The things women sports reporters put up with

UNEVEN PLAYING FIELD

CAMPUS ASSAULT COMPLACENCY

INSIDE A MYSTERIOUS ORPHANAGE

STANDING TALL IN SMALL TOWN SASKATCHEWAN
Graduating this year?

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THE CROW
is the annual student publication of the School of Journalism, Faculty of Arts, University of Regina.

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Photo Editor: Mark Taylor

ON THE COVER

Photo illustration based on Laura Beamish’s photo of Bianca Million in Regina’s Victoria Square Park.

If you want to see The Crow continue to publish in-depth journalism that matters to Canadians, please consider making a donation to the School of Journalism. Your support is crucial to The Crow magazine and other free public outreach services, such as the school’s annual Minifie Lecture. Together we can make journalism the best it can be!

Editor’s Nest

Dear readers,

It’s the School of Journalism’s great pleasure to introduce you to the 2017 edition of The Crow, a collection of long-form journalism produced annually by students in our magazine writing and photojournalism classes.

People often ask me if I assign a theme at the start of the school year. The answer is no, the writers bring their own topics to the table—things they are passionate enough about to spend an entire semester with, through weeks of researching, writing, fact-checking and polishing.

As students collectively experience the changing world around them, however, themes do emerge organically. This year’s Crow, for example, focuses a great deal on the idea of inclusion. In the stories you are about to read, a refugee finds a home, an LGBTQ community finds a church, hip hop artists find their history, a young athlete finds acceptance and a place to excel, and women struggle for freedom from harassment in their universities, careers and relationships. How well or poorly these spaces open up to difference is a source of tension throughout.

The issue also explores human nature from low to high, from the dark well of small town gossip to shedding light on a disease that impacts a growing number of Saskatchewan people. Common to all are the writer’s heartfelt sense of empathy and unique creative expression, characteristics of quality nonfiction work.

Once again, the issue is designed by print lab instructor Mark Taylor and beautifully illustrated with student photography. We hope you enjoy the whole package, cover to cover.

- Patricia W. Elliott
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Standing Tall

Amy Lightfoot knew there was something different about Wyatt.
But in rural Saskatchewan, it’s hard to find answers.

Story and photos
by
ALLISON BAMFORD

He stands at the solid white line, waiting to serve. His piercing blue-grey eyes stare through the mesh of the net, deep into his opponent’s. The squeaking of shoes from the next practice’s warm-up hums through the gym doors, blending with shouts of “serve,” “out” and the calling of scores after each point.

He was four years old when he first discovered badminton. He was playing in the backyard of his cousin’s Cranbrook, British Columbia, home when he announced, “I want to be a professional badminton player when I grow up.”

Fast forward to a Regina, Saskatchewan elementary school gym—with 13 players all under age 15 battling around the four courts—Wyatt Lightfoot stands out from the rest. It took nine years of practice, hard work and overcoming adversity—something he still faces—but he’s here. He draws back his racquet, sweaty hand prints on the worn tape wrapped around the handle.

One deep breath: swing.

The doctors called them markers. Signs on the ultrasounds that predicted the possibility of Amy Lightfoot having a son with Down syndrome. Signs like the formation of a short-bridged nose and the shortening of the arm and thigh bones. At each ultrasound, doctors found more and more of these markers.

This wasn’t her first child; it was her fourth—she had two boys and a girl. But this pregnancy was different for some reason. First the markers, then the labour. She pushed for four, long, exhausting hours in the hospital bed—nothing. The baby was cock-eyed in her pelvis. The 33-year-old was tired, weak and worried for her son’s health, so when asked if she wanted to be put under for a C-section, she accepted.

Things are a little blurry after that, but Amy can make out bits and pieces. One thing she knows for certain is her overwhelming concern for her newborn son. After the anesthetic wore off and the Demerol shots were less frequent, Amy was able to consciously ask the question: does he have Down syndrome? The simple answer was no.

The nurses brought baby Wyatt into the room for Amy to hold, but something was wrong. ‘Are you sure this is ours?’ Amy questioned. For the most part, Wyatt looked like an average baby with an average weight, height and head circumference, but something was off. Perhaps it was his broad forehead or his protruding button-shaped nose or the way his ring finger separated from his middle finger. Whatever it was, he didn’t look like any of her other children.

“My other kids all had these long arms and legs,” she recalled.

Nonetheless, doctors insisted everything was fine. Having not been awake for the birth of her son, she didn’t have the same feeling she had when her other children were born—the feeling of knowing the baby was hers. Looking for validation, confirmation, anything, Amy roamed the hallways of the Moose Jaw Union Hospital checking to see if any of the babies looked like her other children when they were born. She even lifted up the sleeves of her in-laws’ shirts to compare the length of their upper arms to Wyatt’s.
The search for reassurance continued when she brought Wyatt back to their small hometown of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan. Friends and family who came to visit were targets of interrogation: Does he look different? She even went to great lengths to dig through old baby pictures of her other children to compare them, until she came to the conclusion: “This kid is just going to be frickin’ short.”

“Why are you looking for things wrong with him?” Her husband, Kelly, was irritated by her behaviour. There wasn’t an answer to this question because Amy didn’t know, either—it was mother’s intuition.

Six weeks had passed, and Amy was still trying to solve a seemingly impossible mystery. She was sitting on her living-room couch, breast-feeding Wyatt—a task that proved to be much more difficult for Wyatt than the other kids. Kelly was lying on the floor in front of her, monotonously flipping through the channels—pausing only briefly between shows to see what was on. It was two seconds on The Oprah Winfrey Show that caught Amy’s attention.

A man and his partner were walking towards Oprah—click. The seconds on The Oprah Winfrey Show that caught Amy’s attention.

“This form of short-limbed dwarfism is characterized by short-than-average arms and legs, an average-size torso, and an enlarged head with a prominent forehead. Dwarfism is defined as anything under the height of four feet 10 inches, caused by a medical or genetic condition. Wyatt, who currently stands at four feet one inch, is projected to grow to four feet six inches, according to his doctor.

Wyatt’s a dwarf.”

Achondroplasia is the most common type of dwarfism that affects one in 15,000 to 40,000 newborns. Wyatt, like 80 per cent of people with achondroplasia, has average-size parents who could not have prevented his condition—something that the genetic specialist informed Amy and Kelly about during the diagnosis.

The doctor was reassuring. Wyatt was healthy and fine, he told her. But if something was wrong like Amy suspected, Wyatt needed to see a genetic specialist right away—and there was a two-year waitlist to see the only one in Saskatchewan.

The concerned mother, originally from North Dakota, took Wyatt back to her home state to see a specialist there. It wasn’t until September, three months after Wyatt was born, that Amy confirmed her initial thoughts after watching Oprah back in July. “Wyatt’s a dwarf.”

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Opening spread: Wyatt Lightfoot stands on a stool to wash his hands in the Wilcox, Saskatchewan home where his family lives during the school year. Previous pages: Amy Lightfoot, 46, watches over her son Wyatt’s shoulder as they look at an old yearbook from Athabasca Murray College—the high school in Wilcox Wyatt will be attending in the fall of 2017. Wyatt kneels on the freezer door to reach for a snack. This page: Wyatt rides a children’s bike, the perfect size for him. Following page: Wyatt poses in front of his teammates during a CrossCourt badminton practice in Regina. He is also a Team Canada athlete, working toward the 2020 Paralympics in Tokyo.
She pushed for answers and she pushed for doctors’ help. She was going to do everything in her power to help Wyatt live an average life, like the rest of the Lightfoots.

Clothing is another challenge. Finding age-appropriate clothes in Size 8 youth pants and a Medium youth shirt is never easy, especially when shirts get stuck going over his head. Jeans are almost always out of the question because his hands can’t cooperate to do up the buttons, which explains why he usually sticks to sweatpants. And his kids’ Size 4 feet are often too wide to fit into average shoes. As long as it takes to find these clothes, it takes even longer for Wyatt to grow out of them—something Amy considers a “bonus.”

As Wyatt grew older, new milestones meant new adaptations. Most children start preparing for kindergarten just before the school year; however, Wyatt’s preparation began when he was three years old with a walk-through in the school to make sure things were okay. Stools were added, doors were changed, soap dispensers were moved and paper towel distributors were lowered.

Amy did everything in her power to create a safe environment for Wyatt, but bullies were always a possibility—kids can be mean. However, Wyatt admits there was a time he was frustrated with his condition.

“Why are you so small?”
“You should be playing with us, not the fourth graders!” they taunted.

Nothing ever seems to bother Wyatt—not the kindergarteners, not strangers’ stares, nor offside comments made in public. The blond happy-go-lucky 13-year-old is a social butterfly who would rather make friends than create enemies. However, Wyatt admits there was a time he was frustrated with his condition.

“When everyone was growing and I just stayed the same height, I was a little mad because I wanted to be the same height as the others.”

What about today? Does he ever wish he were average height?

“Yes and no. Well, yes, so I could do basically everything I could do, but no because I like my life as a little person.”

Today, Wyatt follows in his brothers’ and sister’s footsteps as he will be attending high school at the Athol Murray College of Notre Dame in Wilcox, Saskatchewan in the fall of 2017. However, he’s managed to one-up his family’s accomplishments as he was recently selected for Canada’s Para-badminton Team—meaning Wyatt is in the running to go to the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics. That’s why Wyatt is back in the elementary school gym today, playing his heart out, not for a gold medal at the Paralympics but for fun at his CrossCourt Badminton practice.

With his knees bent, arms out, racquet up, ready for the serve, his gaze sits level with the bottom of the mesh. His black and red runners budge at the ankle due to the width of his feet. Sweat on his upper lip and brow has accumulated from the past two hours of practice. When the fluorescent gym lights hit his face, the droplets glisten from freckled cheek to freckled cheek. But there’s grace to his movements. Though it’s only a practice match, Wyatt isn’t backing down. He lunges back and forth, landing on the balls of his feet. He swings the racquet through the air with a finesse born of nine years and hours upon hours of practice. When the fluorescent gym lights hit his face, the droplets glisten from freckled cheek to freckled cheek.

Playing the games, Wyatt raises his hands in triumph—claiming the last point is almost as good as claiming the winning point.

Wyatt lifts up the net to walk under and extends his hand to his teammate-turned-opponent. The boy denies Wyatt’s handshake and turns to walk away. Wyatt shrugs it off laughing, runs up beside the boy and puts his arm around him before putting his back. It’s an act of true sportsmanship—a trait that will one day, hopefully, follow Wyatt to the Paralympics.
Dismissed

Many women don’t feel safe on university campuses. What are universities doing about it?

Story and photos by EMILY PASIUK
I wanted to know who was responsible for the disciplinary measures at the university, independent of any discipline that may or may not come from a criminal investigation. The number of reports of sexual assault has gone up since the policy came into force. Between 2011 and 2016, there were 16 cases of sexual assault reported to campus security. Eight of those were reported in 2016, the first full year after the policy was enacted.

According to external relations spokesperson Natalie Tomczak, the increase in reporting is “an indication that our efforts to raise awareness about sexual assault and to support its reporting is resulting in increased reporting.”

I wanted to know who was responsible for the disciplinary measures at the university. What happened to alleged rapists at my school? What happened to alleged stalkers, to harassers?
John Smith is the associate vice-president of student affairs and therefore the person in charge of all discipline for non-academic misconduct at the university. His office isn't all that different from MacDonald-Berg's office, except for a mini boardroom in one corner. He sits behind a large desk that faces the door.

Although not all sexual assault cases at the university come through his office, an expulsion has not happened since he took the position eight years ago, he tells me. “We’re not the police. But the expectation of the public and of the students and of the families of the students are at a higher level than if we were just an employee,” he says.

“If you were the police or you were in the court system and you were to be investigated for sexual assault or sexual violence, you have detectives, you have labs, you have access to everything at your disposal… Here we just have us. This isn’t actually what we’re trained to do; this is just something that every university across North America is expected to do.”

Although other people will sit with Smith and decide the fate of the accused at the university, he’s ultimately the one who will sign the paper and be held responsible for what happens to that student. Smith thinks that some institutions do betray their students, staff, and faculty in the name of positive public relations.

The bond prohibited the accused from contacting her family or the victim. She came back to her room. And her room was unlocked. “I was up after my roommates to make sure doors were locked because there was nothing done and he was still right there so it was like there was no support from the university.”

Day is now in her fourth year at the U of R and no longer lives on campus. The incident prompted her to move and she still doesn’t feel safe at the university.

“They weren’t concerned about my feelings or protection.”

The university only cares about making it appear like they’re supporting students, she says. “They have their security guards and they have all their rules and they’re checking your ID but I think when it comes to an actual incident like this, there’s no—nothing’s done. There’s no actual care for the students. It’s just kind of like as long as it looks that way to the outside, that’s as far as they go.”

Then came a story that was familiar to me, and to many of my friends. The story where you feel as though no one will take the time to help you and so you have to take your protection into your own hands. You tell everyone you can about who is making you feel this way, what they look like, what their name is. You become a sort of haphazard army, a group of simpering, angry friends trying to keep everyone safe and taking comfort in the fact that you know you believe each other. You develop an unwritten code among yourselves. You protect each other.

“I let all of my friends know, my friends let all their friends know, and we made sure that we let everybody know that he was the person.”

After all is said and done, Day has lost her faith in her institution. “We’re not any safer.”

Veronica’s situation was somewhat resolved, after her request to move rooms in residence was granted. But fear still lingered even after the university helped her secure a peace bond. The bond prohibited the accused from contacting her family or anyone who was involved with the situation, but still allowed him to remain in the same place as long as he didn’t talk to her.

“I didn’t want to see him but he was around, so I had no choice because they can’t really take away someone’s education. So I had no choice but to avoid the places where he was. So basically, I was just in my room.”

A pang of fear still strikes her when someone knocks on her door. I wondered if she felt as though part of her education was being taken away because she spent most of her time avoiding him. I wondered if she thought it was fair that he got to continue his education without any of those interruptions. After I asked, she paused for a long time.

“I haven’t thought of that, actually. Honestly, I just still think that if I didn’t let him do it that I would be okay right now.”

A woman was sexually assaulted by two guys that she knew late at night. The guys had gone out, they’d gotten liquored up, and they came back to her room. And her room was unlocked.”

(responsible). I am pretty outspoken, I speak my mind and I do what I need to do. It would be rare that anyone has ever actually challenged me on doing the right thing!”

“They are difficult decisions, and he admits being sued by a perpetrator has crossed his mind. Yet he says he doesn’t shy away from what needs to be done.

“Prompt action and early resolution efforts initiated by the impacted student or employee can be very effective to stop inappropriate, disrespectful and even potentially violent behavior.” - Respectful University Policy, University of Regina

“We violations the University at significant risk and are subject to appropriate corrective administrative or academic discipline and could result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of the member’s position with the University, or in the case of a student, a penalty as determined by the University. The bond prohibited the accused from contacting her family or anyone who was involved with the situation, but still allowed him to remain in the same place as long as he didn’t talk to her.

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It was mid-afternoon when I pulled up in front of the two-storey house on Ottawa Street, in Regina’s Heritage neighbourhood. The street—dusty in the wake of spring’s melt—felt familiar. I grew up not too far away and still reside in the same ‘hood. Back then, people called it the Core neighbourhood. It’s no surprise to see police cruisers every other minute. The Regina Police Service station is only a few blocks away, so witnessing arrests in my childhood wasn’t a big thing. This was the area where I started rapping.

As I sat in my car getting my recording gear set up for the interview with one of Saskatchewan’s pioneers of hip hop, I wanted to bring back that old school vibe of when it all began for him. So I popped in my Naughty By Nature tape before I shut off the car. I was anxious to roll around with one of Saskatchewan’s most important individuals when it comes to hip hop and more eager to watch his reaction to the tape I just popped in my deck.

I walked up to the door. When it opened, the first thing I noticed was his light blue Rocawear letterman style jacket unbuttoned just enough to make out a Toronto Blue Jays T-shirt. He was wearing a green Kangol hat slightly tilted to the side similar to André...
3000 from OurKast's first video, Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik, back in 1994. In the living room, his son sat on the floor playing a video game, wearing a matching Kargol hat, only black in colour, which looked cool. I noticed the bottom shelf of the TV stand had four Xbox 360 DJ Hero turntables and then I looked to my left and saw every DJ's dream, the studio room. Through the open door I could see multiple Technics SL-1200 turntables, a Vestax 06-Pro mixer, two beat machines and three screen monitors triangulated around his seat. This was not your regular basement studio set-up. Jordan Johnson has been purchasing studio equipment for decades. His name may not mean much to hip hop enthusiasts from far and wide but his DJ name rings bells for artists across Canada. Krackajack is undoubtedly Regina's godfather of hip hop.

At first sight, Johnson doesn't look like a hip hop DJ or even a DJ at all. He stands about 6'7" tall and is a little heavier set but nothing about how he looks matters in the world of hip hop. The brilliance of Johnson is the way he embodies the element of DJing and the essence of the culture. Now, when I say the essence of hip hop, I mean the entire attitude of that first party DJ Kool Herc organized in the Bronx back in 1973. The emphasis was on supporting and having a good time to good music. Krackajack was never a rapper himself but from his spot behind the turntables he tried to shine the light on those who may not have a chance to rap onstage otherwise.

We hopped into my car to hit up the forgotten places of Regi- na's earliest hip hop shows and as soon as the beat dropped Krac- kajack turned his head in approval. We drove to one of the first places he remembered DJing, the Caribbean Club, an office-style building on 11-block Oster Street back in the early 1990s. "On a hip hop level, I always stayed true during that time," he said. "Back then I was hip hop. I would say to people, 'I'm not playing this, I'm not playing that. Back then Dr. Dre was hip hop. It was first and foremost about the beats."

"I had just had a little jam session with my cousin Kevin Holness (DJ Koolness), he brought me a small crate of records and we jammed out a little bit. He was testing me out to see if I was any good," said Merk. He smiled as he told the story of his first song and how he got a "rewind," which in DJ parlance means the crowd loved it and wanted to hear it again, so he spun the record back again. The experience was enough to set him on his path. "I asked him what he remembers the most about those days. "I was so surprised that there were other people that liked hip hop," he said. "I could feel that there was something being built, a community. There were rappers that weren't fighting to be the best. It didn't feel like a battle—it was just hip hop!"

As we continued to drive through the city streets, memories flooded back faster than he could voice them. "I swear I must have DJed on every block," he said, laughing. It was at that point I turned to Krackajack and had to ask him, "What do you want people involved in hip hop nowadays to know about back then?"

"I'd like them to acknowledge that there was something here, we weren't just a wasteland of mom and pop-country," he answered. "We did exist. People were working hard on the scene possibly for the same reasons they do."

We reminisced about rappers and DJs from the 1990s. According to Johnson, hip hop shows back then were ones that created bonds between people for loving the same music, the same vibe. After we literally drove down memory lane I wanted to know who he considered "originators." Anish, who was an Indigenous BBoy/rapper with roots in BBoying dating back to the 1980s, was high on his list. "Regardless if it was good or bad he pushed the envelope," said Johnson. When it came to DJing and who really im- pressed him he didn't hesitate: "Merk, 100 per cent."

"I remember he did this acapella mix with Lost Ones (by Lauryn Hill, I was a natural... I was like, wow, his timing was immaculate. I thought that from the very start."

"The resident DJs at the Moon nightclub were Krackajack, OB-1 and Traxx. Krackajack made it his mission to use these rap shows as a chance to get local rappers, myself included, up on stage. If it weren't for the Moon, a lot of rappers wouldn't have had a chance to rap in front of a crowd and, most importantly, on a stage.

The rap scene was growing and in 2005 Regina held its first MC/DJ battle called Got Skillz. I remember the crowd was going crazy for the battles and the venue was packed.

"Got Skillz happened over the next two years and the final Got Skillz battle took place in 2007 at the Lazy Owl Bar at the University of Regina campus. Following Got Skillz was Rise or Retreat, a BBoy battle with BBoys from Alberta and Manitoba. Got Served MC battles popped up and then the film 8 Mile hit the theatres. The funny thing is that the entire movie was based on rap battling but many of Regina’s MCs say without a doubt that the Eminem movie killed the MC norm, as everyone became a spectator. All of these events happened prior to social media, leaving no digital trace that they ever happened. I’m glad Merky Waters and Krackajack remember those times. Before I left Merk's studio I asked him: If there was one thing he could say to new Regina artists about the golden era of Regina hip hop, what would it be?"

"(Know) we had some awesome shows and just because you weren't there (and) it's not documented (like now). There was never a blog and people to post pictures and people to comment. Do your homework and connect with people who were around back then and by investigating into the past you’re not going to hinder anything in the future."

“Our arena was a trap door upstairs... in the office. A fitness centre. “They had this quick (escape door). If the cops came, there was a trap door upstairs... in the office.”
Confessions of a small town

Where I grew up, rumours are facts, secrets are an open book, and everyone is an investigator.
In my rural Saskatchewan hometown, there’s a woman who people call the Black Widow. They say her last four partners met their untimely deaths during the relationship or shortly after its termination.

Or maybe it’s five partners? I don’t know. Frankly, neither do my informants. People back home speak in rumour with an authoritative confidence, justly held or not. See, evidence means something different to every investigator. And in towns like Kellie, everyone is an investigator.

It’s a strange environment to get to know a person in, because you’ll know their secrets before they want you to (or at least the person who still has access to those secrets will be keen to share them). Any relationship that develops is a phenomenon hung in balance between knowing things faster than you should and pretending that you don’t.

As a kid, I understood that an affair was parking your car in another person’s yard, and in Grade 4 I knew about the family feud that made two older girls sporadic rivals. Then, as a teenager, I worked in the local Co-op grocery store and watched our till fill as many tales as it did carrots of milk. It took me years to learn how to sort truth from fabrication and spot the many cases where that wasn’t possible. That is why, like so many times before, I almost missed this rumour for the bluntness that cloaked it. With luck, I did manage to catch the tail of its fleet (a word that has lived lives among all 50,000 Canadians, of whom 5,000 lived in Saskatchewan). Those who survived the epidemic would face the Great Depression in the next year. Many of the province’s population was rural, and approximately 87 per cent of Saskatchewan’s population was rural in 1918.

But a decade later, the community would find itself struggling from the effects of the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic, an event that was entrenched in the history of St. Ann’s. At the time, nearly 13 per 1,000 people in the province died of the flu. Nearly 150 children died in the families they had started. Dozens of children were left without parents or family, prompting the townspeople to seek help for them. St. Ann’s Home for Girls and Boys, where the children were housed, was established shortly after the epidemic.

The house was known for its strict rules and was considered to be one of the worst orphanages in Saskatchewan. The children were often mistreated and neglected, and many of them suffered from physical and emotional abuse. St. Ann’s Home was eventually closed in 1971, as it was deemed too expensive to continue operating.

It was in this orphanage that the legend of the Black Widow began to circulate. There were many stories about the woman who lived there, and some said that she was responsible for the deaths of her partners. However, there was no concrete evidence to support these claims, and the stories were often more exaggerated than true.

The Black Widow is said to be a woman who lives in the basement of St. Ann’s Home, and who is responsible for the deaths of those who are there. She is said to be the cause of the many rumors and whispers that circulate throughout the community.

There have been countless attempts to uncover the truth behind the Black Widow’s identity, but none have been successful. The community is divided on whether she is a real person or just a figment of the locals’ imaginations.

The legend of the Black Widow has been passed down through generations, and is still talked about today. Some people believe that she is still alive, and that she is waiting for her next victim. Others believe that she is just a figment of the locals’ imaginations, and that there is no truth to the stories.

Regardless of whether the Black Widow is real or not, her legend has become an important part of the community’s history. It serves as a reminder of the sacrifices that were made during the Great Depression, and the struggles that the community faced during that time.
Opening spread: Light filters into an empty room at St. Ann's Personal Care Home and Assisted Living in Ituna, Saskatchewan. The building was once an orphanage. This page: St. Ann's old gymnasium is now used for storage.
In comparison to the matter-of-facts he talks about his parents, Patras's memories of the orphanage seem almost fond. Of course, the latter was an improvement over the former. So when I breach the topic of pregnant nuns, I do it carefully. Still, his response is adamant.

“No, no, no, no,” he goes. “They were too religious.”

And that there was a tunnel to Sacred Heart?

“That is false,” Patras says. “Because we wouldn’t’ve used the tunnel, too. No, no. That’s false.”

The people of Ituna had respect for the orphanage, he tells me, “because most of the people (understood). We were all orphans—everybody there, for some reason or another—and had nuts take the reins as parents to look after (us).”

Before I leave, Patras gives me the name of a man in Ituna who he believes was at the orphanage, too; Ted Semchyshyn. I leave a message at the number listed by his name in the phone book and wait.

Semchyshyn returns my call the next day, but is reluctant to talk about St. Ann’s. His mother died giving birth to his youngest sibling, and the fact that he has no pictures or memories of what she looked like still haunts him today: The Sisters Servants of St. Ann’s raised him in her place.

When I do convince him to tell me about his experience there, he responds, “If they sent me to prison, it would be much easier right now. Yeah, that’s very unfortunate, but that’s the way it was. It was survival. That’s what I did. I survived.”

Many aspects of his story align with Patras’s, even though Semchyshyn lived at St. Ann’s earlier, from the time he was five years old in 1945 to 1951. He recalls the same daily schedule and list of chores; he remembers sleeping in a room with 20 other boys; he recalls the same strap Patras does that was used for discipline.

“Your mom is the best thing you have when you’re young. It’s more important than the dad. That’s the way I feel, and I missed that. It’s survival. That’s what I did. I survived.”

Despite his father’s poverty, when Semchyshyn returned home, “it was like heaven... I never looked back at the orphanage.”

He knows nothing about a tunnel but at the mention of secret trysts between the nuns and the priest he pauses. Admittedly, Semchyshyn was too young and under supervision too strict to have seen anything while an orphan—but having stayed in the Ituna community for his entire life made him suspicious.

“(An acquaintance) was courting some kind of lady from the north, coming home at four o’clock in the morning. He’s crossing right by St. Ann’s, and the Father would be walking across the road from—was going back home. And this guy had quite a few drinks and he was feeling good, so he stops the vehicle, he says, ‘Father, you’re in the same boots as I am.’ The Father put his head down and walked away.”

After months of searching, that is all I had: a chance encounter retold, then retold again. It seems I’m no better than I was as a child at identifying which stories are true and those that are false, though I continue to assume, just like a child, that there is difference to be found between life and the whispers that flirt about it from one ear to the next.
Female sports reporters are still struggling for equality.

Story and photo by LAURA BEAMISH

Laura Beamish

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One thing that hasn’t changed is the criticism that women confront regarding their knowledge and ability to work in sports, whether it is to their faces or through social media. Wick says that it is important to remember there are some people who are never going to change their minds about women’s capabilities. She notes that people think being on camera is easy but “when you’re put on the spot, you can forget your own name. You can make blunders that you never would have thought possible.” Women are under a much higher-powered microscope than men, any small blunder is fodder for gender-based put-downs.

Millions grew up big a sports fan and that passion turned into a career option when, as an aspiring journalist, she took a tour of the CTV Edmonton studio. “News was just really busy and stressful and all the sports guys rolled in at like 10:30 a.m. and they were casual and I was like, ‘This is my scene,’” she explained. She had been going to university, headed for a career in the world of communications. She put in an application to the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology’s radio and TV program, and happened to get in right away. So she switched gears and, after five years of post-secondary education, emerged with a broadcasting diploma in hand.

Millions knew she would be a minority in the sports industry, but she was also confident in her ability to hold her own. Like Wick, she had no illusions and was ready to stick it out. “There’s just little things that you wouldn’t even think are sexism, (that) are sexism, and you’re like, ‘This is my life, okay. I’ll deal with it; it’s fine.’” There are subtle decisions that Millions had to make that could affect how her day went, like what she wore. “I always say I know if I look nice on TV judging by how many people add me on Facebook after (a broadcast). And it’s always men,” she said. Millions knew that what she wore has a big impact on how she was perceived by her audience. Some outfits came off as professional and intellectual, while other choices attracted unwanted commentary.

Her laughter was light, but it hinted at a minefield of daily concerns her male coworkers never had to worry about.

I

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“As Charlotte Whitton, who was mayor of Ottawa many years ago, put it, ‘Women have to be twice as smart and work twice as hard as men in order to get as far as men do,’” Hayford says. One thing that hasn’t changed is the criticism that women
often comment on Millions’ appearance, despite the fact that she always dressed professionally. “After one game I was doing a post-game interview with him and he pulled me aside after and said, ‘Between you and me, don’t ever wear what you were wearing last time again.’” The last time she’d interviewed him, Millions had been wearing a simple T-shirt and ball cap; she had rushed to the interview from doing something else entirely. She thought the coach was going to make fun of her casual look. But instead, he told her, “I was too turned on to do the interview—don’t ever wear that again.”

Millions was left conflicted. “You can’t really confront it, because you still need to get the interview from these people, you still need to do your job in the future so I just kind of shook my head and said ‘okay’ and left… that would never happen to a man, nobody would ever do that to a male in sports.”

For Millions, the struggle was that even when such things happen, at the end of the day she still needed to get her job done, and done well. “You still need these people to respect you enough to give you answers and you want to have a working relationship with them,” she said.

Lee Jones, Millions’ sports director at the time, is not ignorant to the reality of the situation. “While I haven’t seen it up close, I know it still does happen from time to time and hopefully it’s something that we can, as a sports community, fix,” Jones says. He is confident that if and when an instance occurs, whether it is in the newsroom or in the field, reporters can speak with him and the issue will be addressed appropriately. The reality for most women, though, is that it’s not an occasional occurrence.

Our energetic conversation deflated a bit when Millions contemplated the question of future change. “I think it’s the ‘boys will be boys’ culture that we live in, honestly. It’s acceptable, it’s okay—not to everybody, I don’t mean to group everybody, there’s some individuals that I’ve worked with who are absolutely outstanding at stopping that… but (to) the overwhelming majority it’s okay to say those things and it’s okay to do those things because they’re athletes and that’s the culture we live in, so we have a lot of change to make,” she said.

The added pressures and discrimination takes its toll and, for the majority of females, it makes their career in sports broadcasting drastically shorter than their male counterparts.

As much as Millions enjoyed her job she knew she wouldn’t be able to do it forever. “Honestly, I couldn’t see myself doing this for the rest of my life,” Millions confided. “It is constant. There is constantly somebody hitting on you. There is constantly somebody just (saying), ‘Oh, you got hired because of your looks.’ It’s fine, but it also wears on you. I’ve been doing this for three years now and I’m almost at the point where I’m like, how long do I do this for?”

The answer, for Millions, was a few more months. In May 2017 she travelled to Africa for a volunteer stint at a children’s orphanage. She came back to her job at CTV but yearned for her hometown, Edmonton, and a different life. “I am leaving Regina,” she announced on her Instagram account on June 14. “I basically have no plan, but my heart isn’t here anymore. It’s with my family, it’s in the place I grew up, it’s in recreating my life to do what I can do to make the world a better place.”

“I always say, I know if I look nice on TV judging by how many people add me on Facebook after (a broadcast). And it’s always men,” says Bianca Millions, a former CTV Regina sports reporter.
Home is where...

Win Naing San spent years on the run. From a Burmese jungle to the Saskatchewan prairie, he’s finally catching his breath.
I men in his nightmares wore beards. He only understood what he saw. After that day, the Second World War, in fact. As a child, he didn't understand any of this. But he held the other man's life in his hands. Clinging to his mother, a madaw, Burma's government military and, in addition to a pistol, Mae Wai. It would've been the mid to late 1990s by the western

He remembers the two men, out in front of that little house in Mae Wai. It would've been the mid to late 1990s by the western

Fleeing for their lives a second time, the family scrambled up the shell of their makeshift tent were a sorry defense against the heavy tropical rain that pounded through the jungle canopy above. Still, the fact that he continued to wake up each morning was a good start.

S sometimes he wakes up at night. The coconut tree leaves that made up the shell of their makeshift tent were a sorry defense against the heavy tropical rain that pounded through the jungle canopy above. Still, the fact that he continued to wake up each morning was a good start.

For a while, the little house was a revolving door. Groups of soldiers would arrive, stay with Win's family for a week or so, and then be gone. Nestled into the southwest corner of Burma's Karen State, Mae Wai had historically been governed by the rebel Karen National Union. The Union's Karen National Liberation Army fought off Burma's Tatmadaw village to village. Win's family were of the Shan people, a minority in K N A L A territory. Though they spoke a different language, the Karen soldiers were okay, they remember. They took care of his house while he was away.

Other times, it was the student-soldiers, including disaffected Burmese activists who'd been trained to fight by the KLNA or UN Command on Refugees gave them food—rice, beans and fish sauce—once a month. They stayed with the couple for six months, and during that time Win began school again. He was enrolled in the second grade. School was a challenge. Being the only Shan student in the class, he didn't fit in. He couldn't read, write, or participate because he had never learned Burmese, which was the language used in the school. He didn't understand why the students around him studied so hard. After living in the jungle for so long, he didn't see the point. He didn't understand life. He felt isolated. Confused, Win failed the second grade.

Opening spread: Win Naing San poses for a photo in Regina. Photo courtesy of Win Naing San

Win Naing San was born in a refugee camp in Thailand. His parents fled Myanmar—the military government had smashed a pro-democracy movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi, leaving roughly 3,000 people homeless. Ten thousand fled, and many took up arms beside the ethnic fighters. The student-soldiers, including disaffected Burmese activists who'd been trained to fight by the KLNA or UN Command on Refugees gave them food—rice, beans and fish sauce—once a month. They stayed with the couple for six months, and during that time Win began school again. He was enrolled in the second grade. School was a challenge. Being the only Shan student in the class, he didn't fit in. He couldn't read, write, or participate because he had never learned Burmese, which was the language used in the school. He didn't understand why the students around him studied so hard. After living in the jungle for so long, he didn't see the point. He didn't understand life. He felt isolated. Confused, Win failed the second grade. But he began to routinely think to himself, "I will likely die today. If not before noon, then after."
Win Naing San plays a traditional Burmese drum during a New Year’s celebration in Regina.

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It was the height that scared him, the unending rush of the plane as it soared overhead, he told his mom he wouldn't do it. He'd go back to the camp instead. Life was simpler in the camp. But there was no turning back.

As they had a morning flight, they had to spend the night at a hotel in Bangkok. The building was huge and when he looked out on the city from the window in his room, it looked so large and far away. It was the height that scared him.

If the building falls, how will I escape? he wondered.

Turning to look around inside the room wasn't much comfort either. The amenities were all foreign to him. He'd seen a television before, but had no idea how to turn it on. He didn't know how to use the toilet, or the shower. None of them did. Looking around at the faces of his family members, Win could see they were all confused. He decided to leave the room to look around, but that just made matters worse. He was wandering around in the hotel, they didn't even bother to look at him. In the camp, people would bow their heads and say hello as they passed by one another. Here, people just walked on, eyes forward.

“How can people be like that?” he thought. He was shocked.

As far from home as they'd ever been, his family pitted in the night. The next day would be an important one. There were beds in the room, but none of them had ever slept on one before. They all slept on the floor.

Win continued to wake up each morning, which was a good start. But he began to think to himself, “I will likely die today. If not before noon, then after.”

Support his widowed mother. His brothers could build a life here. He could start his own family.

To do that, he needed a wife. As fate would have it, he fell in love with a nurse from Burma who’d ended up in Regina. The first time they spoke, Win nervously fumbled trying to speak to her in her native Karen. As time went by, though, their relationship grew stronger. Win became closer with her than he’d ever been with anyone. She was the one. He knew it every time their eyes met.

They decided to be married. They would share a life together in Canada, but to seal the marriage they would travel back to the country they’d left behind—to Burma.

The Burma Win flew into was different than the one he’d left behind. Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi now led the country, replacing National League for Democracy party’s election victory in 2015, which ushered in the country’s first civil government in over 50 years. Despite the change in government, however, the country remained in a state of unrest. Violence still punctuated the country amid scattered ceasefire agreements. In 2016, conflict once again flared between government forces and armed ethnic groups in Karen state, displacing over 5,000 more people and stiffening hopes for the return of refugees. Peace was not yet at hand.

So when Win arrived in Mae Sai, a group of children came forward to him, lacking a family name. So, UNHCR gave him a new name. It was a combination: two parts from his original and one from his mother’s name. Having adopted his “immigration name,” Win Naing San’s next challenge was likely filling in the spaces that asked for his age, his height and so on.

He’d never seen an airplane before and, besides, he didn’t even know where Rome was. He only knew it was somewhere other than the refugee camp he called home and the blood-soaked state he’d left behind.

The further he progressed through school, the closer he felt to realizing his dream of opening a clinic in Mae Sai. If he could manage to make it through his last two years of school and graduate from the tenth grade, he would travel to the Thai border city of Mae Sot—arrived at his home and the blood-soaked state he’d left behind.

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“Run.” The only word uttered by Lani Elliott’s husband when he stopped the car in the middle of nowhere and asked his wife to run for her life.

It was a beautiful summer morning on June 25, 1993. Rays of sun bloomed in the east yet the air was still cold and wet. It had rained all night. Rainy days were Elliott’s favourite part of summer, bringing the smell of wet earth and cooling breezes. But that day fate had decided something completely different for her.

Elliott got married when she was 20. She looked forward to being the happiest wife on earth. Her entire world revolved around her husband. But after a few months of her marriage, things began to change. The abuse started with isolation.

They lived two hours away from the city, in a community surrounded by his family. She was seldom allowed her to meet her own family, and wasn’t allowed to carry a phone. It bothered her but, when she realized she was pregnant with her first child, her worries gave way to hope of a better, happier life with her husband.

The physical abuse started when she was six months pregnant.

“The first time he kicked me was at his parents’ house, for just changing the TV channel. He rammed me down on the floor,” she remembers.

Chances are she wasn’t the only woman being abused that day.

Acting Superintendent Darcy Koch of the Regina Police Service reports the service receives an average of 18 domestic abuse calls every day. According to the 2015 Statistics Canada Report, Saskatchewan has the highest rate of police-reported family violence of all Canadian provinces: 480 reports per 100,000 people. Many more, like Elliott, do not call the police, thinking things will get better.

Victims of Violence is a Canadian charitable organization that was founded by two Alberta women in 1984. The group, which promotes research and awareness on all forms of violence,
describes domestic abuse as typically following a three-phase cycle: the first, the tension-building phase, where the victim is subjected to minor abuse such as verbal abuse, slaps, and shoving; then comes the acute battering phase, where the victim is subjected to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; last comes the honeymoon phase, where the abuser recognizes the damage done, apologizes to the victim and may also lead her to medical attention. Then the cycle begins again.

Elliott is proof that it can happen to any woman. She came from a policing background and had been trained in self-defense. Yet she kept holding out hope that life with her husband would improve. When the problems deepened, Elliott left her home and stayed at her friend's place. It was there that she discovered she was preg- nant again. She decided to return to her husband. He was her only support system, and she believed he loved her and could change his ways. But the violence and the coercion remained the same.

The second time she left, Elliott sought shelter in the city at Regina Transition House, along with her two baby girls. The demand for shelter space is high. In 2008, more than 100,000 women were admitted into Canadian shelters. There were no places available in Regina for her and her children, so she trav- eled to Saskatoon. The shelter there was experiencing a disease outbreak, so she and her babies were sent to a hotel with food voucher coupons. They stayed there until a spot opened up at a Regina shelter.

The prayer was heard. She could hear her son wailing. The hotel's desk staff was nearby, and they were immediately able to call police. They were coming up to the turn off to the city. As they drove, Elliott looked around for a weapon. She saw a thick rusty chain near the console. Before she could grab it, he veered off down a side road and stopped. They were in the middle of nowhere. "RUN!"

"Do you realize that if you died today, no one would know for at least a month that you were missing?" she said. "I could have you scattered all over this valley, and no one would be any wiser."
S he adjusts her clerical collar as she marches down the sun-filled church hallway, blond ringlets bouncing on her shoulders, boots clacking through the thin green carpet with every step. Pastor Carla Blakley’s hazel eyes brighten when her gaze meets a middle-aged man’s across the hall.

“Hey, good morning! I’m glad you came,” she calls out. She steps forward, reaching out a hand, and embraces him with ivory-robed arms. White closes his eyes and lifts his grey-sided goatee skyward with a serene smile. As a gay man who was raised Catholic, he says the feeling of finally being fully accepted at a church is indescribable.

When Bread of Life, a congregation in Regina, allowed worshippers to move from “welcoming” to “fully accepting,” White felt the church had taken a brave step toward making a real change. Travelling the path of LGBTQ inclusion, the church was following a long road of reflection and dialogue.

When Bread of Life took its first steps toward becoming a Reconciled in Christ (RIC) congregation, it was with a single purpose in mind: to be a safe and inclusive space for all people, embracing them without judgment.

Pastor Carla Blakley remembers the discontented voices. “All you do is talk about LGBTQ people,” they’d say, referencing the welcome statement. “This church is going to hell in a handbasket because she talks about gays and lesbians!”

When Bread of Life decided to welcome LGBTQ worshippers, it was just the first step of the journey.

If the gospel means spreading good news to people, but we’re not spreading good news to everyone, then we’re not being true to our faith,” Pastor Carla said.

The church’s members, she explained, were just starting the process of becoming a Reconciled in Christ congregation, meaning they would be openly accepting of LGBTQ worshippers. It would be welcomed.

He wasn’t long before White made the move to Regina. In August 2011, he began attending Bread of Life. It was far from the end of his journey, though—or the church’s. Over the next several years, he would learn that acceptance is good in theory but isn’t simple to achieve.

T he movement to include LGBTQ people within Lutheranism reaches back to 1974, when a group of congregants launched an outreach campaign they called ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation. The group spent a full decade building support before introducing the Reconciled in Christ program. The program’s step-by-step guide laid out a path for congregations to talk about LGBTQ inclusion in their church and community, with an end goal of formal designation as a safe and inclusive space.

In 2008, when Pastor Carla answered the call to be the new pastor at Bread of Life, she knew exactly what she was getting into. With a background in community organizing and two master’s degrees—one in theology, the other in religious studies with a focus on mental ability, race, gender identity or expression and sexual orientation—she was ready to take on the challenge.

“I cried,” says White, his voice cracking and eyes filling with tears. “When the results were announced, I cried. I cried while people were voting because I was welcome. I was welcomed. People loved me for who I am.”

To make things official, according to the RIC program guidelines, Dr. Antoinette Le Roux, a member of the welcoming committee, wrote a statement to read aloud every Sunday morning before service. The statement welcomed people of all ages, physical abilities, members outside of the LGBTQ community began lashing out at Bread of Life, and the church’s members became a RIC congregation.

“Do you not see yourself in this?”

Pastor Carla remembers the discontented voices. “All you do is talk about LGBTQ people,” they’d say, referencing the welcome statement. “This church is going to hell in a handbasket because she talks about gays and lesbians!”

She began to receive notes and letters discrediting her as a pastor, saying that their pastor knew nothing of the Bible. So Pastor Carla did an experiment. For six months, she didn’t use a single LGBTQ analogy, and she asked her worship committee to watch and be aware. Afterward, she took the welcome statement to the naysayers and said, “Do you not see yourself in this?”

She pointed out that the welcome to all gender identities and sexual orientations included heterosexuals, too. Pastor Carla knew in her heart that she was doing nothing wrong but there was no denying that the words stung. “I didn’t appreciate the personal attacks. I didn’t appreciate the calls to the bishop saying I was ‘no longer worthy of being a pastor’ and I couldn’t read the Bible even if I tried,” she recalls with a faint, humourless smile.

“The bishop was really supportive. She knew exactly what was happening and she said, ‘Okay, thanks for calling’ to (the callers), and then she’d call me and go, ‘Carla, keep up the good work!’”

Story and photos by JESSIE ANTON
Pastor Carla knew she was on the right path, no matter how difficult. That same year, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada voted to become a RIC denomination, nationally. The Lutheran Church was widening its doors.

Ten families left Bread of Life between 2012 and 2013. In retrospect, it was to be expected. Yet what the church gained was much more than its losses. A community began to form and grow. Michelle Bashutski first met Pastor Carla when she was outside smoking a cigarette at a friend’s wedding. She noticed a woman dressed in black with a white clerical collar, chatting with someone on the sidewalk. It looked weird at first. Bashutski couldn’t help but think about the Bible stories of Jesus hanging out with sinners, lepers and prostitutes.

“She was just out there, hanging out with us smokers, chatting about church and everyone was happy about it. It was very cool and very strange,” laughs Bashutski. “People don’t run away from her when she talks about the church. She can talk about things in a way that makes people want to listen to her.”

Bashutski and her wife, Jaimie, were married by an Affirming United Church pastor before their “church shopping” led them to Bread of Life. Both from Catholic backgrounds, they found comfort in the Lutheran liturgies and the younger crowd—two things they say the United Church, while accepting of LGBTQ people, couldn’t equally provide.

The first day Bashutski and her wife attended Bread of Life, she was blown away by the same welcome statement that had angered others. “I’m home,” she thought.

“It says that no matter what your gender, your age, your race, your religious background—not only are you accepted or tolerated, but that you’d be honoured,” Bashutski says. “The use of the word honoured is a huge deal to me because that’s beyond just acceptance. That means, ‘We love you and we honour that in you.’

Since she first started coming to Bread of Life, Bashutski has started to identify as transgender. At first, she was anxious because she didn’t know how the church felt about her transitioning from female to male, so she turned to Pastor Carla.

She sat down on the couch in Pastor Carla’s office and began asking questions: Theologically, how does this work? Am I okay? What’s going on here? Pastor Carla assured her that God made man and woman—not just man or woman. “It doesn’t change who you are,” the pastor told her. “It’s just your packaging.”

“It gave me the courage and strength to be strong in who I am today,” says Bashutski.

For Brent Langenberger, Pastor Carla’s sermons gave him the courage to come out as gay to his parents, after 50 years of keeping it a secret.

“It was the start of Lent and she spoke of the need to have those difficult conversations and being comfortable having conversations through a position of love,” he remembers. “It started the ball rolling. It removed so much weight.”

While the church lost a few members in the immediate wake of the vote, 50 families transferred to Bread of Life after it became a RIC congregation—in part because it was inclusive to LGBTQ people, but also because of Pastor Carla. It seemed pastor and church were inseparable. But that was all about to change.

On Dec. 11, 2016, Pastor Carla made an announcement after Sunday service. She had accepted a position as a community relations director for Canada Lutheran World Relief in Winnipeg.
and would no longer be the pastor of Bread of Life by springtime.

She remembers the room going flat; everything went silent and people were in shock. The majority of the congregation was sad to see her go, but most understood that her new role meant she would be able to take what she’s been doing on a local scale and spread it around the world.

While Pastor Carla might be on to new beginnings, Bashutski, like many other members of the Bread of Life congregation, will never forget the spiritual mark the pastor has left on her over the years.

“I always tell people, ‘I never lost my faith, but I lost my faith in the church,’” says Bashutski. “She has almost single-handedly restored my faith that a church can be a safe place for me again—and a place I want to be.”

As for White, he, too, has a fresh role. Being the parish’s official LGBTQ liaison, he is now tasked with helping the new pastor meet Bread of Life’s LGBTQ community and making sure the church continues to be an openhearted place for everyone.

“Carla invited me here, but Carla alone is not the reason I stay,” he says. “In terms of making sure that this place continues to be the welcoming place it is for queer people, then I have an obligation to do what I can to make that happen.”

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When the day for farewells arrives, White rises from his pew, rolls his shoulders and strides with confidence toward a podium at the front of the church. “I don’t know if I’ll be as strong as others this afternoon,” he says into the microphone before clearing his throat. The room grows silent. The only sound is the babble of children crowded around a colouring table off to the side.

“Carla, you came to us where we were,” White says, his voice cracking. “You came to our campfire, you came to our drag shows. You’ve reminded us of the God of Love. For some of us, we grew up knowing that message, that we can’t get around this? She perks up in her desk chair and says, “I ask. “What about other faiths, what advice do you have for them?”

Once she’s off the phone, my thoughts shift elsewhere, to other churches that haven’t become inclusive to LGBTQ people.

“What about other faiths, what advice do you have for them?” I ask. “I know some of them are caught denominationally, but man, if God is love and God loves humans, then what are we doing that we can’t get around this? She perks up in her desk chair and drives her point home with her hands. “They’re human. Let’s just see them as human instead of seeing them as LGBTQ.”

After transforming a single church, a wider world beckons.

She says the committee wrote a congregational profile around the expectation that the new pastor will also be involved in the LGBTQ community, and will need to be an open advocate for LGBTQ people. As I casually glance around the room while she takes a phone call, I remember something White told me, in the same office, just a month before.

“The new pastor will have to understand people like me. They will have to understand the idea of having a foot in two worlds— of being queer and being Christian—and often not being welcome in either world because of the other world in which you walk,” he said.

At the end of his farewell speech, the congregation rises and the room is overwhelmed with applause. At that moment, at 2:47 p.m. on March 12, 2017, a new era is born.

I’m morning when Pastor Carla takes stock of what will soon be her former office. “If there’s any language issues with the new pastor, I’m leaving this entire bookshelf of books—theology, gender talk, heterosexism, Jesus, the Bible and Homosexuality,” she says, motioning to the sparse bookshelf behind her as the sun peeks through her office drapes.

It’s less than a week until her time at Bread of Life is over for good, and her red-walled workspace is almost bare. Only a 12-month wall calendar and a bulletin board with pins that read “trans,” “queer” and “asexual” remain. A half-full glass of water sits on her desk, perhaps symbolic of her state of mind and the road ahead.

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I was like, ‘Why does she have so many?’ And she’d forget that you got her those for Christmas, that you got to go swimming in the pool in her phone, and that you got her those for Easter. Joan was so excited about it she devoured the whole thing. ‘My [nursing] friends were very good about phoning me. One of them had phoned me and said they had seen Nanna walking by the Lewan (Drive Expressway) and then we knew that she was missing.’

The Mayo Clinic describes dementia as a disease that isn’t specif/ic to elderly people but includes a group of symptoms affecting memory, thinking and social abilities that can become severe and interfere with everyday functions. Memory loss has several different causes, thinking and social abilities that can become severe and interfere with everyday functions. Memory loss has several different causes, thinking and social abilities that can become severe and interfere with everyday functions.

The smell hit me like it always did—a mix of old-house-smell and perfumed candles. I noticed right away that your mom had changed the colour scheme of the decor in the living room. There were purple curtains, a fuzzy deep purple throw, and the best piece that caught my eye was the clear bowl with pressed purple flowers inside. I think they were mounted steps reminded me of the countless times we ran down them during nap time, but the new ones still sit in the same positions. You sat on the longer couch and I faced you on the love seat.

The day would’ve went fast, but the moment that stood out for Cindy was the phone call she received from her close nurse friend who was ready to move her out of Robert’s Plaza and into a home that was safe, but she didn’t know where to turn. At this point, there was no nursing friends and family just a few blocks away. She felt sick. She had promised her mom that she would support her staging independent and in her own condos.

That night, she thought of all the cumulative clues. There was the time Nanna called from the Golden Mile Shopping Centre and said her car had been stolen. It was in the parking lot the whole time. Then there was the time she decided to walk to a dentist appointment in the afternoon. She fell down the street. She fell on the ice; luckily a high school student saw her fall, and stopped to help her get to the dentist. The dentist called to say her arm looked broken and it was, the bone severed at the elbow. She was in a cast for 45 weeks. She slipped the side of the road, where her friend had seen earlier. She never found her.

“How she got back [home] is still a mystery to me,” Kuster Orban says. The incident raised a huge question in her mind: “That particular time she knew where home was but... what if she didn’t?”

Joan had walked home that day back to her condos. Once Kuster Orban knew Joan was safe, she went home to her own house and family just a few blocks away. She felt sick. She had promised her mom that she would support her staging independent and in her own condos.

The fact calls on heartbreaking decisions, such as whether to take any extra measures if her mom became unconscious, or whether they would feed her through a tube once she could no longer feed herself.

“You have to figure out as a family how you’re going to work together and make all the decisions together because one person having to deal with it is not fair and you have to do what’s best for that person,” says Kuster Orban.

These were dif/ficult memories to recall, but they brought up special memories, too. That spring Kuster Orban gave her mom a chocolate bunny for Easter. Joan was so excited about it she decided to enjoy it in the garden outside Dove House. The chocolate melted all over her but she loved every bite of it.

Kuster Orban says Dove House was always good about calling Cindy if anything happened to her mom, or if they thought she needed to be there. One day phone rang while she was teaching mental health courses in Moose Jaw. Her mom had recently stopped eating and had become very weak. Now she had fallen.

“When I got there, mom was sleeping with her family—her husband, girl and me. She was so exhausted during that time, I climbed into bed with her.”

Cindy laid with her mom in the small bed in her new room at the care home. She listened to her mom breathing and they both fell asleep. Her mom had forgotten who she was for a while leading up to this, and all of a sudden her mom turned to her and said, “Cindy, why in the hell are you in bed with me?”

Cindy burst into a fit of laughter.

Joan Kuster passed away on June 11, 2012. The months that followed were a blur for Kuster Orban. She was merely existing. Now, Jerry and her friends helped with the funeral, but it was eight months before she got back on her feet and felt at peace with her mother’s death.

She continued teaching her nursing students, which helped her adjust. “I felt like I was going to be a yoga teacher or a friend,” she said. “I had an inspiration: she was going to raise awareness for Alzheimer’s research through handmade jewelry and donate 10 percent of her proceeds to the Saskatchewan Alzheimer’s Society.”

Kuster Orban had been making jewelry for friends and off for 10 years, but after going to her yoga class for eight months, she finally had a vision of a new life’s purpose. Today Kuster Orban works on her jewelry from her home. Her basement full of clothes also doubles as her stock room, but she

It’s growing signifi cantly so we know that by 2020 there will be over 20,000 people living with Alzheimer’s disease in Saskatchewan because of an aging population.”

The Saskatchewan Alzheimer’s Society is a non-profi t organization dedicated to working with people living with Alzheimer’s disease and their families. The organization was founded in 1989 by Joanne Bracken, CEO of the Saskatchewan Alzheimer’s Society. Today the organization is led by Joanne Bracken, CEO, and her team of dedicated volunteers.

Joanne Bracken, CEO of the Saskatchewan Alzheimer’s Society, puts the numbers into perspective for Saskatchewan residents.

“Presently in Saskatchewan, there (are) over 19,000 people living with Alzheimer’s disease or related dementia. It’s growing signifi cantly so we know that by 2020 there will be over 20,000 people living with Alzheimer’s disease in Saskatchewan because of an aging population.”

The Saskatchewan Alzheimer’s Society conducted a study in July 2015 that showed most people aren’t aware of the warning signs of dementia, other than memory loss. In an effort to solve some of these problems, the society offers a variety of education programs to proactively seek out a diagnosis.

Bracken says there are also over 25 support groups across the province and many other programs and services available to sufferers, family members and close friends. The families often suffer more than the person with the disease, she explains.

Kuster Orban worried about finding a good place for Joan—what would she do after her mom passed away? Kuster Orban had been making jewelry for friends and off for 10 years, but after going to her yoga class for eight months, she finally had a vision of a new life’s purpose.
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