

# The York University Magazine

Summer 2018

# My Way

Three grads changed course  
and that made all the difference

**PLUS**

**Comedy King Mark Breslin  
Science and the BBC  
Costuming Stratford  
Hockey's Next Score**





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**The  
York University  
Magazine**

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# THE PRESIDENT



**RHONDA LENTON**  
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

**CANADA WAS RECENTLY NAMED** the world’s most educated country, with an astonishing 50 per cent of the population completing some form of post-secondary education. In terms of university completion, however, we rank seventh in the world. This is no mere quibble if we hope to create the knowledge economy to which we aspire. Relatedly, we are not as inclusive as we need to be in attracting students from diverse backgrounds – consider, for example, the significant under-representation of Indigenous students, women in the STEM fields, racialized groups, mature students and people with disabilities.

We are at a moment when Canada has the opportunity to be a leader in mobilizing an inclusive response to the complex problems facing the world. Today’s 21st century knowledge economy requires lifelong learners who are curious, willing to develop new skills at every stage of their careers, and adaptable enough to face local and global challenges with creativity, confidence and compassion. In a rapidly changing labour market that is profoundly affected by disruption, automation and the globalization of economic markets, greater campus-community engagement and collaboration is needed to advance shared interests and to ensure that our organizations and communities are inclusive, resilient and sustainable.

York University has long been a leader in providing a broad demographic of students access to a wide variety of learning experiences both within and outside of the classroom to meet the educational and professional needs of an ever-changing workforce. To accommodate significant growth and support the creation of even more innovative programs for recent graduates, working professionals, international students and new Canadians, we recently announced the addition of a new School of Continuing Studies building for our Keele Campus. When completed in 2021, this new facility will enable us to create even more lifelong learning opportunities, build connections with local and international communities, and help students of all ages and backgrounds to achieve their fullest potential. We are also opening a new, state-of-the-art Student Centre this year that will offer our student community access to additional multifunctional and student-focused spaces, including meeting rooms, group study areas, recreational spaces and multifaith prayer rooms.

Though the world we are preparing our students for may look drastically different than it did at the time of our founding in 1959, our mission remains the same: to pursue, preserve and disseminate knowledge, to value diversity and to be open to the world. As a community of higher learning, we must always be thinking about what actions we can take to advance post-secondary education in a way that is inclusive and accessible for all, and also how can we mobilize or apply that learning and action to enhance the public good.

By providing technology-enhanced and student-centric learning environments for our students, as well as access to experiential learning opportunities to develop their practical skills and civic understanding, we are continuing our tradition of providing educational experiences that will shape the next generations of globally minded citizens and leaders – graduates who are driving change, pursuing excellence and creating positive and meaningful impact in the world.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE FORD

## Trust Your Instincts

**INSTINCT IS THE GREAT EQUALIZER.** We all have it. Our second brain, as it is sometimes called, dwells deep inside us, in the pit of the stomach. It’s a gut feeling and it speaks to us through vibrations that can shake our rational brain free of pre-conceived convictions, opening it up to unexpected insights.

As much as it warns us of coming dangers, our inner voice also tells us when to let our guard down and trust that something good will happen, just from following our instincts.

Now don’t start thinking I’m getting all clairvoyant on you. This is not about casting a spell. It’s about recognizing and honouring the wisdom of our sixth sense. But you’ve got to be prepared to listen.

I bring this up because intuition has shaped the lives of many of the people you are about to encounter here, in the summer issue of *The York University Magazine*.

Among them are Klaudia (née Zinaty) Capalbo, Mike George and Prakash Amarasooriya (that’s him on our cover), grads who came to the University to study one thing but who, by following their instincts (along with their bliss), ended up doing something completely different after receiving their respective degrees.

Mark Breslin, a recent recipient of the Order of Canada, is another who by listening to his gut pursued his own path in life. The founder of the Yuk Yuk’s chain of comedy clubs pioneered in Canada a kamikaze style of standup comedy that is pure instinct, which is why it feels so raw.

Similarly, Mike Futa looks for intangibles in addition to the stats sheet when picking prize players for the Los Angeles Kings, the reason for his success as an in-demand hockey exec.

Having the right instincts have taken our alumni far. You can read more about their experiences here. Call it a hunch, but I think you will like them.

— DEIRDRE KELLY

# EDITOR’S NOTES



## The York University Magazine

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## ON THE COVER



Prakash Amarasooriya  
photographed by  
Sofie Kirk



# View

OUTLOOK & IDEAS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON

## Mind Your Language

*How speaking more than one tongue will make you smarter with time*

**K** **NOWING MORE** than one language will likely be an advantage to those whose summer plans include travelling to a foreign locale.

But beyond the obvious social benefits associated with being able to order *moules* or *Bratkartoffel*, and sing in Japanese karaoke bars like a native, bilingualism is scientifically proven to enhance brain function and delay the onset of Alzheimer's.

Bilingual brains are more flexible than monolingual ones, and better able to multitask, says cognitive neuroscientist Ellen Bialystok, a Distinguished Research Professor of psychology at York University who has been studying brain dynamics for the past 40 years.

"The evidence shows that lifelong bilingualism has the capacity to change brains; it changes how people pay attention," says Bialystok, an associate scientist at the Rotman Research Institute of the Baycrest Centre for Geriatric Care who received the Order of Canada in 2016.

"It's like having a reserve gas tank. When there is neurological impairment, as with Alzheimer's disease, bilingualism not only serves as a buffer, it offers up compensatory skills that can delay the onset of memory loss and confusion."

Bialystok's research further shows that the more proficient you are in a second language the more it helps to strengthen areas of the brain related to executive function, an umbrella term encompassing neurologically based skills involving problem solving, abstract thinking, goal setting and creativity.

This is because "the bilingual mind is in constant conflict," Bialystok says. "For every word spoken aloud, the brain has to concentrate on the target language and suppress the other

that is always bumping up against it. There is a constant need to select, and so the brain gets extra stimulation, which, research shows, is useful for the long run."

Just how useful was revealed by a 2011 study involving approximately 500 patients with dementia. Half were bilingual and half spoke only one language. But all had the same degree of impairment at the time of diagnosis.

What Bialystok and her research team discovered is that onset symptoms occurred between three and four years later in bilinguals than they did in monoglots, on average at 78.6 years of age compared to 75.4 years.

CT scans of Alzheimer's brains further showed that while bilingual patients had greater cerebral matter deterioration than their single language counterparts, "they were functioning at the same level as monolinguals," Bialystok says. "Bilinguals could better compensate for having the disease and not betray the signs of their dementia until much later."

But this is not to imply that if you are bilingual you won't get Alzheimer's.

"I never said it's an inoculation," counters Bialystok in response to critics who contested the results of her research in a controversial 2016 story in *The Atlantic* examining the science around bilingualism.

"There is no cure and no way of avoiding it. But what the research shows is that our minds are not fixed in stone and our experiences matter. I am studying one of those experiences. And to my mind bilingualism does benefit the brain as much as aerobic exercise and crossword puzzles. It can stall age-related deterioration."

Say *oui* to that. ●



## GRACE NOTES

*Blues musician Sue Foley on the sweet sounds of women guitarists*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAN MESSER

**Q**UICK. Name at least three female guitarists who helped shape the history of 20th century pop music. Give up? Then give Sue Foley (MA '15) a listen.

A top-ranking blues guitarist and singer-songwriter, Foley is back at York University advancing Guitar Woman, her research project into female players whose identities and importance have tended to be obscured.

Begun in 2001 from her home in Austin, Texas, and drawing on dozens of interviews with some of the world's leading women guitarists, Foley's self-generated study has morphed into a PhD program that York pop music historian and scholar Rob Bowman, a Grammy Award-winning ethnomusicologist, has been leading since the fall.

Foley, who plays a Fender Telecaster electric guitar, always loved the six-string playing of her fellow female artists, but wanted to know more about the players themselves as a way of advancing her own artistry.

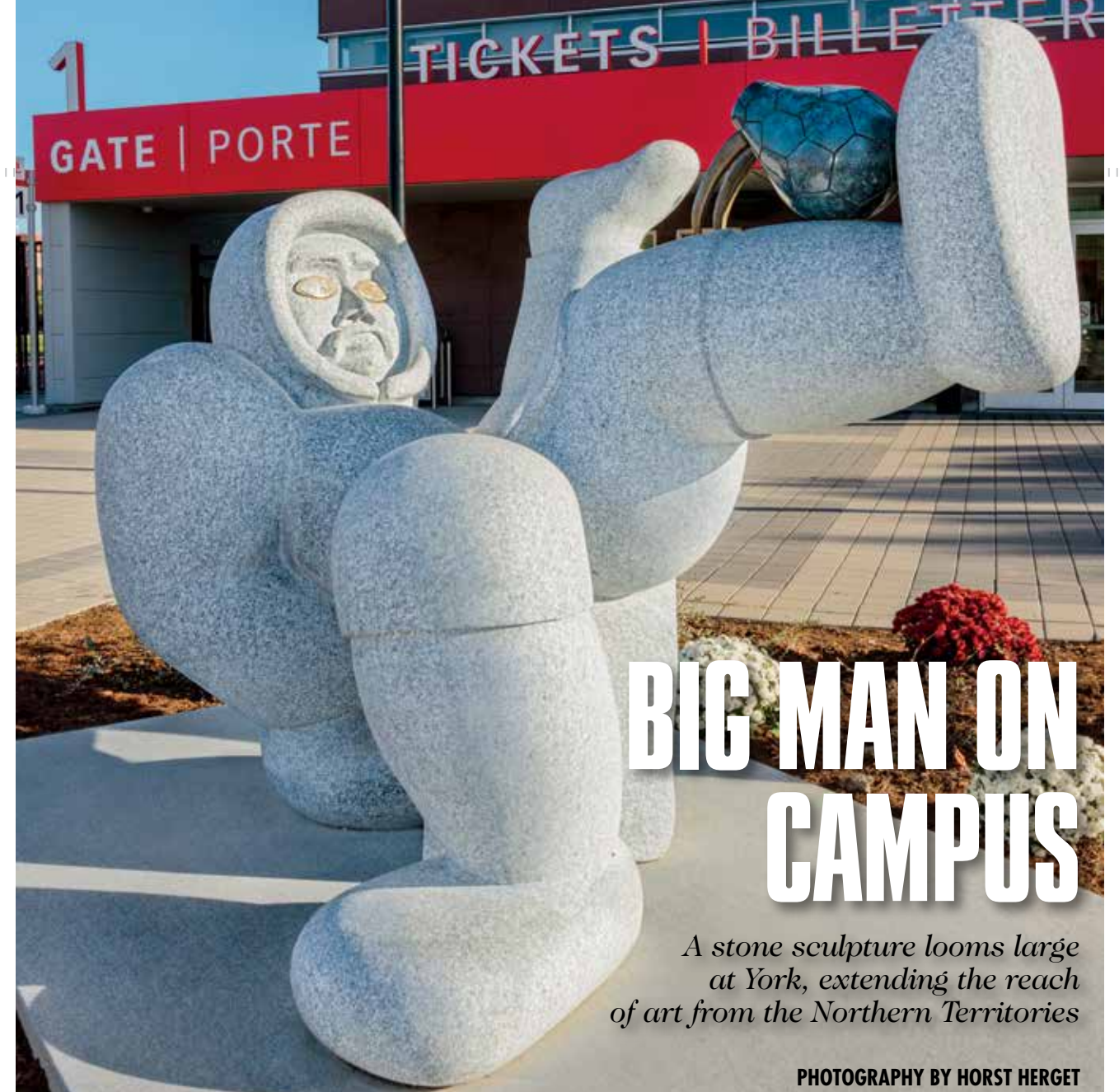
"I wanted to know what makes them tick," says the 50-year-old Ottawa native who earlier this year released her 11th solo album, *The Ice Queen*, to critical acclaim.

Her study includes such powerhouse musicians as Maybelle Carter, inventor of a scratch style of fingerpicking that influenced Nashville legend Chet Atkins, Sister Rosetta Tharpe (a.k.a. First Lady of the Gibson) whose electric guitar playing inspired Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley and Keith Richards, and Canadian classical guitarist and Andrés Segovia protégée Liona Boyd.

With talent this compelling, Foley is already looking ahead to writing a book that should answer once and for all the question of just how much women guitarists have contributed to the craft and culture of recorded music.

"I loved the idea of uncovering the wisdom of someone who was a great musician but who also had a great outlook on life," says the musician-scholar who is on tour in Europe this summer promoting her new record.

"I was always looking to the future when I was doing my interviews. I was always thinking of what I could do to be like them, and have their aura of grace." ●



## BIG MAN ON CAMPUS

*A stone sculpture looms large at York, extending the reach of art from the Northern Territories*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

**T**HE ANATOMICAL STRUCTURE isn't exactly to scale. But when carving an Inuit legend, big is really the only way to go.

"It's how it was conceived," says Ruben Komangapik, a native of Pond Inlet, Nunavut, who collaborated with Kuzy Curley (one of the participants in this summer's Inuit art exhibition at the Art Gallery of Ontario) in creating the massive stone sculpture located at the north end of York University's Keele Campus, in front of York Lions Stadium.

Painstakingly carved from a 51,500-pound piece of raw Stanstead granite over a two-year period, the commissioned artwork depicts Ahqahizu, a mythical soccer player aiming to shoot a bronze walrus head into the net of the northern lights.

Standing over six feet tall and measuring nine feet wide, the

sculpture captures the Arctic hero falling backwards while executing the Alaskan high kick. The Inuit jumping manoeuvre tests agility and strength and is traditionally performed to indicate a good hunt. Its significance crosses sport and culture to represent a way of life for the people of the North.

"The figure tells a story," says York art historian and curator Anna Hudson, a Canadian Indigenous art specialist who oversaw the project.

"The sculpture expresses so much about Inuit life and culture; it presents an Inuit world view."

Adds Komangapik, "What I am hoping that people come away with after looking at this sculpture is the acknowledgment that Eskimos are not in the history books. They are still here, right now, accomplishing great things, and at this scale." ●



# Own It

*Russell Belk helps launch a new graduate course  
on how possessions possess us*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK

**W**HAT ARE YOU going to do on your summer vacation? Hang by the pool? Go camping? Binge on Netflix in an air-conditioned room?

Whatever it is, chances are it will involve purchasing something, be it sun lotion, a new tent or a case of cold bevies for washing it all down. You likely won't be able to help yourself.

According Russell Belk, buying stuff isn't just about satisfying some seasonal to-do list.

In our instantaneous, acquisitively individualistic and self-indulgent world, it's all about fulfilling a fundamental need.

"Consumer behaviour contributes to our broader existence as human beings," says the Schulich School of Business marketing professor, a world expert on the subject and meaning of materialism, and the power of objects over the self.

Consumerism has become a dominant force in people's lives.

"I guess you could compare human society today to the Middle Ages and the role of the Catholic Church in Europe at that time. Consumption is our church and malls and online stores are our cathedrals," says the U.S. native who came to York University 12 years ago as the Kraft Foods Canada Chair in Marketing.

"Because it's so central to our lives now, I think it has become a viable topic for study."

The good professor (the Royal Society of Canada made him a fellow in 2017) allows he may be biased.

His father worked as an advertising agency production manager, and while growing up in Minnesota in the 1950s, Belk spent many hours around the dinner table discussing the impact of advertising on people's purchasing behaviour.

Echoes of those early conversations ran deep.

When Belk went to college to study geophysics, he switched to English while taking a few business courses on the side. This led to a master's in business at the University of Minnesota, where he fell in love with doing primary research on consumer habits and attitudes.

A doctoral thesis followed in 1972. But Belk's big breakthrough came over a decade later when, with a camcorder in hand, he teamed up with John Sherry, an anthropologist, and Melanie Wallendorf, a sociologist, and embarked on what became known as the Consumer Behavior Odyssey.

The academic road trip took teams of like-minded researchers across America to interview consumers about their shopping habits and materialistic dreams.

"For me and the others who participated, it opened up the worlds of both qualitative research and visual methods," says Belk, who established his international reputation with that study.

He later took the research and turned it into *Possessions and the Extended Self*, his seminal 1988 paper positing the idea that in today's mainstream society belongings shape identities as much as, if not more so than, life experiences.

To accommodate the impact of the digital age on consumer behaviour in the 25 years since he published his report, in 2013 Belk provided an update for the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"So much of what we do is digital now," says Belk, presently co-editing a book on the sharing economy and its impact on marketing. "We no longer have a drawer of old love letters, we have texts. And we no longer have a photo album, we have a social media page and timeline and so forth.

"The question is, do these things really become a part of us? Do you become attached to your smartphone which does so many things for you? Or does the fact that you can post things to the cloud make it less of an attachment? And what happens when you can trade up?"

To answer these questions and more, come the fall Belk will teach a consumer behaviour class to students who have signed up for the new Master of Marketing degree program at Schulich, the first of its kind in Canada and specifically designed to train university graduates in professional marketing skills. Classes begin in September.

Topics for discussion will include the rise of robotics as brand mascots, anthropomorphism in product design, inconspicuous luxury, gift giving and collecting, to name a few of the subjects topping Belk's own to-do list right now.

Each is an idea for an academic paper (or two or three) Belk plans to work on over the summer. He will be busy. But too busy to be buying stuff? Don't count on it.

"I have already bought four new pairs of jeans – different colours – for the summer at Uniqlo ... and of course more books from Amazon for my research. I don't much enjoy shopping," Belk says. But like the rest of us, he just can't help it. ●



## THE KILLING FIELDS

*Popular pesticides are clipping the wings of songbirds, new research shows*

**W**ITH THE WARM weather upon us, Canadian farmlands are thick into the growing season. But not everything in nature is benefiting.

According to York University biologist Bridget Stutchbury, two regularly used agricultural insecticides are killing and disorienting white-crowned sparrows flying over or nearby farmers' fields.

"Birds use a suite of tools to chart their path. They have innate star maps in their heads which they use in addition to major landmarks and polarized light," says Stutchbury, a celebrated avian specialist who collaborated with researchers from the University of Saskatchewan in studying the detrimental effects of insect-killing neonicotinoids on migratory songbirds.

"If a chemical throws off their migration, it could cause a delay in breeding and even death."

Specifically, the chemicals looked at were imidacloprid and chlorpyrifos,



PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY CHRIS ROBINSON

insecticides so common they are found in most grocery store produce.

Published in *Scientific Reports*, 57 last fall, the study focused on Gambel's white-crowned sparrows, which had stopped to refuel in Canada's Prairie region en route from the southern Gulf states.

Birds captured for research purposes were whisked away to the aviary at the University of Saskatchewan's Facility for Applied Avian Research where they were fed pinch-sized doses of insecticide-coated sunflower seeds.

As observed, some of the birds became hopelessly lost, attempting to fly east rather than north toward the Arctic tundra, and some rapidly lost weight. Others weakened and died.

While the study did not reflect on how insecticides might affect humans, Stutchbury is raising alarm about the impact of even small doses of chemicals on birds' powerful navigation abilities.

Next steps include examining the chemical impact on other seed-eating birds, a research project supported with additional funding received from the Kenneth M. Molson Foundation in January.

"Birds are sensitive indicators of our environment," Stutchbury says. "If they're not surviving in the wild, then something is very wrong." ●

## THIS IS YOUR CLASS ROOM

[ OPEN YOUR MIND ]

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# THE JOKER



*Mark Breslin made his name poking fun at the Establishment and tickling taboos to their breaking point. But now Canada's irreverent king of comedy is suddenly respectable? Who's kidding who?*

BY DEIRDRE KELLY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD





# MARK BRESLIN

**IS A NEWLY MINTED MEMBER** of the Order of Canada, and, while the appointment is no laughing matter, the standup comic who founded Yuk Yuk's (the national comedy club chain), discovered Jim Carrey (among other celebrity comedians) and wrote jokes for the late Joan Rivers (rest her silicone soul) can't help but think it funny.

"I feel like Gerry Adams of the IRA, a former revolutionary now making nice with everybody," quips Breslin (BA Hons. '74) over a coffee that stretches for hours in Toronto's Yorkville district, near where the first Yuk Yuk's flagship location opened 40 years ago, in 1978.

"I do cherish the honour. But, at the same time, I remember when people didn't let me in the room."

So, let's start there. Behind closed doors. Before this Lenny Bruce of the North started kicking them down with blunt-force chutzpah and sardonic wit. It's how a self-described outcast who ended up becoming a vaunted member of Canadian society might begin to make perfect sense. There is a method to the madness. Discernible only in retrospect.

You see, Breslin hadn't an inkling he'd become a pioneering businessman, let alone a performer whose own prowess behind an open mic would launch many a stellar career and put Canada squarely on the world of comedy map. When he first came to York University as an undergraduate in 1970, all he knew is he wanted to be an iconoclast. He quickly made good his ambition, skipping a lot of classes to read a book a day sprawled out on a love seat in Scott Library.

It proved to be the perfect education for the comedian he would become, erudite as well as acerbic.

"York," Breslin says, "is where I learned to read between the lines."

He was born a disrupter. His parents were middle-aged when he made an unplanned appearance in their lives 65 years ago. His father, Ruben, a former shirt factory owner who ended up running nursing homes, was 53 at the time, and his mother, Matilda, a homemaker, was 44. They had already

reared two grown daughters and believed their child-rearing days were behind them. But the joke was on them.

Their only son, whom they raised like an only child, not only messed with their retirement goals, he blew their minds. Young Breslin was precocious to an extreme.

"I could read before I was three," he says. "I was a sensation at my nursery school." So much so that word of his fire-brand intelligence spread south of the border, attracting the notice of the CIA. "Two men from Virginia came to visit my parents and offered to put me in private school, but my parents wouldn't do it. They wanted me around."

From kindergarten, Breslin graduated to the theatre. Performing is in his blood. His mother had been a child actress in Toronto's then thriving Yiddish theatre scene before retiring from the stage in the early 1920s. "This was back when Yiddish theatre meant something," Breslin says, explaining how the rise of Nazism and anti-Semitism in the 1930s succeeded in weakening its toehold in his family's own community.

The Strand, at the corner of Spadina and Dundas, was the name of the old Yiddish theatre where his mother used to perform. By the 1960s, it had morphed into the notorious Victory burlesque theatre, which his Uncle Harry had come to manage. This is where Breslin says he really grew up.

Behind the scenes, strippers wearing little more than tassels teased him while grizzled vaudevillians fed him punchlines like candy. He wants you to picture it. "You know that scene from *All That Jazz?*," he prods, referencing the 1979 Bob Fosse film in which lead character Joe Gideon has a flashback to his own upbringing inside a striptease club. "That is what my childhood was like."

And it might explain why his mother, despite her own roots in the theatre, never gave him her blessing. "My mother hated what I did," Breslin says. "She was appalled all her life."

From these Woody Allen-esque beginnings, Breslin advanced into adolescence with an outsized ego that more than compensated for standing a little over five feet three inches in his socks. He hovered just below the jutting collar-

He had,  
and always has had,  
an elegant mind  
trapped  
in an outraged  
psyche

bones of the jocks he encountered at his Forest Hill Collegiate high school. "But I didn't get beaten up," Breslin gloats.

"I was a mouthy, lippy, little Jew. I didn't blend in. But I became a star at my high school where I became best known for having run a campaign for a guy who didn't exist to become president of student council, and I won. It launched my political career."

Student activism inspired Breslin early on. It was the 1960s, and he threw himself into a decade rocked by cataclysmic change. He wanted to be part of the revolutionary action. When LSD guru Timothy Leary came to town, Breslin spent a week dropping acid with him. Any mystical visions that might have risen from the encounter had a discordant edge. "Everyone was a hippy, kind of sort of, and I was a political kind of kid," Breslin says. "I had a poster of Eugene McCarthy [the anti-Vietnam war candidate who ran for the U.S. presidential election in 1968] on my wall. I was left of centre."

After high school in 1970, he applied to Glendon College, the idea being to study languages, and, after graduation, join the diplomatic corps and apply his activism to the real world. But French proved difficult, and after two years on Bayview, he transferred to York's main campus up at Keele and Steeles.

There, he quickly fell in with a couple of professors in the English Department who convinced him he had been right to change his major. Among them was Hersh Zeifman, whose modern theatre class compelled Breslin to attend professional productions in the city and write about them, in an analytical way. "He got me interested in off-Broadway theatre," Breslin acknowledges, "which is what I have done ever since."

But he didn't know Zeifman's class would be useful to him. At the time, he didn't even know where he was headed once he convoked in 1974. He only knew he needed a job, any job, to pay his rent. He found one at Harbourfront, Toronto's cultural centre on the shores of Lake Ontario. At first glance it didn't look promising. "I was hired to stand outside on the

tarmac in a powder blue leisure suit and hand out brochures advertising

Harbourfront's various programs."

Since he was there anyway, Breslin started attending some of Harbourfront's shows, and found them wanting. He felt he had become something of an expert on what the city had to offer in terms of entertainment, and again largely because of his education at York. Confident he had the right taste and insights, he told the Harbourfront administration what he thought of the acts they were booking. They then hired him to work in their offices full time as their director of theatre and music. This is when outspokenness became destiny.

As part of his Harbourfront duties, Breslin oversaw the Wednesday open-mic night sessions. On slow nights, he would take the stage himself and improvise. Naturally loquacious, the words flowed out of him. When he lost the Harbourfront gig two years later due to a change of administration, he continued doing comedy as a way of keeping himself employed.

"I was never a John Belushi. But I was always responsive to what was going on in the world and I was not afraid to make myself heard," recalls Breslin of those early days. "I had never really thought of doing comedy before. I had watched sitcoms as a kid – 'My Favorite Martian,' 'Gilligan's Island' and 'Green Acres' were shows I watched regularly on TV – and I listened to the comedy records of Mort Sahl and Bill Cosby. That was my training, although I never knew I was in training. When my friends found out I was doing standup they couldn't believe it. It was so out of character. We all thought, me included, that I'd be doing social activism. But comedy, it turned out, ended up being the next best thing. It was social activism, except done on a stage."

From the beginning, Breslin used comedy as a tool of subversion. His jokes disarmed the status quo. He made fun of religion, politics and societal norms that he found restrictive, hypocritical, pretentious; he stuck his tongue out at the mighty and adopted a kamikaze persona, swearing on stage (something he doesn't do in real life), and at a time when F-bombs were a rarity in the theatre.





“He had, and always has had, an elegant mind trapped in an outraged psyche,” observes Ralph Benmergui, whom Breslin executive produced when the Canadian radio and television personality had his own late-night comedy show on CBC in the 1990s. “He was supposed to lose in life – too small, too strange, too Mark,” adds Benmergui portentously. “Yuk Yuk’s was a slap in the face to all that. His success came wrapped in cruel irony.”

Breslin drew direct inspiration from the anarchic punk movement, which, by the mid-1970s, was tearing up mainstream culture with calculated acts of rebellion. He wanted to shake things up and was among the first to present comics from diverse backgrounds. “No one was doing any of this,” Breslin says. “We were multicultural before it became fashionable.”

Regardless, Yuk Yuk’s, which Breslin had launched in 1976 in the dank, dark basement of Toronto’s Church Street Community Centre, at the heart of what today is known as the Gay Village, became known as the Jewish club. “This is where Jews came to be made fun of. And as I am Jewish I felt no qualms about doing that,” Breslin says. But no one was spared.

“We’d get so nasty and we’d pick on people in the room if we saw them walking out,” he continues. “We’d heckle them from the stage: ‘Go back to your stinking middle class Christian lives up in Willowdale!’ And they would start to cry. We really didn’t want people to like us.” But it couldn’t be helped. People kept coming back for more.

At first there were 30 people in the Wednesday night audience. But as word spread and newspapers like the *Globe and Mail* started writing about the “subculture of masochists” who flocked to Yuk Yuk’s weekly shows, overnight that number increased 300-fold to 1,000. Within two years, Yuk Yuk’s had outgrown its basement location.

The move to 1280 Bay St. in Yorkville in 1978 pushed Breslin into the big leagues. Despite naysayers telling him he’d be bankrupt within three months, he continued to draw in huge crowds for his merciless type of mirth.

“It was a touch of New York in Toronto, even though the comics were almost all Torontonians,” he says, with an air of self-satisfaction. “And it existed to satisfy two big goals. The first was to create a Canadian comedy business that employed Canadians. Forty years later, I still do that. And the second was to provide a free speech environment for the comics who were working in my club. Free speech was the imperative, no matter what.” It often got him into trouble.

Outraged patrons didn’t just go snivelling back to Willowdale; they called the cops and demanded that Yuk Yuk’s be shut down. In response, Breslin had a rubber stamp made with the words “Eat Sh\*\* and Die,” which he used to deface letters of complaint he then returned to their senders. It made his reputation.

“It was really, really brilliant, because he was making comments about a culture that wasn’t afraid to laugh at itself,”

says Joel Axler, a fellow York grad (BA ’76) who was there at the beginning, sitting behind the mixing board, and witnessing firsthand the effect Breslin’s attack comedy had on Toronto audiences.

“He was doing gay jokes, he was doing racial jokes,” continues Axler, today host of a retro rock ‘n’ roll show on Bluewater Radio 91.3 FM. “It was the 1970s when the Canadian mosaic was flexible enough to allow ethnic groups to make fun of themselves and others, and it was OK. Everybody saw it as an expression of communality, and they loved it.”

Word quickly spread, and beyond Canada’s borders.

In 1986, while getting ready to go on stage, Breslin was stopped by an assistant who told him that Joan Rivers was on the phone. He thought it was a crank call. But it was an invitation to meet for a job interview. “I hear through the grapevine we have a lot in common,” said Rivers over the line in that nasally voice of hers. Johnny Carson, then the king of late-night television, she confided, had told her about him.

Breslin took the next flight out to Los Angeles, where Rivers, reclining in her Bel Air mansion while wrapped in bandages from a recent cosmetic procedure, hired him on the spot after he made a risqué joke at her expense (not to be reprinted here). He soon after moved to California to work for the Fox Broadcasting Company on “The Late Show Starring Joan

Rivers.” The show bombed after nine months. But Breslin’s career took off. “I outlasted Joan,” he says.

Since then, Breslin has not only grown his Yuk Yuk’s comedy empire – today there are 14 locations across Canada – he has written five books, including the autobiographical novel *Control Freaked*, initiated SiriusXM Canada’s comedy channel, co-founded the Humber College comedy program, and performed in sitcoms and films, including the 2008 Canadian mockumentary *Confessions of a Porn Addict*.

Now past the official age of retirement (he turned 66 in May), Breslin rarely does standup anymore. But for the past 15 years he has kept his funny bone nimble writing a monthly comedy column in Toronto’s *Village Post* magazine. It recently ran its course and now Breslin is in negotiations with another Canadian publication to write for them. But he is in no hurry.

In 2010, he married wedding planner Karina Lemke, and not long after became a father for the first time. Breslin calls his son, Jackson – named for action painter Jackson Pollock, another creative revolutionary – his crowning achievement, the Order of Canada notwithstanding.

“I wouldn’t have predicted that me, a very verbal person, would even be able to relate to a baby,” says Breslin, a softly smiling changed man.

“But as soon as he peed all over me, I had fallen in love. I really am very happy.” ●





# My Way

*Tentanda Via, the way must be tried, is the motto of York University,  
and a trio of grads who used their degrees to pursue careers  
unrelated to their original field of study swear by it*

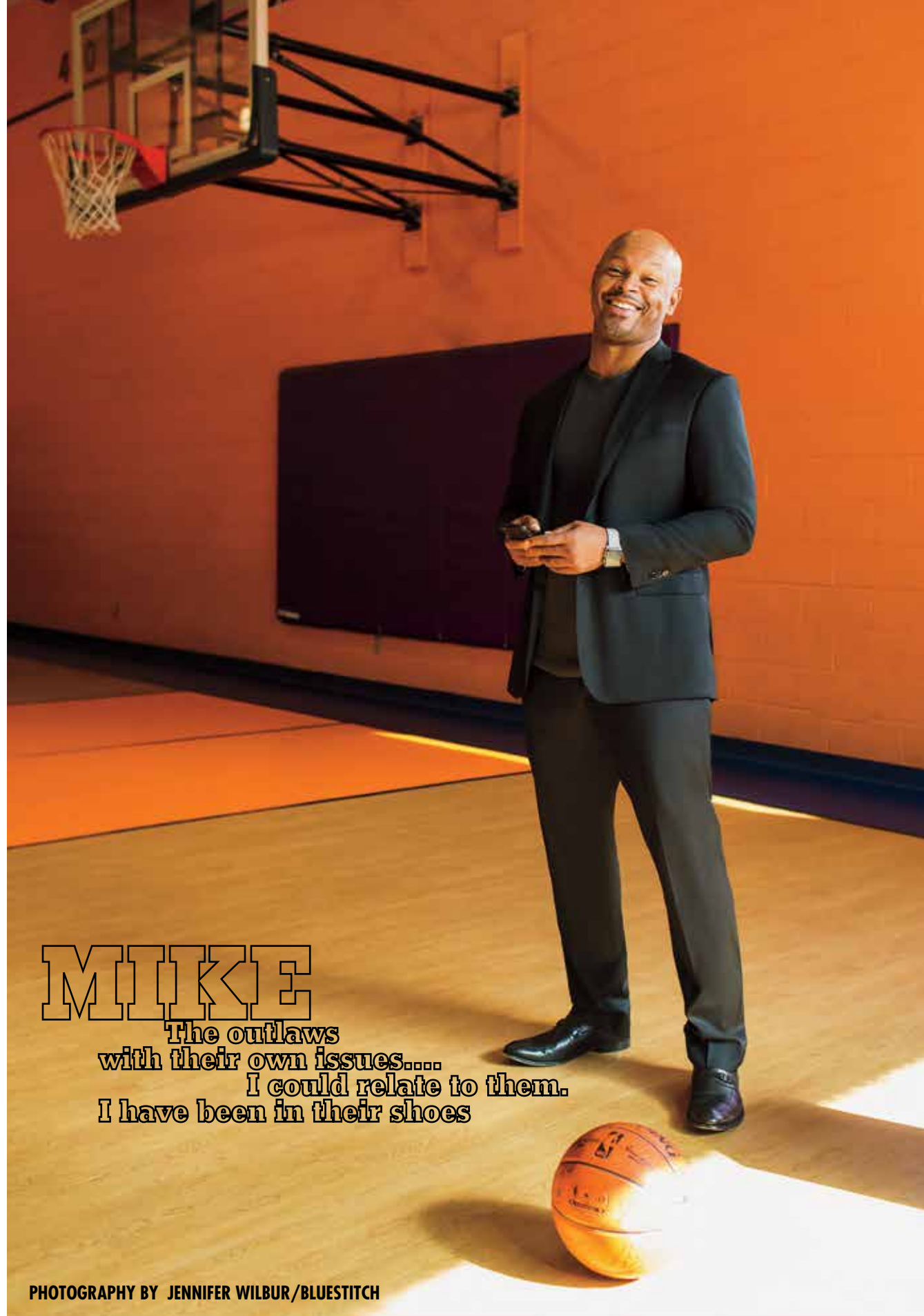


Making people's lives better  
remains the prime objective

# Prakash

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK

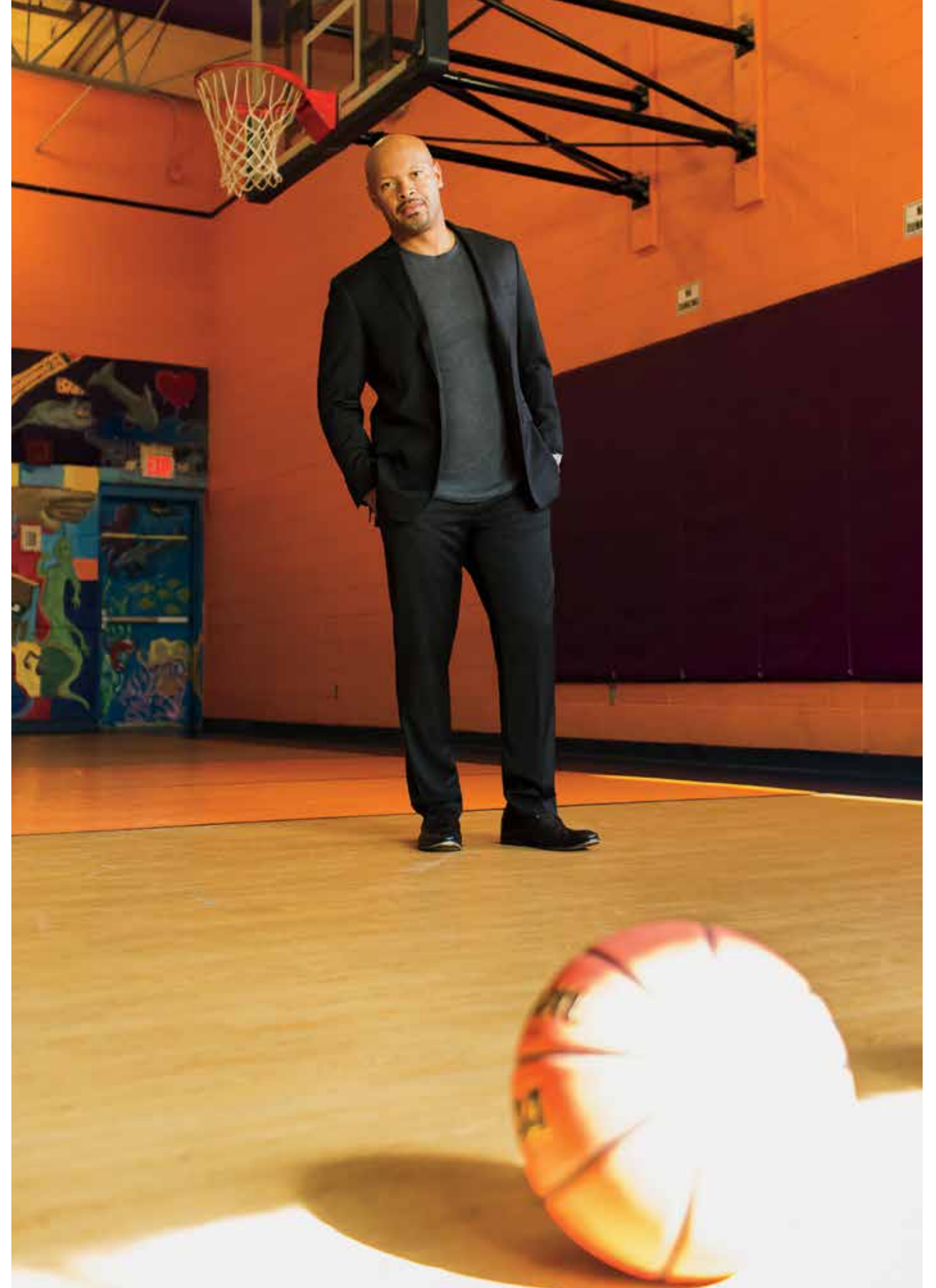




MIKE

The outlaws  
with their own issues....  
I could relate to them.  
I have been in their shoes

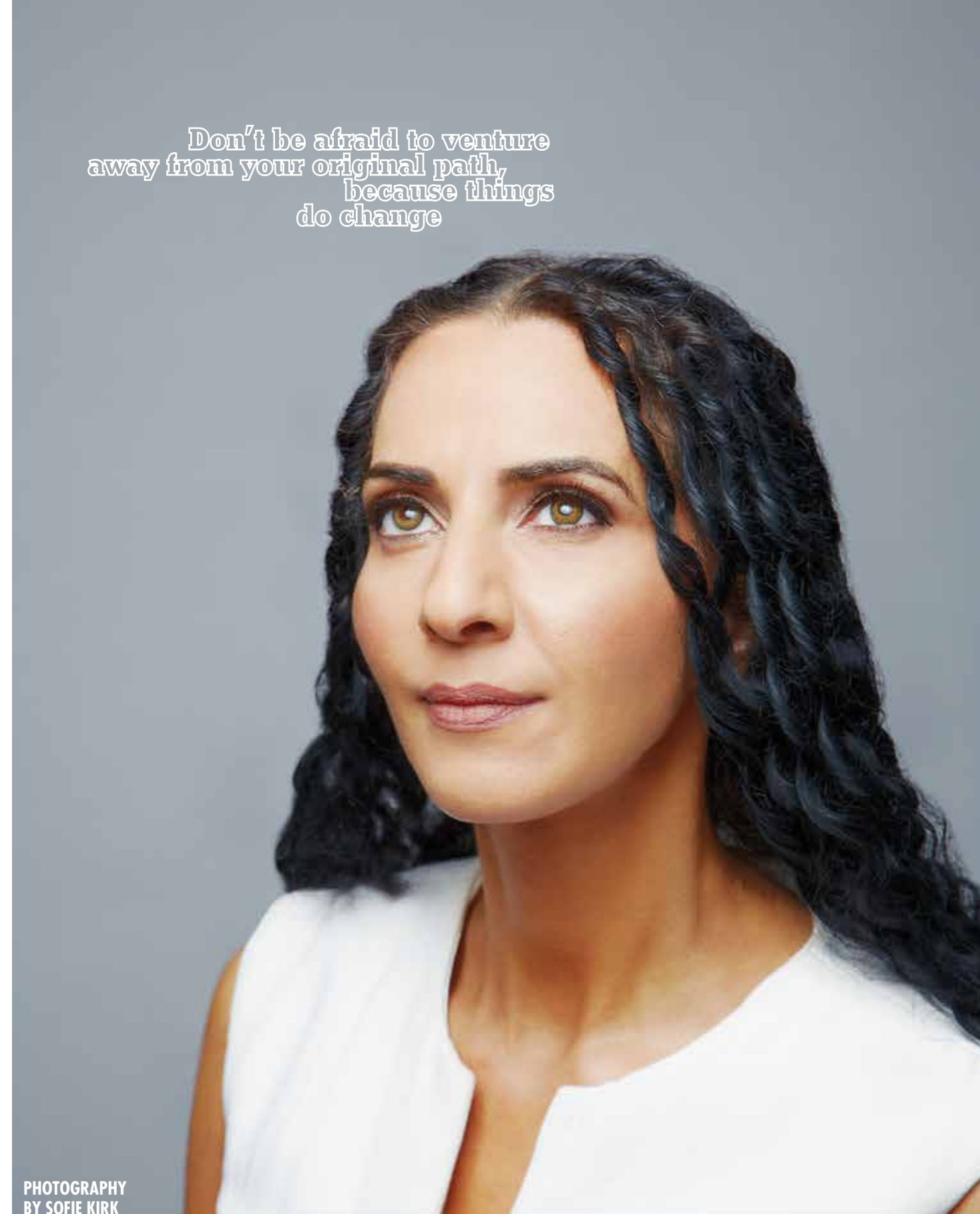
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER WILBUR/BLUESTITCH







IKLAUDIA



Don't be afraid to venture  
away from your original path,  
because things  
do change

PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY SOFIE KIRK



# My Way

BY DEIRDRE KELLY

**YOU COME TO UNIVERSITY** usually with a set goal in mind and select your courses accordingly. But what you don't plan for is that the experience of being on campus, mixing and meeting with new people, encountering and absorbing new ideas, and participating in extracurricular activities – be them sports or student politics – can profoundly alter and shape the career path you will take after graduation. Your education is not a box. It is an idea that forged in the heat of higher education, as these three grads will tell you.

Each came to York to study what they thought would be their life's work but ended up going in entirely different directions that brought them closer to becoming the people they really wanted to be.

**P****RAKASH AMARASOORIYA** was supposed to become a doctor. Or, rather, that was the plan when he first came to York University in 2010 to study sciences.

“I started in chemistry, then switched to biology, then finally decided on becoming a kinesiology major with a minor in psychology. I chose that path,” Amarasooriya says, “because I wanted to prepare myself for a potential medical school career, and felt that kinesiology would provide me with the most relevant education at York for that direction while also providing me with the flexibility I needed to work on my extracurricular and research activities.”

But soon after graduating in 2015 with an honours bachelor of science in kinesiology and a minor in psychology, Amarasooriya had a change of heart.

While preparing his application for medical school, he read media reports and research studies suggesting that positions for specialized doctors would be reduced in Ontario in the coming years. His uncertainty about future job prospects led him to rethink his career objectives, but still with the goal of wanting to help people remaining foremost in mind.

And that's when he made – even for him – a surprising leap into business, which he nevertheless regarded as linked, in an altruistic way, to the practice of medicine.

“I always wanted to make a difference, and felt that by switching into business I could help make that happen,” says Amarasooriya, who grew up in an economically challenged South Asian immigrant family in Toronto's Jane and Lawrence neighbourhood.

“While the health field has a lot of individuals whose principle aim is to do good, the business world is typically made up of people with a different approach and mentality. I felt that if I could go into business with the idea of making a positive difference, I could make more of an impact than I might in a field where doing good is everyone's primary motive.”

With this new objective in mind, Amarasooriya joined TD Canada Trust as a customer service representative in 2016.

At the same time, he took up a volunteer position as school boards lead for the Toronto Youth Cabinet, the official youth advisory body to the City of Toronto.

This latter role was an extension of the non-scholastic activities in which Amarasooriya had participated at York – the salsa and Doctors Without Borders clubs, where he served as president; the Community Safety Council, where he was vice-chair; and the Senate, where he represented his peers as a student senator, to name just a few.

“The leadership skills I developed from participating in extracurricular programs at York, like LeaderShape and other activities, gave me the confidence and competence to excel in any area I choose to pursue,” says Amarasooriya, who cleverly combined his experience at the bank and at City Hall to develop an innovative proposal to introduce financial literacy modules into Grade 10 Career Studies courses in schools across Ontario.

Amarasooriya actively lobbied for the initiative in October and November of 2016, creating and publishing a petition that eventually drew strong support from both public and separate school board trustees, financial literacy organizations and their partners across Canada. Ultimately, he convinced the Ministry of Education of the importance of financial literacy instruction.

The ministry is implementing his modules in Ontario schools starting this September.

Amarasooriya credits his university for making it happen.

“At York, I learned about both the body and the mind in my kinesiology and psychology disciplines, respectively, and I also learned how there are a multitude of factors that contribute to a person's ability to lead a healthy life, which includes financial literacy. I have since been able to incorporate my education into my health-related activities and provide real-world examples of how to educate and improve the health of my community,” he says.

“While I have switched my focus to business, and may switch it again as I see fit, the goal of making people's lives better remains the prime objective.”

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**Prakash Amarasooriya**  
**MAKING CENTS OF KINESIOLOGY**



## MIKE GEORGE AGENT OF LEARNING

**M**IKE GEORGE deepened his bond with God around the same time as York University recruited him to play basketball for its championship team. Don't think that's a coincidence.

He was meant to be at York just as much as he was meant to shoot hoops. The two are inextricably linked.

The now 40-year-old former point guard, today a National Basketball Players Association agent, relocated to the University from Sheridan College, lured, he says, by "a diverse campus with a diversity of courses."

From all the programs he had to choose from, George settled on anthropology, the academic discipline concerned with the study of people. That, too, was no accident.

One of five boys raised in a single parent home, George is a people person.

"I believe in relationships," explains the married father of three sons. "I'm stern but respected. I am fair but I will always protect my guys."

But while studying humans in past and present societies, George realized that he didn't really want to spend his life rooting around bones and skeletons. He wanted to connect with living people. He shifted gears, choosing, while still an undergraduate, to become a teacher instead.

After graduating with a bachelor of arts in 2002, George realized this latter goal by taking a second degree at York, this time in education, in 2003.

His first job was as a middle school teacher for the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board where he taught everything, from social studies to short stories.

But it is what he did after class that really allowed him to make a difference in students' lives: organizing an extracurricular basketball league that George called Christians in Action, or CIA Bounce as it is now widely known.

From the beginning, the club, operating out of Toronto's Humberlea Church of God, taught discipline through faith and faith through discipline.

Basketball, a game in which players are encouraged to blind toss their dreams into the ether in hopes of netting a point, emerged as the perfect platform for building community values, along with brotherly love.

"You know how people gravitate towards the perfect kids, the easy ones who can do it all? Well me, I'd run the other way and find the ones from single parent homes, the outlaws with their own issues. I could relate to them," the anthropologist in him says. "I have been in their shoes."

A scene from his childhood: Midway through the year, while playing soccer, his mother's cheque bounced, leading his coach to tell him he couldn't play anymore. That hurt. And largely because no one reached out to help him. Mentoring young boys from marginal communities would right so many wrongs. But God had a bigger plan.

George's coaching talent, leadership skills and magnetic personality – so strong that "guys from CIA Bounce started applying out of district to come to my school" – eventually turned his club from an extracurricular pastime into an elite Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) basketball program, the best in Canada.

His graduates have gone on to play the game at the highest level. They include Westchester Knicks guard Xavier Rathan-Mayes, Canada's men's Olympic basketball team member and Acea Virtus Roma player Melvin Ejim, Los Angeles Lakers guard Tyler Ennis, Sim Bhullar, the first player of Indian descent to play in the NBA, Salt Lake City Stars guard Naz Mitrou-Long and Andrew Wiggins, who recently signed a five-year, US\$148-million contract extension with the Minnesota Timberwolves, all of them CIA Bounce alumni.

"Our kids are different," says George, who has known some of these top-ranking players since teaching them first in elementary school. "We don't have the same opportunities as young players south of the border so we have to fight harder to gain the same respect."

Confident his program could hold its own against the competition, in 2013 George left CIA Bounce to become an NBA agent in New York. Earlier this year, he returned to Toronto to establish his own agency, the first of its kind.

"One Legacy Sports is the first major basketball talent agency in Canada," says George, who has brought in several CIA Bounce graduates, among them NBA players Khem Birch, Dillon Brooks, Jamal Murray and Dwight Powell, as clients.

"It's going great," he adds. "It's been a good recruiting year."

**A** **WHIZ WITH NUMBERS** while growing up, Klaudia (née Zinaty) Capalbo first came to York University in 1990 as an undergraduate with the goal of becoming a math teacher.

She enrolled in both the mathematics and concurrent education programs, graduating with an honours bachelor of arts degree in mathematics and a bachelor of education in mathematics in 1995.

But besides solving cognitively challenging mathematical problems and sharing her knowledge of theorems with students during work placements, as part of her studies Capalbo discovered that math is everywhere, an integral part of the everyday world.

"At York, I learned that the fundamentals of mathematics encompass everything in our lives, from the creation and development of art, science, history, geography and technology to the simplest forms of calculating change in day-to-day existence," she says.

"Math can be applied in so many different forms and in so many ways."

Even including in the development of marketing campaigns for leading Canadian fashion brands like *Flare* and Toronto Women's Fashion Week, to name two very unlikely places where Capalbo has applied her math skills since launching her professional career 13 years ago.

From her perspective, it was a natural leap.

"If you ask any of my friends from high school, they'll tell you that I've always had a love for fashion – so it was no surprise, to me at least, that my career eventually evolved into the fashion world," she says.

"While studying math at York, I would wear neon socks with matching neon bangles and earrings, and analyze the latest trends on 'Fashion Television' before heading to my local fabric and crafts store to create my own inspired versions of those runway looks to wear."

It was a passion that soon took over her life, compelling Capalbo to shift gears soon after leaving the University to work in the fast-paced and often glamorous world of lifestyle brands and consumer relations.

Her first jobs were in sports marketing and media with NBA Canada. From there, Capalbo moved into broadcasting at CHUM Television, followed by a seven-year stint at *Flare* as the Canadian fashion magazine's senior national account manager.

Presently, she is director of corporate partnerships for Toronto Men's and Women's Fashion Weeks and director of corporate relations at the Toronto Fashion Academy, where Capalbo still deploys her math skills on a regular basis.

"Mathematics is a huge part of the fashion industry, whether it's creating media or marketing campaigns calculating reach and frequency, or becoming a buyer or retailer, to measuring and calculating patterns in design ideas and concepts, importing and manufacturing, to selling sponsorships and events," she says.

"There will always be a need for mathematical skills in fashion because it's not just about creating beautiful collections; it's about creating a successful business where math fundamentals can and will determine success."

Being able to see beyond the rigid parameters laid down by her academic speciality contributed significantly to Capalbo's own success, and now the teacher in her wants to share her winning formula with others. So, her advice to York students calculating their own professional futures?

"Pursue what you truly love and don't be afraid to venture away from your original path, because things do change, and you never know what is next on the horizon. Find what sparks the light in you, and then use it to illuminate the world in your own unique way." ●

**Klaudia Capalbo**  
**FROM FRACTIONS TO FASHION**





*Dana Osborne sews up the energy in the award-winning threads  
she designs for Canada's Stratford Festival*

BY DEIRDRE KELLY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CYLLA VON TIEDEMANN

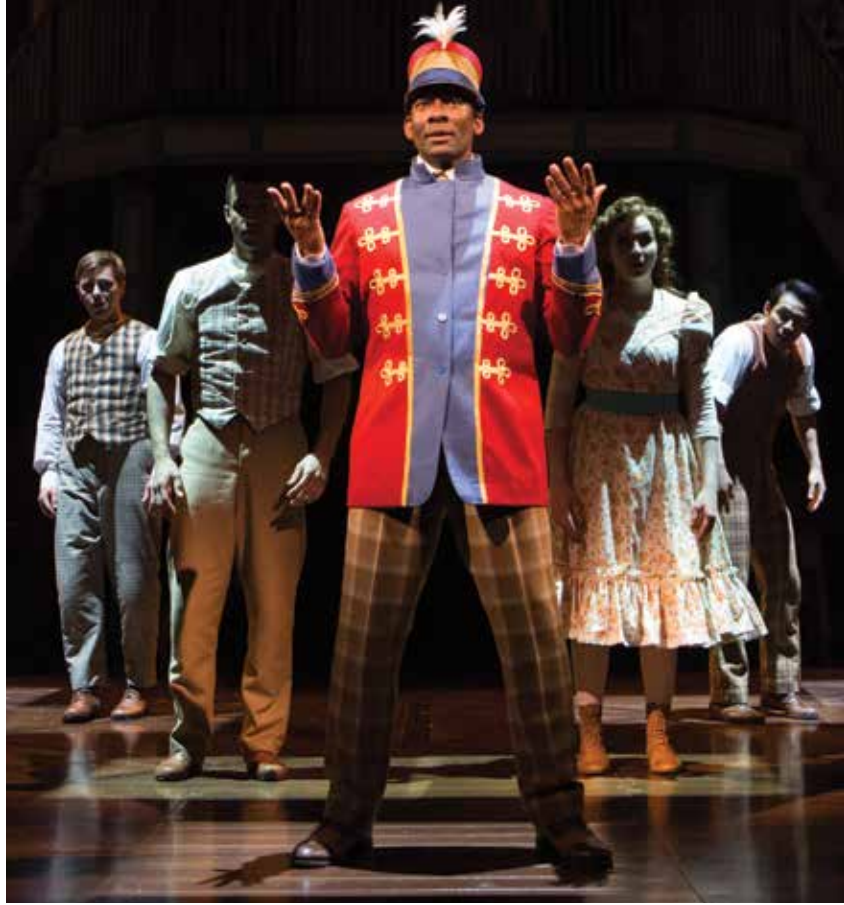
# COSTUME DRAMA





**DANA OSBORNE:** Lining up stripes is hard to do

OSBORNE PORTRAIT COURTESY OF THE STRATFORD FESTIVAL



**DAREN A. HERBERT:** Harold Hill in *The Music Man*

**A****FTER DESIGNING** over 20 productions at the Stratford Festival for 18 seasons – and winning two Dora Mavor Moore Awards for Outstanding Costume Design along the way – you might wonder how Dana Osborne (BFA ’96) keeps coming up with new ideas. But the source of her inspiration is old as the Bard himself. In her case, the play really is the thing.

“I don’t think I’ve ever worked with a costume designer like her,” enthuses Donna Feore, the hotter than hot Stratford choreographer and theatre director who has two shows at the festival this season, *The Music Man* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, both designed by Osborne. “She’s so invested in the text and she reads those scripts in consummate detail. You know how people say they have collaborators? Well, in Dana I really do have one. She wants to make things happen. She inspires me.”

These words of praise, said loud enough so she can hear, make Osborne stick her fingers in her ears and go la-la-la as she strides across the theatre’s thrust stage to reach her fabric and lace ribbon aerie located behind the scenes. Accomplished as she is – her past Stratford shows include last season’s hit musical *Gyps and Dolls* and *Timon of Athens*, a film version of which (by director Barry Avrich) recently screened at select Cineplex Cinemas across the nation – Osborne has maintained the quiet modesty and decorum befitting her private-school girl upbringing in her hometown of Duncan, B.C.

“You always have to take your ego out of the picture,” says the 43-year-old married mother (her husband is actor Stephen Gartner) of a seven-year-old daughter in the weeks leading up to Stratford’s 2018 season opening at the end of May. “You have to





**LEAPING PETTICOATS:** Members of the company in *The Music Man*

stay true to the production. That’s the absolutely best part of this career – you’re constantly learning.”

That learning started at York, to where Osborne had applied after one of her high school teachers had told her about the University and its progressive theatre program. Prior to that, she had never heard of the University before; she also had never before been to Toronto. “But I was desperate to get away from my small town,” Osborne says. “I wanted to be an actress, and when I got to York I was slightly overwhelmed. It was big, it was diverse, it was very different from what I knew – 23 girls in a class. So, it was a lot of learning, a lot of social learning. I knew nothing, but I was determined.”

The social side of the University ended up being as important as what she experienced in the classroom where she studied not just acting but also set and costume design, a course requirement demanded of her academic discipline. Her roommate at Winters College, where she lived three years, was Meghan Callan (BFA ’96), now Stratford’s stage manager. “She had grown up in Stratford,” Osborne says,

“and was the one who brought me here to experience it for the first time.” Also from York – whom Osborne met later – was Jeff Churchill (BFA ’05), today a cobbler who runs a theatrical shoemaking business called Jitterbug Boy. This season, Osborne commissioned Churchill to create the thigh-high platform boots to be worn by actor Dan Chame-roy, as Frank N. Furter, in *Rocky Horror*.

During her final years at York, Osborne had decided to become a designer, as opposed to a thespian, as a way of securing full-time work in the theatre. After graduating in 1996 with a bachelor of fine arts degree, she worked as a costume assistant first on a cruise ship, and then on a variety of big-budget theatre shows, including *The Lion King* and *Mamma Mia!* for Mirvish Productions in Toronto. Another great learning experience.

“But it was a lot of pressure,” Osborne recalls. “I lost 10 pounds and ended up getting an eye twitch, and that’s when I realized I missed creating. I wanted most of all to design.” Churchill, her fellow York alum, then told her about an assistant designer

program at Stratford. “He said I should apply and I got it. I arrived in 2001, and by 2003 I had started designing.”

Her first show at Stratford was *Agamemnon*, for which she designed homespun robes inspired by the play’s 2,500-year-old Greek setting. The following year she did evening wear for Stephen Ouimette’s 2004 contemporary-world production of *Timon of Athens*, and in 2005 the sexy lingerie worn by Cynthia Dale playing Maggie in the late Richard Monette’s direction of the Tennessee Williams’ sizzler *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Many more plays followed – *Moby-Dick* (directed by Morris Panych, and one of Osborne’s favourite shows), *As You Like It*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Hosanna*, *Man of La Mancha* and *Carousel*, to name only a few.

The multiple Tony award-winning designer Santo Loquasto, an American Theater Hall of Famer who has served as production designer on Woody Allen’s films and more, frequently designs for Stratford where he has had the privilege, he says, of seeing Osborne in action. He thinks she’s a one of a kind.

“We met at Stratford where she was one of several bright, talented designers. And during the seasons I worked there I saw her grow in confidence and expertise, not only in command of the play but the players as well. She is a true friend and colleague and it delights me to see her work deservedly acknowledged,” says Loquasto, which, coming from him, is high praise indeed. “Dana has always brought a keen contemporary sense and sophistication to her productions. What we used to refer to as personal style. At Stratford, this was particularly exciting to see. It’s a kind of visual energy that entices the audience.”

Osborne can’t la-la-la that one out. But, with a goofy grin and a shrug of her lanky shoulders, she waves off the accolades and focuses instead on the hard work that goes on backstage to create the enticement that so bedazzles the shows she designs.

The process starts with a yearly shopping trip to the garment district of New York where Osborne becomes like the proverbial kid in a candy shop, scooping up bolts of fabric for





**POPPING BUTTONS:**

Members of the company in *Guys and Dolls* (above) and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (below)



**CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH:**

Kimberly-Ann Truong as Columbia and Erica Peck as Magenta in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*



the season's productions. Given that her Stratford shows this year are so different in tone, content and atmosphere – *The Music Man*, Meredith Willson's wholesome 1950s musical, is about a con man named Harold Hill who poses as a boys' band leader in order to sell instruments and uniforms to the unsuspecting residents of a Midwestern U.S. town, while *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is a lurid 1975 punk rock-meets-horror show spectacle in which a cross-dressing mad scientist seduces a couple who arrive at his costume party after their car breaks down in the rain – Osborne had to split her purchases in two.

On one side were piles of pastel-hued cotton, gingham and silk; on the other enough spandex, fishnet and pleather to pleasure a vegan drag queen. "I can't use natural fabrics all the time," she says, "because I have to make things that can last 120 shows." Once back in Stratford, Ont., the town located about 90 minutes west of Toronto, and Osborne's home since 2011, those fabrics – manmade or otherwise

– were cut and hand-sewn by a team of expert assistants according to Osborne's designs. Even after the costumes were done, adjustments were constantly being made, right up until the day of the performance.

During dress rehearsals for *The Music Man*, for instance, it was discovered that the silk petticoats Osborne had designed for performers to wear under their twirly dresses were too heavy to allow for complete freedom of movement during the production's high-kicking dance numbers. Osborne then went promptly back to the cutting room table, fashioning new costumes made from a lighter-weight polyester that upped the energy level without compromising on the show's overall look. She had trained in dance back in B.C., and so has an innate understanding of how a costume needs to move and breathe when it is on stage.

"A costume does not succeed," Osborne says, "if it is not one with the actor. It's got to look like the actor owns it, otherwise there is no point." ●



# LIVE FROM THE BBC

BY MATT MCGRATH ● PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

From January to April of this year, a London-based correspondent for one of the world's most significant news outlets participated in the Faculty of Science's inaugural residency program for science journalists. He came away gobsmacked, as he writes here, in his own words

**I** **AM NOT SOMEONE** hugely prone to hype or exaggeration. In fact, my ironic outlook is one of my best journalistic shields against the shysters and snake oil sellers of science (and believe me, there are plenty of them). So, when I say that the Science Communicator in Residence program at York University has been truly life-changing for me, it is not just the bleating of a grateful recipient.

Personally, my three months here in the unceasing Toronto winter have seen me lose five kilos in weight, get as fit as I have been in 25 years, become engaged to my longtime, long-suffering girlfriend, and understand the





## YORK, RIGHT NOW, MAY WELL BE SHOWING US THE WORLD, AS IT WILL BE IN YEARS TO COME

attractions of Timmy Hortons, maple syrup and the Presto card. I've also sprouted enough grey facial hair to bring new meaning to the phrase "grizzled veteran."

Professionally, this has been a real eye-opening experience as well.

As an embed, I've seen up close the frustrations of academia as well as the benefits and strengths. Everything is much more formalized in the academic setting than I have been used to as a professional journalist: Appointments take longer to set up, and processes must be followed. Toes can be easily stepped on; noses innocently put out of joint.

But on the plus side, this unique residency has given me the opportunity to sit down with some quite remarkable people at the Faculty of Science, and gain insights into the quality of their work. And, wow, there's so much good stuff here. One of the most gobsmacking realizations from my time here at York has been this amazing tendency for Canadians to hide their light under a bushel.

Or should I say lights. York has a number of bright ones.

They include Professor Chris Bergevin, who helped me understand the complexity of our inner ears and the amazing implications of the discovery that our ears emit their own sounds. Then there's Professor Amro Zayed, a researcher whose work has achieved something that many would have said was impossible – changing the mind of the British government on the use of neonicotinoid pesticides.

Professor Jianhong Wu is a world expert on disease modelling. He's one of the top global voices on the topic. Yet he's not been on the BBC's radar before. Thanks to this resi-

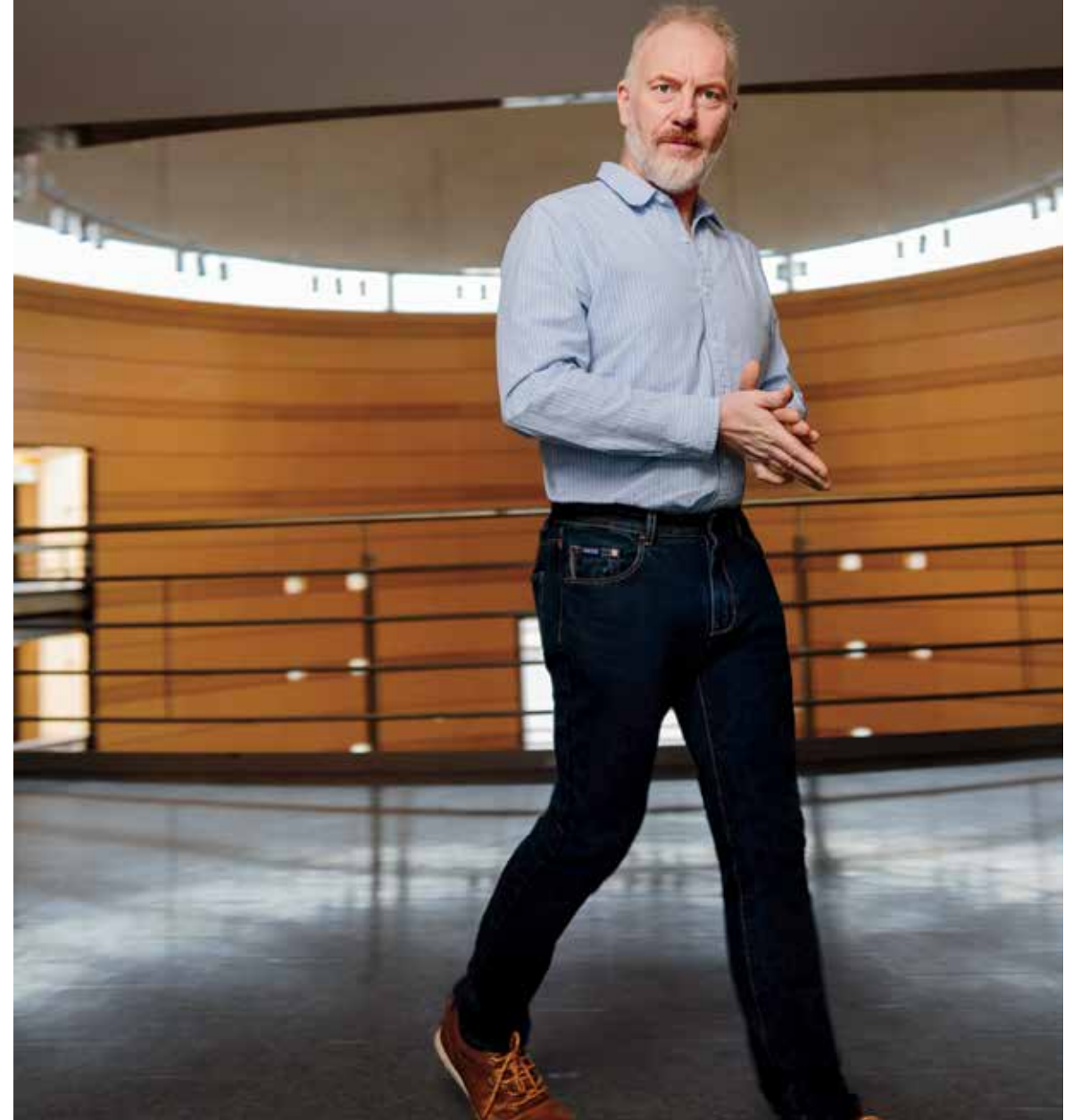
dency, that will change. Similarly with Professor Laurence Packer.

I followed this all-action, global giant in entomology as he charged around his lab, chaos and enlightenment emerging in equal measure. He wanted to show me some Irish bees, a small part of his staggering collection, gathered from around the world over decades. This guy is a gem and a gent, as well as a fount of knowledge that should have a wider audience. I shall see to it.

While at York, it was also really useful for me to spend some time with Professor Cora Young. Her work on air pollutants, including fire retardants as well as new studies on emerging threats, is very exciting and will be of global importance when published. She was not alone. Everywhere I turned there was cutting-edge research going on, all very quietly and politely. How very Canadian!

As well as making contacts and generating ideas for future BBC stories, York also pushed me to do new things such as giving talks and hosting seminars that I have tended to shy away from in the past. Despite being well used to broadcasting live on radio and TV, I have always struggled with the confidence to take on such public speaking events. Being at York has given me the chance to do this in a controlled way – and I've learned loads from the process, especially how to enjoy these occasions and make them fun for the audience.

Most especially, I loved moderating the York Science Forum panel on neutrinos with Nobel Prize winner Professor Arthur McDonald and Professors Sampa Bhadra and Scott Menary, which took place on the Keele Campus in the spring. Preparing for this evening, where art and science was essentially



**MATT MCGRATH:** Learning loads as the University's second-only science communicator in residence

the same thing, required some rapid reading on my part to get up to speed on the complex world of subatomic particles.

I did some other research besides.

The most useful book I found while at York was one called *Neutrino Hunters* by some guy called Ray Jayawardhana. Heard of him? If in any way connected to York, of course you have. As many told me since my arrival here, York's dean of science, a.k.a. Dr. Ray Jay, is destined to go far. As, alas, am I. At least in terms of distance.

Now that the warmer weather has finally hit the Greater Toronto Area, I must return to the U.K., and my job at the BBC. Please allow me to say a heartfelt thank you to Professor Jayawardhana and his team here at York for selecting

me for the residency, and supporting me through it. This is a wonderful, beneficial idea, and you should be applauded strongly for promoting it. I have loved living in Toronto, learning about Canada and seeing the qualities and talents at this burgeoning university.

My most abiding memory is of the bustling halls of this campus, filled with energetic young people of all races, reflecting the amazing diversity of York. Those yakking youngsters I've passed in the eateries and in the overcrowded gym show how integration and harmony can go hand in hand. York, right now, may well be showing us the world, as it will be in years to come. If so, it is very much a brighter and better future that awaits us all. ●





*A York grad curates the art world job of her dreams*

BY LINDSAY MACADAM  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK

**I**T'S FIRST THING MONDAY morning at the Drake Hotel's Queen Street West flagship where I'm meeting Mia Nielsen (BFA '97), the hotel's director of art and culture, to hear about her career evolution since her days as a York University art student. It's not even 9 a.m. and the place is already buzzing with creative energy.

As I wait in the gallery-like lobby, Nielsen greets me before escorting me to a tufted turquoise booth in the historic building's expansive lounge, fetching us both a cup of coffee as I admire the surroundings – to my left, Brooklyn-based Canadian artist Jason Mclean's *The Sun Falls on Toronto*, a memory map of the Toronto neighbourhoods he used to frequent; and, directly in front of me, Luke Painter's digital mural of an imagined garden populated by well-known 20th century works. It makes a fascinating backdrop to the well-stocked bar.

Clad in head-to-toe black with a statement necklace draped delicately over her shoulders, Nielsen, 45, expresses her gratitude to York for setting her on the path to becoming one of the world's few full-time hotel art curators. Starting out as an idealistic first-year with every intention of pursuing the life of a working artist, it was her professors who introduced her to another option: the role of curator. "They encouraged me to look at other people's work," she says, "to make connections between works that I was seeing."

On staff at the Drake Hotel Properties for the past 11 years, Nielsen has had no shortage of opportunities to put those skills she learned at York to good use. "It's like a totally different job every 18 months," she says enthusiastically between sips of black coffee. "When I first started at the Drake it was a year and a half old and it was very much a local place. It has since grown into an international destination in terms of reach and recognition." Those who make it their business to know the scene recognize Nielsen for having contributed much to the Drake's aura of hip.

# Framing the Scene



## It's not enough to buy the best works. You have to create a context for the best works

“Mia’s contributions have helped to shape Toronto’s arts and culture into the rich, vibrant and diverse scene it is today,” says Schulich School of Business alumna Alicia Vandermeer (MBA ’90), who now works as deputy director and chief advancement officer at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and who has come to know Nielsen through her work with the AGO’s Art Toronto Opening Night Committee. “The Drake has definitely contributed to Toronto’s ‘cool’ factor, adding an accessible and provocative place to see emerging contemporary artists.”

In her role as curator, Nielsen is charged with developing the cultural strategies for each of the Drake’s five properties, including everything from art and music to dance and theatre performances. “It’s about activating spaces at different times and thinking about what’s going to further enrich that guest experience,” she explains. As a result, Nielsen’s forever on the hunt for new artists to work with, whether that’s while visiting local and international art fairs, festivals and exhibitions, or while scrolling through her Instagram feed. Her tireless efforts have not gone unnoticed.

“I don’t know whether she hides six or seven other Mias behind her when she works, because she does some of the quickest curatorial turnarounds in the city,” gushes Emelie Chhangur, interim director/curator at the Art Gallery of York University, who has worked with the Drake curator on numerous projects over the years. “Contemporary art is not just decoration. It’s not wallpaper. It’s not a backdrop to a hotel. She really brings the art front and centre and strikes a balance where it is part of the milieu of a boutique hotel, but with a real support for artists.”

From as young as 10 years old, the St. Catharines-born creative knew she was destined to follow a non-traditional path. Art was a constant presence in her Danish family – her mother had been a singer, her mother’s best friend an opera singer and her aunt a painter. Nielsen lived near Brock University, where she often would binge on symphony concerts and dance performances to satisfy her artistic cravings. “My disciplines changed a bunch over the years,” she says, “from music to theatre and then,” thanks

to a special high school teacher who helped her realize her potential, “eventually to art.”

When it came time to choose a university, Nielsen toured York and was won over by the facilities, the location and the people she met. She applied and was accepted, staying at York five years. Today, she has nothing but praise for the experience. She easily lists off the names of her favourite professors – Janet Jones, Judith Schwarz, Ted Goossen and Ken Carpenter. “Ken had this really interesting way of instilling confidence in one’s vision,” she says of the professor whom she credits for steering her towards curating when she realized she didn’t see herself continuing with studio work beyond university.

Carpenter was a long-time friend of David Mirvish, the Toronto theatre impresario with an impressive private art collection. Nielsen happily remembers the time when he took her class to see Mirvish’s modernist paintings and sculptures on the top floor of one of his family’s restaurants on King Street West. Among all Mirvish’s masterworks, there was one Hans Hofmann painting that stood out to her, but not in a good way. “It’s terrible, isn’t it?” Nielsen remembers Mirvish saying when she asked him about it. She nervously agreed. He then explained that the piece was significant because it was the first painting in which Hofmann’s signature motif was used. “To be an important collector,” she recalls him saying word-for-word, “it’s not enough to buy the best works. You have to create a context for the best works.” To underscore the importance of that bit of advice, Nielsen makes an explosion sound to represent her mind being blown in that moment.

This decisive encounter had taken place in the mid-’90s, well before the term “curating” was part of the general lexicon, and before curatorial programs were widespread. But it had given Nielsen an idea for how to live the creative life another way, without being an artist.

As an undergraduate she worked 30 hours per week as a telemarketer, raising funds for local arts organizations over the phone, to help pay her tuition. She also interned every Friday at the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, a gig

she sought out after visiting the space as part of a first-year university assignment. It afforded her a glimpse into her future career.

After graduating in 1997 with a bachelor of fine arts in photography and new media, the ambitious young professional worked her way up from assisting a commercial photographer to working alongside Odon Wagner at his eponymous Toronto gallery. Tasked with managing Wagner’s first foray into online purchases and sales through Sotheby’s new Internet division, within a year Nielsen took her newly acquired skills and opened her own dealership, Quiver Projects. Over the next seven years as her own boss, she curated museum exhibitions, sold works at art fairs and online, and built up a stable of international collectors to whom she sold Canadian art. During that time, she also had her son, Ian, who is now 13. “It’s hard to be self-employed and raise a child,” she admits, so she gave up the entrepreneurial path for something a little more conducive to family life. It was perfect timing.

While Nielsen was making a name for herself as a freelance creative in the early aughts, businesses were beginning to realize the value of expertly selected art – not just to decorate the walls, but to provide a cultural experience for visitors. Also around this time, art curation in hotels had become a bona fide trend. Adorning hotel walls with original artworks started in New York in 1984 after hotelier Ian Schrager



**MIA NIELSEN:** Choosing artists and hanging with them, too

commissioned a series of Robert Mapplethorpe prints for his original boutique hotel, the Morgan. It picked up steam in the 1990s and during the early years of the new millennium with the hiring of the first on-staff hotel art curators in such newly renovated properties as the NoMad and the James, both located in SoHo. “Responding to guests’ desire to have their lodgings project an image of who they are or aspire to be,” the *New York Times* reported in 2010, “hotels are taking their artistic endeavours more seriously.”

The Drake Hotel was right on trend. Nielsen started working at the Queen West hot spot in 2007, originally on contract, but eventually becoming a full-time staffer. Since then, she has partnered with countless local and international artists, art festivals and fellow curators to create impactful expe-





**I'm obsessed with curating public spaces because it's such an important entry point for the public to have an opportunity to look at great works of art**

periences for patrons. One of her most memorable projects to date was the 2012 party at the Drake's flagship location celebrating the Toronto International Film Festival debut of Canadian performance artist Peaches' concert film, *Peaches Does Herself*. Nielsen flew the electro-punk princess in from her home base in Berlin for a five-hour building-wide spectacle, complete with 25 support performers and art displays in every room.

Her latest projects include revamping the lounge installations at the Drake Hotel; commissioning work from internationally acclaimed Toronto artist Rajni Perera for the new Drake Mini Bar, the company's first solo artist space that opened in May; and pulling together attention-grabbing sculptures for the Drake Devonshire Inn's annual outdoor exhibition, this

year called *Follow That Thought* and featuring work by York University alumna Jaime Angelopoulos (MFA '10), which runs until November.

Her job description is continually expanding, which is one of the things Nielsen loves most about it. That, and sharing art with the public. "I'm obsessed with curating public spaces because it's such an important entry point for the public to have an opportunity to look at great works of art," Nielsen says.

"I think it's essential. In our digital world, we're becoming accustomed to having our thoughts echoed back at us. Having artwork in public spaces is a way to break that down a bit, to encourage curiosity, to encourage people to ask questions." ●



## New Moon

*PhD candidate Lauren Fournier wins national curatorial prize*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEE HENDERSON

**I F THE 2018** Middlebrook Prize for Young Canadian Curators is any indication, it looks like York University might be paving the way for yet another up-and-coming curatorial powerhouse. At Toronto's Gladstone Hotel on March 7, PhD candidate Lauren Fournier was announced the winner of the prestigious prize recognizing Canadian curators under 30. Her proposed exhibition, *Epistemologies of the Moon*, brings together contemporary, Canadian and Indigenous artists

and collectives who are engaging with the symbolism and imagery of the moon as a historically feminine – and, more recently, feminist – symbol, and opening it up to new meanings in the present.

As winner of the prize, Fournier will receive funding to produce a \$10,000 exhibition – her largest to date – which will be on display at the Art Gallery of Guelph from September to December.

Finishing up her doctoral work in York's Department of English this summer,

the Saskatchewan native might be new to the curatorial scene, but she's no stranger to the art world. "I have this ongoing writing practice, but I have been immersed in artist-run culture in Canada and have worked in galleries in different capacities," she explains.

As for what's next for this creative multihyphenate, she seems to have it all figured out. "The ideal scenario would be to have a position that's a hybrid of academic and curatorial work – that would be the dream." ●



*A new study about the elderly  
and their laundry  
asks long-term care facilities  
to clean up their act*

**BY DEIRDRE KELLY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON**

**A****T FIRST GLANCE,** a pile of dirty laundry might not look like a source of fresh ideas for an academic with a deep-rooted interest in social justice. But when Pat Armstrong started rummaging through sacks of sweaters, socks and silken nothings awaiting washing in nursing homes scattered across six western world countries, the Distinguished Research Professor in the Department of Sociology at York University uncovered layers upon layers of hidden sociological meaning behind garments belonging to their elderly residents.

“Clothes are important to creating a sense of self, and a sense of dignity, and so how you care for them matters,” says Armstrong, who has published a book on the topic following eight years of international research into the importance of laundry.

Co-authored with York PhD graduate Suzanne Day, *Wash, Wear, and Care* (McGill-Queen’s University Press) argues that clothing is more than just fashion. It exerts a critical influence on the morale and health of senior citizens living in institutional residences.

For the occupants of old people’s homes, clothes often represent the last shreds of self-respect to which the elderly cling after everything else in their lives has shrivelled and died. Clothes express not just ideas about identity, but often existence itself. Armstrong learned this first-hand while leading an international team of ethnographic researchers into nursing homes across Canada, Sweden, Norway, Germany,

# Clothes



# Call



**Even an old sweater is precious  
in the context of an assisted living facility  
where a resident's autonomy  
becomes as stripped down as their bedding**



the U.S. and the U.K.

Far from observing their subjects from the comfort of the ivory tower, Armstrong and her fellow scholars divided themselves into groups of between 12 and 16 members who took turns doing shift work inside the facilities within

their purview. They did domestic labour, sweeping floors and serving meals, while keeping their eyes glued on the ever-pervasive piles of laundry that constituted the bulk of their primary research. The researchers didn't just observe; they interviewed staff as well as residents and their family members about the handling of clothing within an institutional setting. They wanted to understand how a seemingly mundane task as doing the laundry can profoundly affect the physical and psychological makeup of the elderly in care.

"It starts when we tell them we have to label their clothes once they enter a long-term care facility, and then it escalates

when we tell them that only certain kinds of clothes will be allowed in, those made of synthetic and made to withstand the boiling temperatures of industrialized laundry," Armstrong says. "It's usually the first time a person who has entered a home feels a loss of identity, and the affects can be devastating."

Even an old sweater is precious in the context of an assisted living facility where a resident's autonomy becomes as stripped down as their bedding. Parting with a cherished article of clothing, even for such a routine task as laundry, can be emotionally fraught, with an elderly person growing increasingly anxious while waiting for the garment to be returned to them, safe and sound. Their fears are usually justified. "We heard about lost sweaters everywhere we went," says Armstrong, dressed in one today, along with jeans and a sensible pair of shoes, while sitting inside her Kaneff Tower office at York University. "And when you've lost your clothes, you've lost your sense of self, and everything of meaning to you."

Miranda Ferrier, president of the Canadian Support Workers Association, knows firsthand the importance of clothing to senior residents of long-term care facilities. "I took care of one lady who knitted a red sweater for herself before she went arthritic and it was her crowning achievement and then the sweater went missing and she fell into a deep depression. Yes, over a sweater. But the point is it had incredible value to her," says Ferrier who, while not a part of Armstrong's study, agrees with its findings.

"Clothing might seem like a little thing to a personal support worker, especially when the PSW has 15 residents to take care of, but the little things are important," Ferrier continues. "It all plays to quality of care. You've got to look at the big picture."

Nathan Herrmann, the Richard Lewar Chair in Geriatric Psychiatry at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and the University of Toronto, agrees. "I am the psychiatric consultant for the Veterans Centre at Sunnybrook, a long-term care facility, and there is no question about how important clothing is to the residents. There are many examples of 90-year-old male residents who must be dressed in a jacket and tie on a daily basis, even if they are in a wheelchair, and that's because it is very important for their self-esteem and self-identity to have their appearance and their clothing look good and be reflective of their previous accomplishments and cultural background," Dr. Herrmann says.

"They want this sense of self through clothing so as not to look like patients. These long-term care facilities are their homes, where they hope to have a good quality of life. Clothes really do make the man or woman."

Given this expert perspective, it would stand to reason that laundry would rate high on a list of priorities for those working in long-term care facilities. But Armstrong, cross-appointed to the departments of Global Political Studies and Gender and Women's Studies at York, says that is simply not the case.

Her research found that most long-term care facilities, with few exceptions, tend to overlook the profound impact laundry has on the lives of senior citizens living in their care. As she writes in her book, "Dirty, wrinkled, lost or shrunken clothing can undermine both health and self-respect, not to mention upset both the resident and their family." As well, the handling of laundry affects the overall experience of a home for workers and residents alike. "Hallways crammed with carts of soiled linens look institutional and emit odours that permeate every room."

Additional problems can occur when laundry is contracted out. Who takes clothes out of the cupboards and who puts them back? It's an open question.

Armstrong and her team observed many instances where clothes were taken in bulk from people's rooms and returned

in a similar anonymous manner, hung on racks in communal hallways for anyone and everyone to handle. "You have to remember there's often cases of dementia in these homes and some residents will treat it like Walmart and just pull clothes off the rack, regardless of who they belong to. A big difference would be to organize it in such a way that people feel their privacy is respected. But in Canada, as we found, this often doesn't happen."

And why is that?

"Not much has been written on the subject before," says Armstrong, explaining why she felt a need to devote the past

**There are many examples  
of 90-year-old male residents  
who must be dressed in a jacket  
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even if they are in a wheelchair**

eight years of her academic career to scrubbing away at the ignorance that has allowed the grim conditions in nursing homes to fester.

"I think there has been a tendency to treat these places as medical institutions, and so the focus has tended to be on measuring falls and the number of meds. The quality of life stuff just doesn't get attention," she adds. "But clothes and all that go with them are critical to quality of life. Our objective is to put life into years, and not years into life."

Guided by feminist political economy, and informed by theories of care, Armstrong hopes her jointly authored book will effect real change. The future, she says, depends on it.

"If we can't treat the most vulnerable with dignity then what good is our society?" ●



# Alumni

## Centre Ice

A former York Yeoman is about to score the biggest goal of his life

BY DEIRDRE KELLY

**O**N THE DAY after the Los Angeles Kings lost to the Winnipeg Jets in overtime, Mike Futa is smiling.

“It’s so close in the playoffs race right now,” says the California team’s Canadian-born assistant general manager on a quick trip home to Toronto to visit family in March.

“As long as you get a point, you can’t be complaining.”

Accumulating points, methodically, until they add up to something big, is how Futa (BA ’91, BEd ’92) has tended to manage his own success with the game.

The 50-year-old NHL executive has climbed steadily through the ranks since first joining the York Yeomen hockey team during the 1988-89 season. It was an auspicious start.

The University’s prized squad was then on a winning streak, snagging three consecutive Ontario University Athletics (OUA) championships from 1986 to 1988, and two national titles in back-to-back seasons, 1987-88 and 1988-89. Futa, who played left wing, contributed to that success.

“He was a rookie but a key guy for sure,” says Bill Maguire (BA ’89), a former team captain who went on to be York’s head coach from 2006 to 2008.

“His passion as a player was always second to none. He’d play hurt but would never show it. Only when he’d take his shoulder pads off would you see just how cut up he was. But nothing ever deterred him.”

Least of all the York team’s less-than-stellar working conditions.

“We called it the Ice Palace back then, but it was a shack. It could not have been much fun for the visiting teams,” says Futa, shaking his head in bemusement.

“The bathrooms were the public toilets and it was always jammed to the roof – with both players and fans. But it was an incredible atmosphere. The Palace was a rocking place, and playing there for York really helped those of us who went on to have careers in professional hockey. It really did.”

“Mike always was a winner,” says Graham Wise, who recruited and then coached Futa for the four years he played hockey at York. “He put all his energy into whatever he was doing, as a player, as a coach and as a manager. From a student-athlete to where he is today, he has always been a great leader.”

After graduating from the Faculty of Education in 1992, Futa moved to Europe to play pro hockey for two seasons each with Denmark and Germany until a dislocated shoulder

forced him to reassess his playing career plans. “I knew I was going to face problems if I were to have surgery,” he says, “and so I thought I had better get on with my teaching.”

Call it divine intervention because when Futa returned to Canada in the late 1990s, he moved instead into coaching after a Basilian priest put in a good word for him at St. Michael’s College, the Toronto boys’ school from which close to 200 professional hockey players, several Hall of Famers among them, have come.

At the time, Father Ted McLean was principal of Father Henry Carr Catholic Secondary School, located close by the Rexdale neighbourhood where Futa had grown up. The late priest was well known for having chased pucks before committing himself to the religious life.

Father Ted was so sharp on the ice, Detroit had offered him a contract. But he had turned it down for the priesthood, dedicating the rest of his life to nurturing a love for hockey in his students, Futa included.

“Before he passed,” says Futa, growing emotional, “he recommended me to the St. Mike’s Majors, which is where I started my coaching career. I owe it all to him. He kept me focused on the big picture.”

That big picture started small, with Futa, then 27, arriving on the scene as the youngest coach in the history of major junior hockey. “I was extremely passionate but grossly underprepared for the job,” chuckles Futa at the memory. “I got fired. But while it lasted it was good. It was a great experience.”

And it led him to bigger and better things, starting with a successful stint as assistant coach and assistant general manager of the Oshawa Generals and then progressing in 2002 to the position of general manager of the Owen Sound Attack, a role Futa commanded for five highly productive years.

Named the OHL’s Executive of the Year during the 2004-05 season, Futa developed a reputation for unearthing hidden talent.

While in Owen Sound, Ont., the Georgian Bay city where each of his three school-age daughters was born, Futa had early on pegged Wayne Simmonds for greatness. He recruited the Scarborough, Ont., native for his OHL team before Simmonds, then playing for the Brockville Braves in the Ontario Junior Hockey League, could cross the border and skate as a scholarship recipient for a U.S. college team.

Futa promised Simmonds future success, and then personally mentored the then 18-year-old along his professional path.





“He was always there for me, always in my corner, that’s the kind of man he is,” says Simmonds, today a first-line right winger and alternate captain for the Philadelphia Flyers, and one of only a handful of black players in the NHL. “He always keeps his word.” The admiration is mutual.

“I always believed in the guy,” says Futa. “He didn’t come from very much, but I got to know him well both on the ice and off, which is how you can really determine if a player is great or not. Do they project strength not just in the game but in all aspects of their life? Do they do the hard work required when no one’s watching? That was Wayne. He was on no one’s draft list at the time. But when I moved to the NHL I wasn’t leaving him behind.”

That move happened in 2007, when the Los Angeles Kings first hired Futa as the team’s co-director of amateur scouting. He quickly proved his mettle. Not only did Futa bring in Simmonds, drafted by the Los Angeles Kings in the second round of the 2007 NHL Entry Draft as the 61st overall pick, he also recruited Kyle Clifford, Dwight King, Jordan Nolan, Tyler Toffoli, Slava Voynov and Drew Doughty, key players who helped the Kings win the Stanley Cup in 2012.

“Don Cherry took to calling the L.A. Kings the best OHL all-star team,” Futa says. “We got the accolades but at the same time this wasn’t a unilateral decision. I suggested the players but the management had to agree on them.”

Still, there was push back.

“I remember people questioning Doughty’s commitment to fitness,” says Futa, smiling with the satisfaction of one of who gets to say I told you so. “But today he’s arguably the best hockey player in the world.”

In 2014, some of Futa’s picks helped the Kings win a second

cup. Perhaps as a thank you, that same year, the team named him VP of hockey operations and director of player personnel, a step up the corporate ladder.

Last April, the Kings again promoted Futa, this time to assistant general manager, an important prerequisite to someday becoming a GM of an NHL team in the future, which is the top of the hockey pyramid.

Several teams have already come calling. They include the Vancouver Canucks, the Buffalo Sabres, the Toronto Maple Leafs and, more recently (and assertively, as Sportsnet, TSN and “Hockey Night in Canada” extensively reported in March), the Carolina Hurricanes. Bets are on that Futa will soon hold sway over his own hockey universe.

After having earned a place on *Sports Illustrated*’s Stealth List in 2011, Futa is an industry secret no more.

“He’s put his time in to get to that point where he’s mentioned in those circles,” says Maguire, observing his former teammate at York with discernible pride. “He’s really prepared himself for this – it’s just a matter of time before he becomes a GM, in my opinion.”

Still, Futa is in no rush to change teams.

He loves his Kings, and his new home on the Pacific coast overlooking Manhattan Beach. He loves the players he has nurtured, the colleagues he has befriended and the fact that on the occasions when Bobby Orr has reason to call him on the phone he gets all goosebumpy while forcing himself not to gush. Futa is and will always be a true hockey fan. He is planning his next move carefully.

“It’s like being traded. You have to make sure it’s the right place for you, for your family. It’s all got to work.

“Because your ultimate goal,” he says, “is to win.” ●

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# Classes



FRANCISCO ALVAREZ (BFA '78, MBA '90)

## 1975

### WOOTEN, ANNE (BA)

A certified corporate etiquette and international protocol consultant, Anne received her training and certification from the Protocol School of Washington. Her unique approach to teaching stems from a three-decade career in the entertainment industry. Anne has directed and coached internationally known theatre, film and television performers and brings her attention to detail to her services as a business image consultant.

## 1978

### ALVAREZ, FRANCISCO

(BFA, MBA '90)

With over 25 years in the culture sector, Francisco has worked as a creative administrator in numerous cultural organizations and government and spent over 14 years at the Royal Ontario Museum in varying roles before joining Heritage Toronto as

executive director in 2015. Currently the Dorene and Peter Milligan Executive Director, Galleries, at OCAD University, Francisco oversees the institution's nine art galleries and permanent collection. He is also a principal at Mr. Pink Art Consultants — a high-end art consultant firm creating curated art and accessories collections for commercial and private clients. Dedicated to volunteerism, he has served as co-founder and board chair of the Pan American Food and Music Festival, co-chair of Pride Toronto and co-chair of Dancers for Life, among others. Francisco is a co-founder of the Inside Out film festival, ArtsXplosion Cultural Society and Nuit Rose, and sits on the City of Toronto's Artistic Advisory Committee for Nuit Blanche. A former dancer with Dancemakers, a contemporary dance company founded at York in the 1970s, the native of Colombia was recognized in 2012 as one of the Ten Most Influential Hispanics in Canada by the International Languages Academy of Canada. In 2014, Francisco received the Person of the Year award from INSPIRE, a local organization honouring outstanding achievement in the LGBTQ community of Greater Toronto.



### HYAMS ROMOFF, AUDREY (BA '85)

Five short years after graduating from York University, Audrey launched OverCat Communications, a Toronto-based public relations agency that has created campaigns for a wide range of clients and celebrities including Shoppers Drug Mart, Estée Lauder, Victoria's Secret, Crate&Barrel, Jennifer Lopez, Sarah Jessica Parker, Céline Dion, Victoria Beckham and Revlon. Named a top PR executive for seven consecutive years by *Cosmetics* magazine, in 2012 Audrey was nominated for PR Professional of the Year by BizBash, a leading industry resource, in their annual Readers' Choice Awards.

## 1980

### MCVEY, MICHAEL

(BA, BEd, BA '85, BEd '87)

A professor of educational technology at Eastern Michigan University, Michael was recently elected to serve a three-year term on the Board of Directors of the International Society for Technology in Education — a passionate community of global educators who believe in the power of technology to transform teaching and learning, accelerate innovation and solve tough problems in education. An educator with over 35 years of experience, he began his career shortly after graduating from York University, teaching high school special education and English literature. After teaching in Japan from 1991-92 with the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, he relocated to Tucson, Ariz., where he taught special education and was recognized for creating the first school-based website in Arizona, one of the first district sites in the United States. After publishing his book, *Meeting the Internet Challenge*, Michael was invited to teach at the University of Arizona. He went on to complete his doctorate in educational leadership through Northern Arizona University and became a tenured professor at Eastern Michigan University. He currently lives in Saline, Mich., with his wife, Christen, a floral designer and city council member, and together they have a blended family that includes three daughters.

## 1983

### ALOFS, PAUL (MBA)

In April, Paul retired from his 14-year



### PONE, ANDRIS (MBA '03)

A bestselling author, Andris published his second book, *Attract: Power Up Your One-of-a-Kind Personal Brand*, in 2017. He is the go-to branding expert for CBC's "The National," CBC Radio One and the *National Post*, and has made multiple appearances on the Business News Network. A sought-after speaker, he has given keynotes across North America to Starbucks, Home Depot, Unisource, and some of the world's largest banks and insurance companies. Andris is president of Coin Branding based in Toronto. He regularly returns to Schulich to lecture MBAs and undergrads on personal branding and how to articulate their unique gifts.

post as CEO of the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation. During his tenure at one of the world's top five cancer centres, he raised \$1.2 billion in net fundraising. Paul is the bestselling author of *Passion Capital: The World's Most Valuable Asset* (2013) and continues to speak frequently on the

subject of how to build long-term success for your career, company or cause. Recognized in 1995 as one of Canada's Top 40 Under 40 business leaders when president of HMV Canada, Paul currently serves on the Dean's Advisory Council for the Schulich School of Business.

## 1998

### CLARKE, ANITA (BSc)

Known online as Geeki Girl, Anita, a self-described computer nerd with a fashion twist and the creator of the award-winning I Want – I Got style blog, has combined her 14 years in QA



# Classes

and 10-plus years as a prolific fashion blogger into her dream job as an engineering storyteller (engineering communications) at Shopify — a Canadian e-commerce platform company. In her new role, Anita tells and facilitates the creation of stories about Shopify's engineering team to the world.

**FRESCURA, ALEX** (BA, BEd '02)  
From a family of academics, Alex is currently the director of admissions and athletics at St. Michael's College School in Toronto, while his wife, **ROSE** (BEd '03), is the department head of physical and health education at St. Brother André Catholic High School in Markham, Ont. Their five-year-old daughter, Lia, is a senior kindergarten student with the gift for language inherited from her late grandmother Dr. Marinella Frescur — a former faculty member in York University's Department of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics from 1976 to 2010. Both Alex and Rose fondly remember their years working with the University's athletic teams in the York University Athletic Therapy Certificate program.

## 1999

**FARNSWORTH, VANESSA** (BA)  
A science journalist, former horticulturist and longtime resident of the British Columbia interior, Vanessa's articles

and columns have appeared in many regional and national publications, including *Canadian Gardening* and *Canadian Living*. She is best known for her memoir, *Rain on a Distant Roof: A Personal Journey Through Lyme Disease in Canada* (2013), which shone a spotlight on a looming public health crisis. Her latest book, the short story collection *The Things She'll Be Leaving Behind* (2018), is a darkly humorous take on women trying to survive in often inexplicable circumstances. Vanessa is currently president of the BC Interior chapter of the Professional Writers Association of Canada.

**SLIND, DARREN** (MBA)  
After successfully leading the Canadian and Latin American region for the J.D. Power global market research company as senior director since 2011, in October 2017 Darren was promoted to vice-president, South Asia, ASEAN and Oceania to lead J.D. Power in Asia Pacific. Darren recently relocated from Toronto to Singapore. In his new role he will lead a team of 90 associates across the region serving automotive clients in 10 markets including India, Thailand and Australia.

## 2014

**TREMBLAY, DANIELLE** (BA)  
Danielle was recently promoted to a

full-time position with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Simcoe County as a mental health and addictions counsellor with Crisis Services. Founded in 1918, CMHA is one of the oldest voluntary organizations in Canada, providing services and supports to more than 1.3 million Canadians through the combined efforts of more than 11,000 volunteers and staff across Canada in over 330 communities.

## IN MEMORIAM

**BRADDEN (NÉE KNAFELC), ANDREA** (BA '08)  
The 33-year-old Glendon alumna and Woodbridge, Ont., resident was tragically killed in the April 23 van attack on Yonge Street in Toronto. A member of the Slovenian Roman Catholic church in Etobicoke, Ont., Andrea earned a bachelor of arts in psychology from Glendon in 2008. After graduation, she began her career at MedHunters, moved on to TGO Consulting and was working as an account executive at IT research consultancy Gartner Canada's Toronto office at the time of her passing.

**COLES, DON**  
The long-serving faculty member and professor emeritus died on Nov. 29, 2017 at the age of 90, with his family

by his side. A celebrated poet, novelist and teacher, Don served as a professor in humanities and creative writing. Director of the Creative Writing program at York University, he was with the University for 30 years. Don also spent 10 years teaching at the Banff Centre for the Arts, where he served as senior poetry editor from 1984 to 1994. During his lifetime, Don published 14 books of poetry, a novel and memoirs, winning him the Governor General's Literary Award in 1993 and the Trillium Book Award in 2000. His novel, *Doctor Bloom's Story*, was a finalist for a Toronto Book Award in 2005. His legacy extends to having nurtured other Canadian writers, including Giller Prize winner Michael Redhill and hockey legend Ken Dryden.

**CROSS, MARK** (BA '16)  
The York University alumnus died suddenly and tragically on April 6, in the fatal bus crash involving the Humboldt Broncos of the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League. An assistant coach with the Broncos at the time of his passing, Mark had been an assistant captain during his time at York and the team MVP in his fifth and final season in 2015-16. Remembered as a ferocious competitor and mentor who had a vibrant approach to life, he spent five seasons with the Lions from 2011-16.



## Noteworthy

### Audio is the New Black

How a York grad is giving beauty a voice

BY KISHA POWELL  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
MAX ABADIAN

**CARLENE HIGGINS** (BES '00) is one part of the fierce duo behind "Breaking Beauty," a year-old podcast telling the stories of the industry's most iconic brands, straight from the mouths of their founders. Currently garnering massive attention from the likes of *Refinery29*, *Elle*, *Coveteur*, *Grazia UK* and *Glamour UK*, the podcast has already racked up close to 100,000 downloads by featuring beauty world heavyweights such as Glossier's Emily Weiss, Tiffany Masterson of Sephora's fastest growing skincare line Drunk Elephant and Kate Ross LeBlanc of Saje Natural Wellness. "I love to shine a light on these risk-takers who are winning with their genius idea," Higgins shares. "Their stories are always inspiring."

Higgins graduated from York magna cum laude with a bachelor in environmental studies and a minor in English and immediately started working in environmental advocacy. But she realized quickly it wasn't the field for her. Somewhat accidentally, she fell into magazines (she started at *Salon Magazine* before landing at *Flare*, one of Canada's top fashion glossies) and knew she was in the right place.

Working her way up at *Flare* to become the publication's fashion and beauty director, Higgins spent over 15 years on

the beauty beat before launching her podcast — the first of its kind in Canada — in 2017 after the publication she worked at ceased printing and she was left pondering her next move. While many would be content with a successful and growing podcast, Higgins is not.

Earlier this year, she launched TheBeholdr.com, a website covering style, self-image and "life stuff" for modern women over 35. In an industry that tends to cater to a younger crowd, *Beholdr* is ushering in a new way of addressing mature women, helping bring a voice to a largely ignored group.

Of her time at York she says, "It was a very conscious choice for me to go to an urban university that had a diverse student population. I'm always looking at how things are interconnected and my hope is that if/when my site becomes really successful that we will have a strong philanthropic arm that gives back to our community and planet."

Higgins lives in Toronto. When not recording episodes for "Breaking Beauty" or working on *Beholdr*, she is a freelance beauty and style writer (*Coveteur*, *Elle Canada*, *The Kit*) and a self-described #momboss who is obsessed with the wide, wild world of entrepreneurship. ●

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# Noteworthy



## Wearable Art

A philosophy student turned photographer creates prints from imagery collected on his world travels

BY DEIRDRE KELLY

**W**HEN Michael Day (BA '74) studied English and philosophy at York in the mid-1970s, it was a heady time – “highlighted by the resignation of Richard Nixon, Kissinger, the Beach Boys, striped shirts and long hair,” reminisces the Toronto native who is today a professional photographer and a

partner in the Suzi Roher Accessories company, which he helped found.

Led by his wife, the designer Suzi Roher, the brand is popular with Sarah Jessica Parker, Joni Mitchell, Gloria Steinem, Heidi Klum and the Duchess of Cambridge, among other stylish women who have been photographed wearing the brand’s handcrafted belts.

Artisanal silk scarves, added to the family-run business 15 years ago,

feature prints and imagery created by Day, who is now 65, from some of his photographs of art works in galleries around the world.

Consumer demand has prompted him to frame some of the prints as original works of art. They will be for sale at the first-ever Suzi Roher Accessories flagship store on Toronto’s Queen Street West (near Trinity Bellwoods Park), which opened in June. ●

## Eco Warrior

Plastic is not fantastic, as this wildlife authority can tell you

BY DEIRDRE KELLY

**T**HIS SUMMER, while many of us are jumping in Canadian lakes to cool off from the scorching heat, Megan Leslie (BA '03) will instead be scouring the shorelines to haul away garbage polluting the country’s waterways and related ecosystems.

Appointed president and CEO of the WWF-Canada (formerly World Wildlife Fund) last December, Leslie is the organization’s former vice-president of ocean conservation and a former parliamentarian who served as environment critic for the New Democratic Party of Canada. She is responsible for introducing the recent motion to add microbeads to the Canadian Environmental Protection Act’s list of toxic substances.

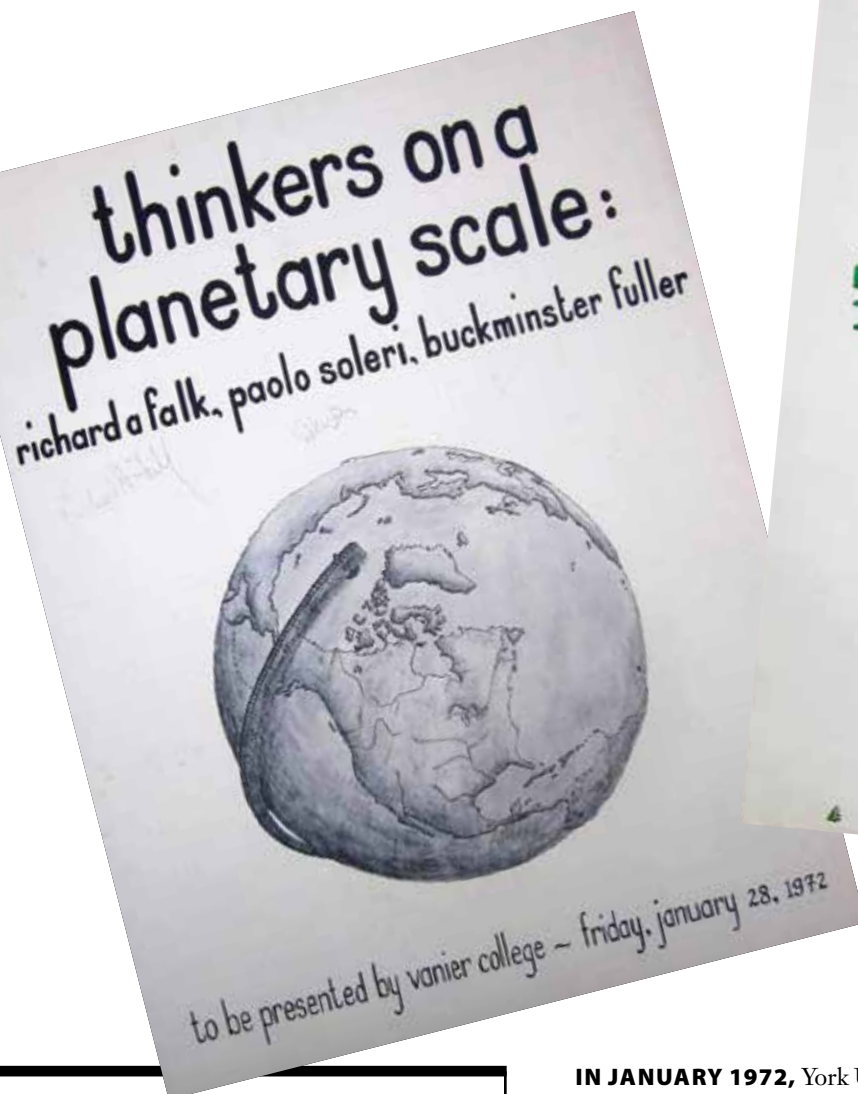
Single-use plastics, like disposable plastic straws, are among her biggest concerns right now, and by helping to steer the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup, an initiative jointly run by WWF-Canada and Ocean Wise, a not-for-profit with thousands of locations across Canada, she hopes to highlight how even a small non-recyclable can wreak enormous damage on the increasingly fragile world of nature.

“Microplastics, those invisible remnants of things such as plastic bags, synthetic clothing and bottles, are now being found in our waters at an alarming rate,” says the Kirkland Lake, Ont., native who studied history and social and political thought at York University, before earning a law degree at Dalhousie University in 2004.

“Wildlife like fish, birds and turtles often mistake microplastics for food and can become entangled in larger plastics. Every piece of garbage we remove from our shorelines is one less piece that can harm wildlife.”

*If you want to join or host a Shoreline Cleanup this summer, or just want more information, visit [shorelinecleanup.ca](http://shorelinecleanup.ca)* ●





## Flashback

**Have a great photo from your days at York?**

Email us at [magnotes@yorku.ca](mailto:magnotes@yorku.ca)

**IN JANUARY 1972**, York University hosted a meeting that brought together three of the era's greatest minds to converse in the same room: Richard A. Falk, an American professor of international law at Princeton University; Paolo Soleri, the Italian-American architect and urban visionary best known for his theory of "arcology" – a combination of architecture and ecology – and Buckminster Fuller, the brilliant Massachusetts-born systems analyst, author and inventor (he created the geodesic dome that crowned the USA Pavilion at Expo 67) who used science to create a more sustainable planet and for the betterment of humanity.

The symposium, which took place at Vanier College, was not only organized by the students, they promoted it using their own creativity. One of them was Shelley Freeman (BA Hons. '74), then a French literature student volunteering to do layout for the *Vandoo*, Vanier College's newspaper. She created an original poster for this once-in-a-lifetime campus event, which she then had autographed by all three visiting geniuses. "I still have it," says Freeman, today a resident of Montreal where she is a practising artist. "Over time, Bucky Fuller's signature has faded, but it is still visible." Also in 1972, students from all York residences who were concerned about the future of the environment participated in Tree Day, an event that involved planting trees in a small woodlot adjacent to Founders College. Freeman made the poster for that event, too. "I had to hand paint several copies," she recalls, "because there was no money for printing." ●

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