to keep up with motor traffic, and not be overtaken quite so much."

For greater context, it is important to note the recent study by researchers at Monash University which found that more than half of drivers perceive cyclists as "not completely human." This was demonstrated by a clear link between the dehumanization of cyclists and acts of deliberate aggression towards them on the road. Acts of aggression included, but were not limited to: using their car to deliberately block a cyclist, deliberately driving their car close to a cyclist, and using their car to deliberately cut off a cyclist.

Many drivers believe that cyclists have no place on the road, let alone female cyclists. This sense of entitlement contributes to greater risks for many female cyclists and keeps many others off the saddle entirely.

Women and Harassment

Sexual harassment has been a regular occurrence for many women, whether on the street, at work, the grocery store, or just about anywhere else. It is something that women are expected to mitigate through the clothes they wear, the neighbourhoods they visit, and time of day they venture into the streets.

The reality is, women are susceptible to harassment in almost every area of their life, and unfortunately, cycling is no exception. On a bicycle, a woman is exposed and publicly available to criticism. Whether the criticism is for not wearing a helmet or failing to stop at a stop sign; in the view of some men, women are supposed to act in a certain way and these 'un-lady like' acts display a level of confidence that some men simply cannot allow to take place without comment.

The Guardian recounts the experience of journalist Dawn Foster facing several incidents of harassment while cycling, such as; "a man once pulled up next to me in a van, opened the window and shouted 'lucky saddle!'. There was another time when a car of four men pulled up behind me in the middle of a busy junction, leered and asked me if I wanted to get in the car. Or when a man cycled past and slapped my bum when I was riding along." I have also experienced many honks, been yelled at, called a b*tch, given the finger, etc. while cycling around Winnipeg. Although I try not to take these acts of aggression personally, it always makes me feel a little less safe, a little less welcome on the streets.

It is important to note that this is not a matter of a few isolated incidents, this is a systemic issue weaved through matters of power and entitlement. When these acts of harassment are carried out by drivers, particularly male drivers, they are utilizing their power to exhibit that if they wanted to harm a woman on a bicycle, they could. This extends to cat calls, honks, and many more threats of violence that are often seen as inconsequential.

Women and Appearance

With safety getting most of the attention in this conversation, we have to remember the kind of attention women are constantly subject to, particularly around their appearance. The advocacy group Sustrans, based in the UK, observed a significant drop in girls cycling when they entered secondary school, citing a concern with how they look and how boys will perceive them if they arrive at school sweaty and disheveled. Now, let's consider working women wanting to commute by bicycle and experience the many benefits that come with it. Unfortunately, women are 'at risk' of helmet hair (if they wear a helmet), sweat, and dirt flying in their face, among other beauty hazards. In some workplace environments, a woman does not have to worry about her appearance amongst her peers, but in many, that is not the case.

A study by sociologists, Jaclyn Wong and Andrew Penner, found that grooming practices could result in a higher paycheck. While the study indicated that men with superior grooming habits also earned more, they were only judged partially for this matter, whereas, women's grooming "accounts for the entire attractiveness premium for women."

In a society that links a woman's value so closely with her appearance, to the extent that it influences career performance and salary, it is no wonder many women would not want to compromise that by hopping on a bike—after all, they could develop 'bicycle face.'

Women and Responsibility

The transportation patterns of men and women are inherently different, largely determined by the associated responsibilities of each gender. Women typically take shorter, more frequent trips at different times of day that do not fit within the typical commute model. Furthermore,

women still make more escort trips with children and more shopping trips, etc. than men. Transport for London research, regarding barriers to cycling, cites "home and family responsibilities" as the main barrier for many black and minority ethnic groups, particularly women, who are responsible for caring for children and other family members.

Much of the cycling infrastructure available in cities around the world are insufficient to accommodate young children cycling independently, cargo bikes, or trailers. Painted bike lanes, sharrows, and signs instructing road users to share the road are not enough to encourage women to cycle with their young children, limiting the health and mobility of themselves and their families.

A Feminist Solution

There is no easy solution when it comes to issues that are systemic and deeply ingrained within society. However, through many of the studies which have examined barriers to cycling for women, women have been more than willing to share their needs and strategies to eliminate these barriers.

Most notably, women see a completed network of separated and/or protected bicycle lanes as an immediate priority. While this would address many of the concerns around safety and harassment, especially in Winnipeg, it would not begin to challenge the patriarchal systems that keep so many women off bicycles.

Women shouldn't have to overthrow the patriarchy just to get where they need to go on two wheels, but it may be the only way forward.

Desperate for a Seat

Cath Nichols

After work, the walk from bus stop to platform 16
is near on impossible. Desperate in the foyer,
I ask a woman to give me her seat (there are only

five seats on the concourse, the result of a rubbish
refurbishment). I ask Customer Services if I
might get a wheelchair across the station, but

no-one is available to push. I walk unsteady with my stick.
Lucky for me, after the barriers, there are two odd benches
shoved together. This means the arm-free ends

make a glorious spread, a corner two-seater on which
I can lie down. I close my eyes, relieve my back and hip.
I may be crying. A woman asks if I am alright.

I am not alright. I am here in Leeds to work. Something
is wrong with this. I rest for 15 minutes then lurch upright,
edge towards the escalator, legs juddering. Cross the bridge,

take the lift down to my platform. I arrive at the rear
of the platform and see no seats. How sad it is that
access provisions are often placed so far away

from seats! Such access assumes ready strength,
insists we walk or roll *greater* lengths than non-disabled folk
to find the lift, the dropped kerb, the route through.

A five-minute walk has taken thirty. Thirty! I may collapse
but I've reached a seat finally, and crumple gently instead.
Really, I am always collapsing, but do so *with planning*.

This is my life now: planned collapses, 'rest' to avert more serious
disaster. This is not desirable, but who would pay me
to stay home? I wish someone would applaud my efforts

not to make a mess in public, but overall, I'd rather
a better rail service, accessible stations, a local, part-time job.
Or money to pay my bills and rest… Rest! A reckless concept.

Hereafter, I'll use a power chair, but don't expect
plain sailing from that. I have friends with wheelchairs;
I've heard the horror stories.

Reflections on Finding Yourself Abroad

Matthew Robinson

Two days had passed since I last encountered a familiar face. Halfway through my five-week journey through Europe, I unexpectedly parted ways from my friend in London and found myself landing in Copenhagen unprepared for the isolation that awaited me. Stepping off the plane, a barrage of Danish signs shook me from the stupor of my restless mid-flight nap. There were no English translations. Alert, I began to decipher the series of codes that would lead me to my home for the next three days. With several bags in hand, I found the train and bus connections needed to drop me off right in front of my Airbnb flat. The anxiety of my encumbered commute turned to relief as the key slid into the door.

I had no itinerary and was trying my best to embrace the thought of unstructured travelling. This was made difficult by the Danish wayfinding and the sudden loss of my travel companion. However, the days passed quickly. I spent them riding a loaned commuter bike through the city streets, alone. I had calmly allowed myself to get lost amongst the tangled web of bike lanes and the oddly configured intersections. The Danish lettering never managed to take hold in my mind, so instead I looked towards landmarks, the large amusement park rides of Tivoli Gardens or the old gates of the Carlsberg Brewery HQ, to let me know how far I had strayed into the city.

Even though I was enjoying the independence of my solitary excursions, I eventually found myself staring out the window of my Airbnb flat. In less than 24 hours I would be on yet another plane to another city filled with similar brick buildings to stare at and similar streets to explore. All I could think about was how I had done my best to avoid making a real and spontaneous human connection in Copenhagen. It was the final night of my stay and my gut was telling me I needed to reach out, but waves of anxiety kept coming over me. I was never one to reach out. It was much easier to wait for someone else to initiate connection.

At the outset of my trip, I had downloaded Tinder in anticipation of a night where I would need a lifeline to help me break through these emotional barriers. But after 30 minutes of swiping and failed

conversation attempts, I set my phone aside and contemplated settling back in to the protection and comfort of the four walls around me. Lying down on my bed, I closed my eyes and listened to the on-going internal debate between my ambition to venture into the unknown and my need for security. A notification buzz from my phone interrupted my thoughts—a tinder connection:

"Hey, if tonight's your last night, you have to go to my favourite bar. I won't be able to join you, but I'm sure you'll be able to find something to do!"

That wasn't the lifeline I was hoping for, I thought to myself. How could I just show up to place by myself, in a city I didn't know, without a plan? These doubts replayed in my head while I mapped out the address and readied myself to leave. Each step toward the door was painful.

I gave myself the comfort of a slow evening bike ride, taking my time along familiar trails. I enjoyed breathing in the crisp air and tried to ignore the looming uncertainty of social acceptance that awaited me at my destination. Despite my best efforts, I easily located the bar and parked my bike among the rows of identical bikes, leaning up against the side of a nearby building. I flipped the small back tire lock, making a mental note of the spot. It was still very strange to me that you could leave a bike vulnerable and unanchored in the city for hours at a time. Liberation can often feel a bit strange, it would seem.

My loaned commuter bike was the last vestige of stability. I walked towards the bar and through a patio filled with groups of people deep in conversation, each step taking me further away from my comfort zone. I suddenly encountered the fact that this particular bar had four floors, each with its own vibe. A variable I hadn't considered.

Right away, my gut told me the top floor was the best choice. If anything, it would further delay the inevitable reality of actually having to reach out and connect with a stranger. But before I could savour the slow climb up the stairs, I reached a small, dark room at the top of the staircase, filled with a dozen people scattered amongst booths and standing tables. In the far corner, lit by a red spotlight, was an unassuming man on a stage. In one hand, he held a microphone and with the other, he was pressing buttons on a MIDI controller placed precariously on a barstool. Dissonant synth sounds on top of sporadic drumbeats and warped vocals oozed out of old, worn-out speakers. I

was briefly comforted by this strangeness.

Now that I was here, the first logical step was to get a beer. Beer in hand, I turned around and looked out onto the stage. Next, I had to find someone standing alone and strike up a casual conversation. Nearby, there stood a young, blonde woman that seemed equally uncertain about the happenings in the room. I nervously shuffled closer to her.

"So, what's this all about?" I leaned over to her and gestured to the man on the stage.

"What?" she replied.

"What's this all about? Who is that supposed to be?" I shouted a bit louder, straining my voice against the music.

"Oh, I don't know, I'm just here with some friends," she said with a thick accent.

I turned around and four other people, roughly my age, spontaneously appeared a few feet behind me. We walked over to them and I introduced myself. They were celebrating the final night of an art exhibition they were organizing. Along with a local Dane, there was a Swede, a Brit and two Belgians. Within 10 minutes of my arrival at the bar, the strange musical performance ended and I was accepted without question as part of this group of friends. I gladly followed their lead to their next destination, polishing off my beer.

I couldn't believe how quickly I shifted from walking into a room, filled with fear and uncertainty, to joyfully riding in a convoy of bikes to a distant Bodega. Anxiety fell away from me as I cruised through car-less roads overrun with cyclists. While a few of the group members parted ways after another beer and a trip to a fast food restaurant, the rest of us talked until sunrise at the Brit's flat. I remember looking out of his window at a nearby park, brilliantly lit by the morning sun. My heart was filled with warmth at the beauty I had found waiting for me outside my comfort zone.

Why do we travel? What inspires us to place as much distance as we can from what we know so that we can truly dive into the unknown? As I reflect upon this small fragment of my life story, I can't help but focus on my privileged relationship with this expression of travel—the movement and exploration across borders. I am fortunate enough to

choose the times when I expand my world and piece-by-piece introduce the chaos of uncertainty. The ever-popular concept of 'the world-traveller' is a wave of luxury that breaks hard against the reality that others face through travel. While some of us seek a foreign experience in an exotic country to "find ourselves," others are simply trying to find a better life for themselves.

I think about my stepmother when she was a young 19-year-old Mexican woman, recently married and moved by her husband across two borders to a cold, foreign city. In this unknown place—the place where she now calls home—she would have to learn a new language, raise a family and live separately from the support systems and culture that surrounded her throughout childhood.

I think about refugees we see in short video clips on our screens, arriving in a cramped boat on the shores of Greece, using the last of their resources to escape perilous conditions. The homes they flee aren't the archetype of comfort and safety that many of us have come to expect.

I believe expanding our view of the world, seeing how others live, and connecting with those living entirely different lives are the reasons we travel. As we allow what is new and uncertain into our scope, we shift the perspective of our experiences and shine a light on our memories to cultivate a greater empathy. Looking back, I am grateful to the young man on the other side of the world, years ago, fighting his own internal battles and breaking through the limitations of his comfort zone. It is part of the journey that has led me to where I am today, trying to make the world a better place for all.

I Have a Home

Berhe Gebrihet

One afternoon a few months ago, it began to rain heavily the moment I walked into my home from work. Just as I was thinking about how lucky I was to have made it home before it began to pour, I noticed that my younger brother was phoning me from Ethiopia. I picked up the phone to answer, and we began talking about his life in a UN sponsored refugee camp in Ethiopia, my life here in Winnipeg, Canada, and our plans for his future. When we ended our call, I was overwhelmed with memories about my family and my sweet childhood in the Eritrean village in which I grew up – actually it was in several villages.

Today, with everything else going on around the world, I miss and worry about my family, and realize that we, as human beings, don't always know how to value what we have. I remember when I was a child in Eritrea that my mother used to say to me, "The gold that is in you, is like linen." It is an expression that means, 'you do not appreciate what you have until you lose it.'

I mentioned that I lived in a few villages, and not just one. From what my family has told me, I was born in 1997 just as war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Because of the war, the villages located in the border area were forced to relocate to either the centre of Eritrea, or the centre of Ethiopia. My family was Eritrean, so we were forced to move further into Eritrea for our safety. But half my family was relocated to Ethiopia, and the two sides of the family were unable to see one another for 22 years because the border was closed.

From what I remember, even after the war ended, we were forced to relocate our village to a different region almost every year. Every region was controlled by different villages, and every time we settled into a new area, the other villagers in the area would call us derogatory names and physically attack us for settling in their territory. This meant that we relocated our home more than eight times during my childhood.

But if there is one village that I really remember, it is the one where I spent most of my childhood. It was a village amidst other small villages. It was located in the southern part of the country and it was called Mai Wray.

That rainy day in Winnipeg, I realized how funny it was that I felt so good about not getting caught in the rain. After all, where I grew up, although it only rained in winter, our house would fill with water every time that it did. In fact, it wasn't exactly a house that we lived in. It was made from mud, and was more like a kind of tent.

Years later, looking out the window of my apartment while listening to the songs of Israeli artist, Zohar Argov, I pictured that home. We had three tents that served as our house. One tent was a small store that was our family's main source of income. The second tent was like a pantry with metre high acacia shrubs surrounding it to protect our animals from predators. And the third tent was our salon and bedroom. It had two mud beds and one bed made of iron, where my mother and the youngest children slept (because my dad was in the military and rarely home).

This house was located under a mountain, and the two things that I remember the most about it are the pouring rain and the snakes that we couldn't keep out of the house. The snakes never frightened me because we had a cat that we all loved that would keep guard and catch them, but I really hated the rain.

When I was really young, every time it rained I would cover up with the only blanket that we had and climb onto my mother's bed and hide. Meanwhile, my older siblings would split into groups of two and each group would hold onto a corner of the tent so that it wouldn't blow away and leave us without a roof. The rains always got us wet, and as they did, they always served to remind us that we really didn't belong where we were. We were on the local villagers' land, not our own land, and because of that we were not allowed to build more permanent housing that would have kept out the rain.

As Zohar Argov's voice continued to soothe me, I also remembered that in those days we were not allowed to leave the village out of fear of violence. As I thought about that, I reminded myself how good my life is here in Canada. It is not without some problems, but compared to what I have been through, it is the closest I have come to a perfect situation.

When I was in grade seven, after living in the village for a few years, I was kidnapped together with a couple of friends and taken to an area near the Sudanese border. The kidnappers were Bedouins who were

known to roam the area, kidnap Eritreans from the border villages, and hold them for ransom. From Sudan they took us to Egypt where I saw terrible things, including the rape and murder of people who could not pay their ransom, and the trafficking of organs. The conditions were terrible, and for weeks we were without food and water.

A couple months after I was kidnapped, some of my relatives paid my ransom and I was freed and left on the border between Egypt and Israel. I crossed into Israel and lived there for seven years, and attended school there and supported myself financially. I felt like a regular Israeli youth (and that's when I learned to appreciate the songs of Zohar Argov). But once I graduated high school and turned 18, things changed and my nightmares and fear returned. I was issued a temporary work visa, but every two weeks I had to renew the visa, and every time I did, the bureaucrats would either tell me that I should return to my home country or threaten me with jail. And from that I understood that the life I had built for myself in Israel didn't matter.

At that point, I began to think of Canada. The first time I heard about Canada was from the 'made in Canada' sticker on the UN supplied canola oil we used to receive in Eritrea, but since being in Israel, I had often heard that it was a safe place for refugees. I approached a young Canadian woman who worked at the Tel Aviv youth club I attended, and asked her if she could help me get to Canada. I talked about my fear of being expelled from Israel and the difficulties I had there. Within a week of me asking her, she got back to me to say that her family in Winnipeg was willing to sponsor me to Canada as a refugee. Two years later I received a phone call from the Canadian Embassy telling me that I would be issued a visa for Canada and would be leaving within a couple of months.

I cannot explain the feelings that I experienced when I heard this news. At the same time I was sad because it meant that I would have to leave behind everyone and everything I knew in Israel. But when the day arrived for me to leave, I also knew that the luckiest day in my life had arrived. I was going to Canada and I would receive permanent residency status for the first time in my life!

It was my first time on an airplane and I was nervous about that and about the people who would be waiting for me when I arrived. Then, after 12 hours, my flight arrived in Toronto and as soon as I got off the plane I was greeted by a Canadian immigration agent who said to

me, "Sir, welcome to Canada. We are glad to have you here." That was a shock, because everywhere I had been in my life, I had always been treated poorly and told that I was second class and not welcomed. For the first time in my life someone was greeting me with happiness and open arms. It felt like I was reborn!

After a few hours waiting in Toronto, I flew to Winnipeg where the Canadian woman's family met me at the airport with flowers and a Welcome to Canada sign. Even though they had not met me before, they took me into their home and I lived with them for four months. It was weird for me because I had been on my own and looked after myself for so long, but now it was the opposite. The father and mother in the family were like my parents and they looked after me and worried about me in regards to everything, and it took me time to get used to it.

The thing that I found the strangest and the funniest is that they gave their dogs names and let them sleep in the house, because what I knew from where I grew up was that dogs were used only to guard the flock from predators. We had a couple dogs in our village, but we never allowed them to come into the house or sleep on our beds with us! I guess it's a cultural thing.

Today, I live in my own apartment by myself without fear that tomorrow someone will kick me out or that the country will expel me. I don't worry that the roof will collapse on me, and I remain without fear of violence. When I leave my house, I don't worry about the police harassing me. Having said that, though, I am a young Black man and people like me are killed by the police every day. So I keep that in mind, even though it is less of a worry here than it is with our neighbour to the south.

I think about the things that I had to go through in order to get to this point in my life. My life today is so far and so different from what I imagined it would be. But the moving every year from village to village, and being kidnapped and taken from my family, gave me the ability to understand the value of a home and a roof. And my life in Israel, although bad in some ways, also was good. It allowed me to get to know people who became like family to me.

Now I am in the most secure place. Every day that I get up from my bed in my apartment and I don't need to worry about the rain pouring in through the roof, I am grateful for everything that I experienced. I don't really think that I had to go through all the bad things I experienced

at such a young age in order to appreciate the simple things in life, like home. But I do know that if I did not go through what I did, I would not be where I am and who I am today, so I am grateful for everything that happened.

This story was translated from Hebrew to English.

Crossing The Border

John Grey

I was young then,
as young as four passports ago.
And it was cold,
cold as an immigration clerk's demeanor.
I was crossing the border on foot.
I had a backpack and a credit card.
I was smuggling lifestyle
but he was more concerned
that I didn't become a burden on the government.
I wasn't even a burden on me.
I was seeing the world,
one road, one hill, one farmhouse at a time.
And I was seeing from a great height also,
and there were no boundaries,
no lines to separate the countries.
But I played his game,
promised the man I was neither
freeloader nor criminal,
just a guy with endless curiosity
and the energy and credit to back it up.
He didn't smile but he waved me through.
I like to think that the swish of a hand
means a country is glad to see me.

Interpreting Desire Lines

Eva Morrison

At a well-travelled city intersection, two sidewalks meet at a right angle, offering the pedestrian a choice to continue straight across the road or turn in one direction. Behind the sidewalk is a grassy patch with an arc worn in from those who chose an alternative path, cutting off from the paved corner to form their own quicker route. This is considered a "desire line," a term coined by Gaston Bachelard who saw these kinds of makeshift paths as a form of drawing.[1] Desire lines, unofficial pathways formed through repeated tread, appear all over the world when the user's experience differs from the design of a space. They have intrigued geographers and urban planners as a form of user response to paths laid out by institutions. Writer Erika Luckert mapped out desire paths, asserting that they reveal "a social history, something that belongs to a larger population in the rare moments when that population converges."[2]

This social history is rooted in a shared desire to reach point B in a way that diverges from the path laid out by the city. The motive can be to save a few minutes in a commute, to take a more pleasant or scenic route, to bypass pedestrian traffic, or simply to leave the beaten path. In any case, it is a celebration of our freedom of mobility, an exercise of our right to choose where we go in the public sphere, and how we get there.

A single set of footsteps does not necessarily represent a collective societal drive; what is more interesting and informative is that this divergence is repeated many times to create a desire line. In order to take shape, the alternative path behind the paved street corner had to continually be favoured over the sanctioned sidewalk until the grass ceases to grow. Desire paths begin with one outlier, followed by a few venturous walkers, and then are fully formed as many people choose to take this route. By maintaining and contributing to this path, users speak back to the institution with every footstep, and walking becomes both an individualized and democratic act.

French intellectual Michel De Certeau theorized urban spatial practices, exploring these kinds of individualizations of mass culture. He asserts that due to class ideologies, we have considered "producers" of culture

to be authors, educators, and revolutionaries, and situated this kind of authority figure in opposition to "consumers." However, by challenging notions of cultural production we can discover creative activity where it has been denied that any exists: in the everyday. De Certeau describes actions like walking, talking, and dwelling in urban landscapes as "the arts of doing"- the ordinary citizen's creative resistance to the structures produced by institutions.[3] In this sense, desire lines are a way for those relegated to consuming culture to respond to authoritative organizations by actively producing space, sometimes in disaccord with the meaning that was intended by city planners.

If these "arts of doing" situated in the everyday can be an opening for dialogue between the institutions who create the city and the citizens who use it, what exactly is being expressed? Desire lines result from a need that is unmet and they exist as an alternative solution. Those who regularly walk the city are a subgroup: walking is less often for leisure, as De Certeau romantically describes it, and more often out of necessity for those who cannot afford a car or taxi ride. Taking a shortcut is an active solution in order to reach one's destination faster, to get to work on time, to catch the bus, to make it home.

Desire lines can be seen as unsolicited user feedback expressing how people want to use a product, be it physical or digital. Austin Knight, a tech designer working at Google, relates physical desire paths formed by walkers to the desire lines studied by digital-based UX, or "user-experience" design. Tactics of adaptive or user centered tech design can be seen in these paths: some urban planners confirm the user's feedback by altering the design to incorporate the makeshift walkways that form between concrete, while others observe the patterns and needs of pedestrians before paving anything.[4] A common example of user-centered design in relation to desire lines is the strategy allegedly used by university campuses: leave the grass blank and wait for the student body to cross it how they will, then pave the dominant paths that form. UX design is largely about user input; analytics show how users are navigating a web design, and these digital desire paths can be used to optimize the product. Both digitally and in the real world a design can either be made to influence or direct the user, or the designer can shape their product around the way it is being used.

With this user-centered approach to spatial design, the most efficient solution to reoccurring desire paths may seem to be to pave the fastest

route from point A to point B. But what if desire paths are not always about efficiency? What if the desire is to leave the path and forge one's own? In their essence, desire paths are an act of dissent, a conscious choice to disagree with the sanctioned path in order to navigate space freely. The way that they are managed by the state or by private landowners is indicative of geographical hierarchies of power.

Heather Davis and Nathalie Loustau's project "Open/Ouvert" examines desire paths in relation to utopic ideas of the Commons, considering the governance and appropriation of common city space and access to natural resources. Davis and Loustau explore the notion of sharing access to land and space as utopic vision, where the utopia centers on the idea that there is a better form of social governance than the current system.[5] "Open/Ouvert" looks at unsanctioned pedestrian crossings of the railway tracks that cut through the city of Montreal, now infrequently used with residential communities growing on either side. Canadian Pacific Railways owns the fenced in tracks and, with the help of local authorities, dispenses trespassing fines to those who cross.[6] However, desire paths are forged by many pedestrians who still cross the tracks as it remains the most direct above-ground route to get from one neighborhood to the other and to access the metro station, grocery stores, gyms, and library in the area. Some citizens create desire lines because they enjoy the creative element of finding their own way across the track and assert that they would not want it to be paved and "official."[7]

Examining the everyday as a place for creative expression, these types of pathways can be viewed through a postmodernist lens as anti-institutional artworks: the ultimate act of collaborative inventiveness informed by societal function and motives. In 2002, artist Francis Alÿs expanded his painting practice beyond the gallery space with the work *The Leak*, walking the Pinheiros district of São Paulo with a punctured can of paint that left a thin line of color to mark his path. Daniel Birnbaum examines the extended field of painting in urban space, and comments that in Alys' work, "the activity of walking functions as a way of inscribing the body into social space, leaving an aesthetic trail."[8] If we take this notion of fine art departing from its medium and its location in the institution of the gallery to become integrated into sites of public space, and push the elements of geosocial networking, accessibility, and the mundane even further, desire paths can be considered contemporary art on view in the most far reaching and populated exhibition space: the

urban ground. In this interpretation, desire paths are a celebration of freedom of expression and creativity within the mapped out city sphere.

The importance of freedom of movement and expression is accentuated when it becomes regulated or restricted by the state. Desire paths such as the ones crossing the train tracks in Montreal represent a shared need that remains unmet in the system of urban circulation. With the threat of fines, the seemingly innocuous everyday act of walking is criminalized and it becomes politicized as an act of protest. In sites of public space, the notion of desire lines as a form of dialogue can be expanded to consider them a symbol of our right to free speech and right to dissent.

Desire lines can be viewed through many lenses and allow for varied interpretations. They have elements of individualism, while simultaneously existing as a reflection of a shared social history. Whether they stem from a need for creative expression, problem solving, or simply following a shortcut to save a few minutes, they are always a celebration of choice, our freedom to disagree with the path laid down in front of us.

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[1] Erika Luckert, "Drawings We Have Lived: Mapping Desire Lines in Edmonton", *Constellations* 4 no. 1 (2012) https://doi.org/10.29173/cons18871.

[2] Ibid

[3] Michel De Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. (Berkely: University of California Press, 1988)

[4] Austin Knight, "Desire Paths and Real World UX". Accessed November 20, 2019: https://austinknight.com/writing/desire-paths-and-real-world-ux

[5] Nathalie Casemajor Loustau and Heather Davis, "Open/Ouvert: Common Utopias", *The Fibreculture Journal* 20 no.1 (2012): 130, issn: 14491443

[6] Ibid, 125

[7] Ibid, 136

[8] Daniel Birnbaum "Where is Painting Now" in Painting: Documents of Contemporary Art Series ed. Terry R. Myers (MIT Press: 2011) 155-160

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Steve Abbott (Transplant)

Steve has edited two poetry anthologies and published two full-length poetry collections and five chapbooks. He lives in Columbus, Ohio, where he edits Ohio Poetry Association's annual member journal *Common Threads* and is a coordinator of The Poetry Forum, one of the longest-running poetry reading series in the United States.

Laurence Ammann-Lanthier (La texture de l'écorce)

Laurence is a Franco-Manitoban who has left home and returned many times; a mobility-facilitated spiral of growth, disconnection, connection and perspective, which has brought more love into her life, including love for Winnipeg, its urban nature, urban dwellers and the great prairies of Treaty 1 that keep us together.

Bob Armstrong (Pilgrim on a Freedom Machine)

Bob is a novelist, playwright, freelance writer, cyclist and hiker whose comic novel *Dadolescence* was published by Turnstone Press and whose plays have been produced by Theatre Projects Manitoba, Lunchbox Theatre (Calgary) and at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival. He is currently flogging a novel and a short story collection, and spending a lot of time hiking with his wife Rosemary.

Robert Beveridge (Independence)

Robert makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry in Akron, OH. He has recent or upcoming appearances in *The Virginia Normal*, *Credo Espoir*, and *Chiron Review*, among others.

Gabriella Brand (Roncevaux Roncevalles)

Gabriella divides her time between Connecticut, USA, where she teaches foreign languages, and the Eastern Townships of Quebec, where she works with Syrian refugees and paddles her red canoe. She has hiked across several countries, in spite of her old lady bunions, and her writing has appeared in over 50 literary magazines. Her website is gabriellabrand.net.

Diane Driedger (In French Class)
Diane is a poet, visual artist and educator. Her latest poetry book is *Red with Living: Poems and Art* (Inanna, 2016). She lives in Winnipeg.

Emma Durand-Wood (Henderson Hwy Blues)
Emma lives in Elmwood with her husband and three young children. An active volunteer in her community, she has been writing about life in Winnipeg on her blog, *Winnipeg O' My Hear*t, since 2009.

Holly Ferrier Lamont (Your Movement, My Moment)
Holly writes for therapy. She enjoys putting her thoughts on paper and allowing them to just wander into either a rhythm for a poem or escape into a collection of words for a short story. A new(ish) mom, she is slowly learning about who she is as an artist, as she also is learning about who she is as a person who has been reuniting with family that she did not know she had. She resides in rural Manitoba with her husband and son, among the quiet backdrop of nature.

Berhe Gebrihet (I Have a Home)
Berhe Gebrihet is a 23-year-old Tigrayan-Eritrean, which means that his origins are from Tigray in Ethiopia, but his family are Eritrean citizens. In July 2011, Berhe was taken from his home country and ended up in Israel where he finished high school and spent most of his youth. In April 2018, Berhe immigrated to Canada and has lived in Winnipeg since then. He dreams to one day become a film director.

John Grey (Crossing The Border)
John is an Australian poet and US resident. He recently published in *That*, *Muse*, *Poetry East* and *North Dakota Quarterly*, and has work upcoming in *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Hawaii Review* and the *Review*.

Izzeddin Hawamda (Imagine)
Izzeddin was born and raised in a rural village just outside of the city of Nablus in the West Bank, Palestine. He is currently working toward his PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Manitoba.

Janell Henry (Legends from the Trails: Shelby Encounters the Memegesi)
Janell is an Ojibwe curator, writer and producer from Roseau River Anishinabe First Nation, Manitoba. She now lives in Transcona, Winnipeg with her partner, Chuck, and two sons, Blake and Alex. Janell's curatorial practice challenges the Indigenous/Canadian dichotomy while working from within both realities.

Tricia Knoll (Senior Strength Class)
Tricia is a poet who lives in Vermont's north woods. Her work appears nationally and internationally in journals and anthologies. Her website is triciaknoll.com.

Yvonne Kyle (Double Blades?… Well Maybe)
Yvonne is a Winnipeg business owner who hopes to retire soon so she can spend more time exploring the world outside her door and writing about her real and imagined experiences. Yvonne belongs to two writing groups that motivate her to keep writing even when life is a whirlwind of busyness. Many of Yvonne's short stories feature a boat.

Jenean McBrearty (Movement)
Jenean's fiction, poetry and photographs have been published in over 200 print and on-line journals. She is the author of the how-to book, *Writing Beyond the Self*; *How to Write Creative Non-fiction that Gets Published*, and is a 2015 Silver Pen Award winner for her noir short story, *Red's Not Your Color*. She lives in Kentucky and writes full time.

Brendan McKay (The High Pass)
Brendan is a Saulteaux writer and photographer from Rolling River First Nation and Sandy Bay First Nation. He studied film and philosophy at the University of Manitoba and currently lives and works in Winnipeg.

Laura McMaster (Walking)
Laura is a teacher of English and philosophy in Winnipeg. She reads extensively about the intersection between landscape, trails, and ideas, with each shaping the others. Her first drafts always happen off paper, on trails, as she moves through the prairie, the woods, and the city.

Alex Merrill (Meeting Ernesto)
Moving is a familiar activity to Alex Merrill. She has been moving for most of her life, and is very lucky that all of her moves have been of her own choice, from somewhere she loved to somewhere else she loved. Born in Quebec where she spent 29 years, she has also lived in Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, British Columbia and, since 2001, Manitoba.

Eva Morrison (Interpreting Desire Lines)
Eva's research explores curatorial strategies and contemporary art in relation to feminism, social space theory, and institutional critique. She has a Bachelor's of Fine Art specializing in art history and studio arts from Concordia University, and has been a lead contributor to the Feminist Art History publication *Yiara Online*. From Toronto, she currently lives in Montreal.

Cath Nichols
(Desperate for a Seat and Wednesday Commute)
Cath lives with chronic pain and uses a wheelchair. Her 2017 poetry collection, *This is Not a Stunt*, focuses on non-conforming bodies, including transgender and intersex life-stories. Her work has been described as resilient and cinematic, which is ironic as she is mainly weak and static!

Binh Pham (Through A Child's Eyes)
Binh writes short fiction and children's stories. Two of her stories were shortlisted for the 2018 Ada Cambridge Biographical Prose Award and longlisted for the 2018 Harper Collins Aspiring Writers Mentorship Program. Two more stories and one poem were published in the *Stories from the Suburbs* anthology. Binh is currently writing a short story collection based on her childhood in Vietnam.

Byron Rempel-Burkholder (Tracks)
Byron is a retired editor and writer living in the West Broadway neighbourhood of Winnipeg. He is an avid gardener, hiker and camper, and has a keen interest in Indigenous-settler history, human rights, spirituality and food.

Nicole Roach (Cycling While Female: Barriers to Women's Transportation Independence)
Nicole navigates the city of Winnipeg primarily by bike, by foot and by bus. She has worked as a sustainable transportation project coordinator at an environmental non-profit, and is passionate about women's issues as they relate to transportation, urban design, climate change and much more.

Matthew Robinson (Reflections on Finding Yourself Abroad)
Matthew has spent the last ten years trying to find his place in the world. Two university degrees and fifteen countries later, he is an urban planner and active transportation advocate in his hometown of Winnipeg. While his search is ongoing, he's learning to live mindfully in the present moment, always ready for life's next great adventure.

Ron Romanowski (From Birth to War, from Army to Prison Camp, from Music to Canada, from Marriage to Israel, from Romania to Kaddish)
Ron handles administrative affairs for the six non-binary writers (Ron Romanowski, June Summer Jones, Siegfried Jerusalem, John G. Carmody, Marina Stepanova, Ruth Rachel Cyprian) who form the New Festival Theory crew. They have published *The Big Book of Canadian Poetry* and *Incantations from the Republic of Fire*, and continue to work on poetry in the rich ground of Winnipeg.

Jim Ross (Invisible Disabilities)
Jim jumped into creative pursuits in 2015 to resuscitate his long-neglected left brain. He's since published nonfiction, poetry and photography in over 100 journals and anthologies on four continents, including *Dreamer's*, *The Atlantic*, and *Manchester Review*.

Sandra Schmidtke (Centurion)
Sandra resides on the windswept Canadian Prairies in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is the winner of the 2019 San Miguel Writers' Conference Writing Contest in Fiction. Grant writer by day, fiction writer by night, she has a B.A. in English and a debut novel searching for its forever home.

Korellia Schneider (self, in motion)
Korellia hails from the United States, but considers herself a bit of a nomad trying to find her place in the world. Currently she is a graduate student at the University of Manitoba pursuing an MA in Peace and Conflict Studies.

Moneca Sinclaire (Right to Meander in a Store)
Moneca is Nehinan (Cree) originally from Northern Manitoba. She moved to Winnipeg to attend university and fell in love with learning. She completed her PhD and is a proud mom to her one and only son, "The OB" rapper extraordinaire.

Karen Solomon (My Mother's Bike)
Karen is retired and enjoys cycling and walking in her hometown of Winnipeg. Travel is another favourite pastime and she hopes to cycle in Holland one day.

Kevin Strong (The Climb)
Kevin writes music, scripts, stories, children's stories, and poetry when he is not doing accounting or spending time with his wife and two children in Winnipeg. He has published 32 poems and takes inspiration from travel, current events, famous poems, novels, and song lyrics.

Vincent Ternida (Southeast by Southwest)
Vincent's writing has appeared in *Ricepaper Magazine* and *Dark Helix Press*, and was longlisted for the CBC Short Story Prize in 2019. His first novella, *The Seven Muses of Harry Salcedo*, was published by Asian Canadian Writer's Workshop. He lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Carol VandenEngel and Glenn Green (Paddle on Paddlers)
Husband and wife team Carol and Glenn left behind busy office careers to continue their pursuit of the great outdoors. Together they enjoy wilderness adventures, a good cup of espresso while watching the sun rise, and recently, paddling their canoe across Canada. They currently reside in Kingston, Ontario.

Donald R. Vogel (The Battalion)
Don holds a master's degree in English from Stony Brook University and has attended the Southampton Writers Conference. He has published both fiction and nonfiction in several literary journals and is the Director of Estate Planning at New York Institute of Technology. He lives in Long Island, New York with his wife and son.

Laura White (The Dancer)
Laura is an amateur writer and dancer who holds a BA in English and a MA in cultural studies. She enjoys examining different aspects of our culture—be it dance, music, writing, art, etc.—and how it relates to our daily lives and sense of self. She currently lives in Winnipeg.

Nancy Wick (The Accidental Walker)
Nancy is a journalist who has won regional and national awards for her feature writing. Now retired, she writes personal essays and other nonfiction. Her work has appeared in the journals, *Minerva Rising, Persimmon Tree, Summerset Review and Longridge Review*, among others. She has also been included in the anthologies *Boom Project: Voices of a Generation* and *Triumph: Stories of Victories Great and Small.* She lives in Seattle.

Featured Authors

Steve Abbott
Laurence Ammann-Lanthier
Bob Armstrong
Robert Beveridge
Gabriella Brand
Diane Driedger
Emma Durand-Wood
Holly Ferrier Lamont
Berhe Gebrihet
Glenn Green
John Grey
Izzeddin Hawamda
Janell Henry
Tricia Knoll
Yvonne Kyle
Jenean McBrearty
Brendan McKay
Laura McMaster
Alex Merrill
Eva Morrison
Cath Nichols
Binh Pham
Byron Rempel-Burkholder
Nicole Roach
Matthew Robinson
Ron Romanowski
Jim Ross
Sandra Schmidtke
Korellia Schneider
Moneca Sinclaire
Karen Solomon
Kevin Strong
Vincent Ternida
Carol VandenEngel
Donald R. Vogel
Laura White
Nancy Wick

Foreword

Leigh Anne Parry
and Anders Swanson

Introduction

Sharon Chisvin

The WriteTo*Move* anthology was created through the Winnipeg Arts Council's WITH ART community public art program and is part of the City of Winnipeg's Public Art Collection.

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ISBN 978-1-7775184-0-0
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