

# The York University Magazine

Fall 2017

# Taking Office

Rhonda Lenton, respected sociologist,  
becomes York's eighth president



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The  
**York University  
Magazine**

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# THE PRESIDENT



RHONDA LENTON  
PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR

**THERE CAN BE NO GREATER HONOUR** than serving York's dynamic and diverse community of students, staff, faculty and alumni as your new president and vice-chancellor. York University is fundamentally committed to equity and social justice, and to bringing our scholarly, research and creative activities to bear in addressing the world's biggest challenges. During my 15 years at York, I have seen first-hand how our standing as a progressive, comprehensive research university is closely tied to our alumni community. You embody the best of the University and are our ambassadors locally, nationally and globally.

Many of you remain engaged with York following graduation, whether through mentoring graduate and undergraduate students, participating as guest speakers or panel members, or helping students better understand the myriad career paths available to them upon graduation. As alumni, you are an important gateway to the world, providing our students access to diverse experiential education opportunities through community-based learning, community service learning, internships and co-ops. And through your donations, both large and small, you provide vital support to advance our shared goals and aspirations for the future, ensuring the University's continued development and growth.

It is a point of pride for me and for all of us at the University that the York family today includes more than 300,000 alumni living and working all over the world. One of my priorities is to strengthen and improve our connectedness with alumni. This includes building stronger lifelong relationships through the facilitation of social and professional networks, and by providing preferential access to on-campus expertise and facilities and negotiated benefits with third-party suppliers. Connectedness is also about creating and fostering dialogue, so that every voice is valued and heard. I look forward to hearing from you about your successes, and sharing with you the University's achievements, initiatives and plans for the future. By staying connected, we will ensure that our alumni continue to shape York's future, just as they have helped to define our past.

The challenges of today's unsettled world remind us that openness and inclusion, rather than exclusivity, must be the emerging model of the 21st century. I look forward to opportunities in upcoming editions of *The York University Magazine* to speak to the themes that I believe will be essential to continuing to grow York's reputation for excellence, engagement and impact. I hope to see you on campus or at alumni events, and I encourage you to connect with me on social media @YorkUPresident or by email at president@yorku.ca

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

# EDITOR'S NOTES

## Goodbye to All That

**WHEN I FIRST ARRIVED AT YORK** it was – technically – 1973, the result of some English award or other in Grade 13 (when that existed). There wasn't much here on campus then. The Ross and Fine Arts Building. The various colleges in "complex one" and "complex two." There were a lot of fields and grass, and as you took the bus in along Steeles Avenue from Finch Station, you could see farms and sheep and cows and an amazing octagonal wooden barn at the intersection of Dufferin Street. To get downtown by transit took two hours.

York was a concrete oasis of higher ed awash in a sea of abandoned farmlands. Our day-long poetry seminar of 1973 took place in a kind of a sunken living room right outside the dean of fine arts's office. It was completely carpeted in purple shag and known locally as the "purple passion pit." The pit still exists, but the shag is long gone.

I remember meeting a young woman there. I asked her, "Oh, are you a poet?"

"I am a poetess," she replied, with an emphasis on the "ess." That was my first introduction to higher learning.

Later, under the tutelage of bona fide writers like Irving Layton and Miriam Waddington at York, I found that one indeed could become a poet if one had the will and the talent and the devotion. Other equally amazing English professors followed from 1974 until 1978, when I graduated and headed for U of T.

Cut to 1985. Much to my amazement, I found myself abandoning

a job in the book publishing world for writing, when I landed a position in York's communications department. I had replied to an ad for an "Editor 1" in the *Globe and Mail* (starting salary: \$21K). More than 250 people besides me also did, my then boss told me (we were still feeling the results of a recession). Later, I became editor of York's *Alumni News*, the distant precursor to what you're reading now.

It wasn't too long before we managed to turn *Alumni News*, which was newsprint, into more of a magazine, with features, departments, class notes etc. Then, in the early 1990s, we went glossy. The magazine was redesigned and renamed *Profiles*.

*Profiles* flourished for a while, but with a regime change we ceased publication and instead put out *Universe* (a newsprint broadsheet) once a month for a year, on-campus only. By the next year it was decided we needed an external magazine (again!), and so *YorkU* was born. After a decade of *YorkU*, we re-imagined it into its present form as *The York University Magazine*. We now publish three times per year: two web-only issues and one in print and web. The Fall 2017 issue marks the debut of our new digital magazine. And my last as editor.

I've met and worked with dozens of interesting people over the years in the process of putting the magazine together, but now it's time to bid the journalistic world goodbye and make room for other passions. None of which involve purple shag.

— MICHAEL TODD

## The York University Magazine

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# View

OUTLOOK & IDEAS



## Mirror Image

*Pluto's ice ridges may be similar to Earth's*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK

A

**NEW STUDY** by Lassonde School of Engineering Professor John Moores has found evidence that snow and ice features previously only observed on Earth have been spotted on Pluto.

Penitentes are bowl-shaped depressions formed by erosion, with spires around the edges that measure several metres high. They are found at high altitudes on Earth. Moores's groundbreaking research, done in collaboration with NASA and Johns Hopkins University, indicates that these icy features may also exist on other planets where environmental conditions are similar to ours.

"The identification of the ridges of Pluto's Tartarus Dorsa as penitentes suggests the presence of an atmosphere is necessary for the formation of penitentes, which would explain why they have not previously been seen on other airless icy satellites or dwarf planets," says Moores. "Exotic differences in the environment give rise to features with very different scales. This test of our terrestrial models for penitentes suggests we may find these features elsewhere in the solar system, and in other solar systems where the conditions are right."

Moores and his colleagues compared their model to ridges on Pluto imaged by the New Horizons spacecraft in 2015. Pluto's ridges are much larger – 500 metres tall and separated by three to five kilometres – compared to their metre-sized cousins on Earth.

Moores says Pluto's penitentes' gargantuan size is predicted by the same theory that explains the formation of these features on Earth. Researchers were able to match the size and separation, the direction of the ridges, as well as their age – all of which was evidence to support their identification as penitentes, he says.

Although Pluto's environment is very different from Earth's, Moores says the same laws of nature apply.

Both NASA and Johns Hopkins University were instrumental in the collaboration that led to this new finding. Both provided background information on Pluto's atmosphere using a model similar to what meteorologists use to forecast weather on Earth. This was one of the key ingredients in Moores's own model of the penitentes, without which they would not have been discovered. ●



## Our Plastic Brains

*How our brain adapts to sensory loss – even of an eye*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON

**N**EW FINDINGS BY YORK researchers indicate that people with early vision loss exhibit a larger volume in the auditory parts of the brain, as well as evidence of cross-modal plasticity, compared to those with typical sight. (Cross-modal plasticity is defined as the adaptive reorganization of the brain's neurons to integrate the function of two or more sensory systems.)

The study was led by PhD student Stefania Moro. Along with Professor Jennifer Steeves and PhD candidate Larissa McKeton, she looked for evidence of the brain's multi-sensory plasticity in people with only one eye.

The team studied a unique group of patients who had early visual deprivation in order to examine how the brain

develops after the loss of an eye. The patients in the study had cancer of the retina that was diagnosed between birth and the first few years of life.

"The study allowed us to look at how changes in sensory input to the brain during development affects the maturation of the sensory structures of the brain," says Steeves, a professor of psychology and biology. "We previously studied auditory function in those with vision loss and found that it's good or sometimes better than expected in the brain hemisphere that supports language and other auditory functions."

The researchers found that those patients who had more plasticity in their visual system also had more plasticity in their auditory system. ●



## Fish Out of Water

York study finds native walleye at risk

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS ROBINSON

**T**HE WALLEYE (also known as pickerel) is one of Ontario's most popular recreational and commercial fish. Now it may be at risk of disappearing because of predatory and invasive smallmouth bass moving into Ontario lakes, a recent York study has found.

Climate change is warming Ontario's lake waters. Walleye populations are declining as a result, because of reduced suitable habitat and competition from invading smallmouth bass. These findings, by biology Professor Sapna Sharma's recent master's student Thomas Van Zuiden, have large implications.

"Walleye play an important role in lake ecosystem dynamics as top predators, and are also a popular angling target for commercial and recreational fisheries," says Van Zuiden.

Van Zuiden and Sharma analyzed data from 722 Ontario lakes and found that when walleye and smallmouth bass are living in the same lakes there are three times fewer walleye. The York researchers predict that the co-occurrence of the two fish species may increase as much as 332 per cent by 2070, significantly increasing the vulnerability of walleye populations across the province.

"The future is looking dim for walleye in Ontario," says Sharma. "Our study illustrates the importance of including multiple environmental stressors in statistical models when attempting to understand changes in biodiversity." ●

Scat-sniffing dogs reveal new details about the lives of endangered lizards

# Nose to the Ground

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MCKENZIE JAMES



**O**NE INTREPID YORK RESEARCHER is taking a rather novel approach to help suss out details about the lives of endangered blunt-nosed leopard lizards. Instead of training dogs to find explosives, lost people or weapons, biology PhD student Alex Filazzola has taught them to detect the scat of leopard lizards.

The dogs, he says, have helped him discover not only the scat, but also the importance of the shrubs the lizards use, which are vital to preserving the endangered reptile in the face of climate change. “The loss of these lizards would have a cascade effect on other species,” notes Filazzola, lead researcher on the project.

His research team geotagged 700 *Ephedra californica* shrubs (favoured by the lizards) in the Panoche Hills Management Area in San Joaquin Valley, Calif. Then, two scat detection dogs searched for lizard scat over a two-year period. In one year, due to drought, lizard scat was found more frequently beneath the shrubs. The shrubs proved instrumental in providing critical microclimates for the lizards. The shade helped them regulate their body temperature in extreme heat and provided protection from predators. The lizards were also found to use rodent burrows (often found under the shrubs) to escape predators.

“As the climate warms and lizards find it more difficult to regulate their body temperature, our findings [about the relationship between the lizards and specific shrubs] could help preserve the blunt-nosed leopard lizard not only in California, but globally as well,” says Filazzola. “This demonstrates how much many animals rely on plants for survival, and that goes beyond simply eating them [for nutrition]. Positive plant-animal interactions could further support animal populations that are already threatened.”

Leopard lizards were once abundant in the San Joaquin Valley, but agriculture and industrialization have reduced their range by approximately 85 per cent. Filazzola’s study has revealed that environmental management techniques employed over the past 50 years to aid the lizards have done little to change their endangered status. ●

## ALL IN A DAY'S WORK:

1. A blunt-nosed leopard lizard sunning itself on a typical warm day
2. Tia, one of the scat-sniffing dogs from Working Dogs for Conservation, excited to start the day
3. Alex Filazzola during peak flowering in a well-known blunt-nosed leopard lizard habitat, the Carrizo Plain in California
4. Working Dogs for Conservation in action searching desert shrubs for blunt-nosed leopard lizard scat. Pictured are Orbee (dog) and Debbie Woollet (handler)





# Taking Office

*Rhonda Lenton, respected sociologist,  
becomes York's eighth president*

**R**HONDA LENTON became York University's eighth president and vice-chancellor on July 1. Like many at York, Lenton was a first-generation university student. A highly respected sociologist, she has taught, researched and published broadly in the areas of family violence, feminist movements in academia, Internet dating and, more recently, higher education. Previously, she served as dean of York's Atkinson Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, vice-provost academic, and vice-president academic and provost. *The York University Magazine* spoke with President Lenton recently about her background, her mentors and her vision for the University.

**THE MAGAZINE:** Please tell our readers a little about yourself. What are your core values and how do you think they help shape how you lead?

**LENTON:** First of all, let me say how much I appreciate this opportunity to speak to *The York University Magazine's* alumni readers about the tremendous opportunities that await York University. From attracting the best students,



faculty and staff, to building a new Markham Centre campus and improved transit with the opening of the new subway later this year, there is no question that York is definitely on a trajectory for significant growth and success.

I think my primary motivation for letting my name stand for president was how much I believe in the vision of York University. York has an exciting story to tell, and it is precisely the kind of university that is needed in a global knowledge economy for the 21st century. I am humbled and honoured to have been appointed president, and excited to be taking on this important role and for the opportunity to continue to advance the University and support our undergraduate and graduate students, our faculty, staff, alumni, and external partners and communities.

I was born in Winnipeg, one of five siblings – just one boy, all the rest are girls and I am a twin. I grew up in a hard-working family with a deep, first-hand understanding of the importance of strong social values. The one value that is probably the most important to me is integrity. I would also say that my personal values are very much aligned with York's values as laid out in the University's Academic Plan: a commitment to excellence, social justice, inclusivity and diversity, as well as being bold and progressive in our thinking.

My own background is in sociology. I left Winnipeg to do my PhD at University of Toronto. I love Toronto and I truly appreciate the opportunities I enjoyed because I went to university. My own research is in the areas of gender, family conflict, sexual harassment, research methods and more recently, higher education – and I have a profound appreciation for how university research contributes to city building, public policy development and the betterment of society.

**THE MAGAZINE:** As a first-generation student, like many of York's students, how do you think that experience helps you now as York's president?

**LENTON:** Neither of my parents had the opportunity to go to university. From very early on we heard about the importance of higher education from our parents. I think they

really appreciated and understood what they missed. As a first-generation university student, I came to understand the value of higher education and the opportunities it created for me. That's why I have always been attracted to York's strong commitment to access, to equity and social justice, and why I am passionate about increasing access to postsecondary education.

The fact that I was a first-generation university student and that all three of my daughters were able to go to university have, together, shaped how I think about higher education, how I interact

with students, and my understanding of the importance of always thinking about what we are doing from the student perspective. It has also impacted how I think about the twin contributions of not only preparing the next generation of graduates who will assume responsibility for society, but also amplifying the societal impact of our research. I've seen first-hand what education can do, not only in changing one's own circumstances, but, more broadly, the fundamental importance of higher education for the well-being of society.

**THE MAGAZINE:** Who were your mentors or the leaders who inspired your academic and administrative journey? What, in particular, did you admire most about them?

**LENTON:** I try to learn from everyone with whom I interact. But if I were to focus on who helped to shape my approach to higher education, I would have to say that it was the feminist leaders of the day.

My first job was in 1986, when women's study programs were being formed in universities and were starting to take off. There was a whole cadre of feminists, almost too many to name, whom I truly admired: Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir, Bell Hooks, my own PhD thesis supervisor Margrit Eichler and others. I would also add to that list my own mother. Although she didn't go to university, at her core, she is a feminist.

All of these women influenced the kind of research I do, my thinking about how questions get defined by society, the intersection between class, race and gender. So, they were all

very influential, not just for my own research, but how I approach my administrative role as well – always determining whether or not you are dealing with a problem as an outsider or insider; always examining the power dynamics that are functioning in society, in a university. They have really been relevant for everything I do.

**THE MAGAZINE:** York is widely recognized as a progressive university. What does that mean to you? What is your vision for York University?

**LENTON:** York's progressiveness is one of the most compelling features about the University. York is committed to bridging and linking the accessibility agenda with excellence and impact. That, in turn, has helped to shape the four pillars that I believe are fundamental to successfully realizing my vision for York. For a university to have maximum influence in society, and to fully realize the potential that higher education offers society, it must be able to bring together access, connectedness, excellence and impact.

And York does that so well. We already have a distinct identity, captured in our mission statement, which reflects our longstanding commitment to social justice. York was working in the areas of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research and programs long before they became popular terms elsewhere. Now, it's accepted in higher education just how important it is to look at complex problems from different, diverse perspectives. But it was York that led the field.

Access to education underpins York's priorities in our planning documents, and I believe a continued commitment to accessibility is essential in a global knowledge economy where postsecondary education is necessary for an increasing proportion of careers. We must continue to do whatever we can to remove the barriers for all eligible students seeking higher education.

York is the only university of its size that provides a diverse student population broad access to a research-intensive, high-quality learning experience, and we remain committed to ensuring that all students can realize their full potential and contribute to society. And the proof is that York



**MEET THE PRESIDENT:** Rhonda Lenton snaps a photo with York students

has hundreds of thousands of graduates whose impact is reverberating far beyond our campuses. We are a multicultural university that is committed to working with our local communities, but we also have a strong international presence, as

our students and faculty increasingly seek out international experiences and partnerships, and as we continue to attract ever-increasing numbers of students from around the world.

A second central goal of my presidency is to grow and enhance York's connectedness. I see the next five years as an opportunity to strengthen and improve how we connect with one another as a community, both on and off our campuses, locally and globally. This means improving connectedness with our students and faculty as well as the staff who support our academic mission. It means connecting students with their learning by providing greater opportunities for self-directed and inquiry-based learning, and enhanced academic supports and services. It means continuing to build local, national and international research networks.

I see our connectedness as an emerging – and quite compelling – theme in York's story, central to our vision as an engaged university. The new Markham Centre campus is an excellent example. We are already better connected to York Region because of it, and this will only be truer when the doors open in 2021. Working with our partners in Markham, York Region, Seneca, and others in the GTA and internationally, we will strengthen experiential education opportunities for our students, advance the comprehensiveness of the programs we offer and further strengthen our research partnerships. The two new subway stations on our Keele campus will enhance the interconnectedness between York and the GTA. With all the new development in this region, York will no longer be considered "uptown," but will now be "mid-town" – at the centre of the GTA. And the partial French designation of our Glendon College connects that campus even more strongly to the Franco-Ontarian community – another differentiating strength for York and for the province.

My third goal is to continue to increase excellence in everything we do. If we can successfully implement



**ALL ABOARD:** York's two new subway stations will enhance the interconnectedness between York and the GTA

broad-ranging program quality initiatives, we can expect an increasing number of our programs across all our Faculties to be ranked in the top 100. This goal necessitates that we invest in our well-established programs in the arts, humanities and social sciences while we continue to expand science, health and professional programs.

Globalization and technology have had a significant impact on higher education and there are tremendous opportunities for York to leverage emerging opportunities, including thinking through how we combine experiential education and technology-enhanced learning, advance our internationalization strategy and increase research activities for our students. I also want to support the amplification of our scholarly activities. In pursuing these goals, we will have enhanced our impact – locally and around the world, through the graduates we produce and the research and creative activities we undertake – making a significant impact on the social, economic, cultural and overall well-being of the communities we serve. Highlighting and intensifying our impact as a leading institution of higher education is my fourth goal.

So, building on York's foundation as a progressive university, my primary focus going forward will be in these four key areas of access, connectedness, excellence and impact – continuing to enrich York's reputation and leadership as a postsecondary education institution from which our communities draw strength.

**THE MAGAZINE:** What do you think are the keys to being able to successfully translate your vision for York's future into actions?

**LENTON:** I think it is significant that enabling our plan is one of the core priorities identified in the University Academic Plan. Because to be successful you need to think long and hard about how you are actually going to implement the plan.

First and foremost, we need to improve the engagement of our entire community, not just the internal York community, but equally important is the engagement of the broader community with whom we work – community partners and our alumni, who are both hugely important in these endeavours.

I also believe that collegial governance and transparency are very important. It is a goal I have over my term to improve and find new ways to reach out to the entire community so that everyone feels that

we are partners in shaping York's future.

It is important to point out that, generally speaking in Ontario at the moment, there is a great deal of discussion about whether or not universities should be either primarily undergraduate universities or research universities. In my view, York really sits at the front of the pack in terms of understanding that in a global knowledge economy you need to bring both together. Because those students who are going to be successful in the 21st century need access to both scholarship and research so they can get the necessary skills they need. And here, again, this is where I think York is quite distinct.

York University is also one of the most diverse universities in Canada, and our diversity is one of our greatest strengths. But we need to continue to build and nurture it. As such, our responsibility as a publicly funded institution of higher learning is to ensure that all students, staff and faculty who come to work and to learn can do so in a respectful learning and work environment, free from discrimination of any kind.

York represents Toronto – and the GTA more broadly – so well in terms of its multiculturalism and its diversity. While York's commitment to inclusion is there, I think it's an area where we still need to do better. It's challenging because a commitment to inclusion as well as diversity means that you want to be sure that we are protecting academic freedom while also creating an environment where everyone feels empowered to present their views. Universities have an obligation to provide safe spaces for discussions on difficult topics.

**THE MAGAZINE:** Many are saying that York seems to have turned the corner in terms of changing public perception of its reputation. Do you think that's true? And, if so, why?

**LENTON:** I do feel that York has turned the corner over the last five to ten years. I think there are a number of factors that have contributed to that. Our strong planning culture is

essential. While difficult in some respects, the willingness of the community to take on a comprehensive review in 2014 provided an opportunity to look at our data in a systematic way and to reflect on York's challenges and opportunities for strengthening the University going forward.

Coming out of that process, a number of programs have undertaken new initiatives. We have already launched and agreed to an expanded commitment to experiential education opportunities for all of our students, including enhanced learning technology, as well as other initiatives aimed at enhancing student advising, research amplification and the campus experience.

While we are always thinking about how and where we can improve, recent data is providing hard evidence that York is on a positive reputational trajectory, including the positive momentum as future students' first-choice university. Applications and registrations are up overall, including domestic and international students. In fact, York was one of a very few universities that saw an increase in student applications that included 24 per cent of first-generation students and the highest percentage of college transfers in Ontario at 17 per cent.

We have also seen an increase in research scholarship and creative activities. York was one of only 13 universities in the country that received an unprecedented \$120 million from the Canada First Research Excellence Fund to become a world leader in vision research (VISTA). We have improved student persistence, and student satisfaction has improved, and the number of York programs in the top 100 is increasing. These are just a few of the success measures that indicate York has turned the corner and is now in a position to fully realize the vision we have for ourselves.

**THE MAGAZINE:** What do you think are the biggest challenges facing students today, York University and Ontario's postsecondary education?

**LENTON:** I think a common theme facing students, universities and postsecondary education as a whole, is the pace of change – in communications, transportation and, particularly, technology. Rapid changes in technology impact not just how we function as a university ourselves, but also how we teach. It also has direct implications for students because of rapidly changing and new careers. A common expression now is that the careers that graduates need to be eligible for 10 years from now either don't exist yet, or certainly will

not be the same as what might be popular and of interest to students today.

And that means students and higher education overall both need to be flexible to ensure that students don't just have specific skills for particular jobs, but rather they are equipped with transferable knowledge skills that will allow them to evolve and be successful once they join the workforce.

This means we need to change what we teach, and how we teach. We need to be sure that our students have both depth and breadth in what they learn, strong transferable skills and a commitment to lifelong learning. I think that is a real advantage for York, due to our early understanding of the importance of interdisciplinarity. Beyond providing students with substantive knowledge on a particular topic, be it English or engineering, we must also provide them with communication and technology skills, so they are able to easily adapt to different career situations.

Today, this kind of integration is key for almost any career you can think of. It doesn't matter whether you want to be a humanist or a social scientist, a lawyer or a nurse. You need to integrate the social sciences, humanities or sciences into the curriculum. I think it's this combination that makes York graduates more attractive to employers and helps to ensure their future success.

Pace of change also has fundamental implications for the postsecondary education system. Historically, we understand how universities were built, how classrooms were organized and how faculty members taught. But now we are starting to see a continuing evolution of how universities function, how they are designed and organized. The classroom itself is becoming a much more fluid and flexible concept. We should expect that the classroom of the future will increasingly focus on application and problem-solving with materials rapidly being updated and easily accessible through technology.

All of this presents a tremendous opportunity for universities to get out in front of this change and to think differently about what universities are for, and to link that up with the importance of research and scholarship, and an enhanced student learning experience aimed at graduating globally educated citizens. It is a tall order. There are cost implications for experiential education, technology-enhanced learning, and the facilities and infrastructure to support those changes. However, universities have always adapted to their circumstances. It's going to be an exciting journey and we are clearly already well down the path. ●



BY SANDRA MCLEAN  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOFIE KIRK

# Place of Great Peace

*York's Hart House renamed at special ceremony on National Indigenous Peoples Day*

**A**TA CEREMONY during National Indigenous Peoples Day, York University's Hart House was renamed Skennen'kó:wa Gamig. The new name comes from both the Mohawk and Anishinaabe languages. Skennen'kó:wa means "the Great Peace," a cultural teaching that refers to the bases of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The Great Peace are the laws and responsibilities that Haudenosaunee people aspire to live up to. Gamig is an Anishinaabemowin word that means home or house. We see this house as a space where students, staff and faculty can "come home" to their teachings as they move through the University. With this renaming comes the hope for further understanding and reconciliation between York University and the Indigenous

peoples who are a part of the University community.

The renaming ceremony began with a traditional opening by York's Elder-on-Campus and Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, Amy Desjarlais, followed by a performance by Spirit Wind, a women's hand drum group.

The house will be a place where that peace can take root through the understanding and rebuilding of relationships. To Ruth Koleszar-Green, co-chair of the Indigenous Council at York, Skennen'kó:wa Gamig reminds her that she has a responsibility to foster peace in the world. "It's also really important as students come to the University that they have the opportunity to learn not only what they're taught in their courses, but about their history and heritage," she said.

"Some of those students learn about their history for the first time after coming to York U. This house provides a safe and supportive place for that learning, but it also allows for a space where Indigenous peoples can lead the conversation."

Skennen'kó:wa Gamig is located on York University's Keele campus, tucked into a forested area next to Osgoode Hall Law School, on the site of the Centre for Aboriginal Student Services' Tipi. This entire area is the traditional territory of several Indigenous Nations, including the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Anishinabek Nation, the Wendat, the Métis Nation and the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation.

The house was owned by the Hart family until 1958, and then briefly owned by Claude Passy before York University

acquired it in 1964. Its renaming is part of York University's developing Indigenous Strategy, which includes creating spaces for Indigenous peoples, course content that explores Indigenous life, culture and tradition, and research that is relevant to Indigenous people.

Prior to the renaming ceremony, students from Kiiwednong Aboriginal Head Start planted handmade hearts in Skennen'kó:wa Gamig's new Heart Garden, which is a Cindy Blackstock national initiative that pays tribute to children who died in residential schools. Blackstock received an honorary doctor of laws at York University's June 23 convocation ceremony. She is a member of the Gitxsan First Nation and executive director of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society. ●

# CRASH 'N' BURN



Philip Monk on his new book that documents a turning point in the history of Toronto's art scene

BY MICHAEL TODD  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD



THE LATE 1970s were a key period for Toronto. It was a time when the city thought of itself as Canada's most important art centre. But as Philip Monk, director and curator of the Art Gallery of York University (AGYU), illustrates in his new book, *Is Toronto Burning?*, history has shown that the nascent downtown art community – not the established uptown scene of commercial galleries – was where it was happening.

**I**T WAS A POLITICAL PERIOD. Beyond the art politics, art itself was politicized in its contents and context. Art's political dimension was continually polemically posed – or postured – by artists in these years. It was a period rich in the invention of new forms of art. Punk, semiotics and fashion were equally influential, not to mention transgressive sexuality.

With no dominant art form and the influence of New York in decline, there were no models. It was, as Monk points out, a time when anything was possible.

*The York University Magazine* spoke to Monk about living through a time when Toronto's art scene went from staid to avant-garde.

**THE MAGAZINE:** What was the impetus for writing a book and curating a show at the AGYU in which you document what you contend was the life and death of a seminal Toronto art scene in three brief years in the late 1970s? I take it it would be more than just nostalgia on your part?

**MONK:** Until very recently, there has been a resistance to writing any sort of history of the origins of contemporary Toronto art. I thought it important, while I still had access to resources, to document through an exhibition and interpret through a book what was important about the late 1970s – a time, coincidentally, when I entered the Toronto art scene as a critic. Being a participant gave me other than an historian's objective perspective, but neither the exhibition nor book

were exercises in nostalgia. Rather, the book attempts, like any historical exercise, to chart retrospectively a different path than what the original participants thought they were doing at the time.

**THE MAGAZINE:** Do you see the book as a document of the time or do you hope it will be more than that? And, further, what relevance might it have for emerging artists now, especially as we're in the latter stages of this current decade in much the same way that your book documents the latter stages of the Toronto art scene in the '70s?

**MONK:** The late 1970s Toronto art scene created itself out of a vacuum, as a performance of sorts with artists as the audience. In other words, it was a performative act that made a fiction of an art scene into a real one. As such, it is a lesson of sorts, a paradigm, in fact, in how to create an art scene. Yet paradigms shift. So much has changed that the late '70s scene no longer functions as a model. It now really is history alone. To establish this history in writing is more than to document it. Thus, the book participates in some of the same performative strategies artists employed in the period: In order to make people interested – in what is now historical – you have to mythologize it first. My book is as much myth-making as history writing.

**THE MAGAZINE:** You call this period in Toronto's renaissance one of the "last avant-gardes." Why is that? And do you feel the Internet – where everything can be known and posted as soon as it's conceived – has taken some of the mystery out of happenstance or random discovery or, indeed, scuttled the whole idea of an "underground"?

**MONK:** My theory is that for a brief moment in the mid-1970s, avant-garde scenes around the world liberated themselves from the dominance of New York. With its emphasis on video, performance and a pervasive camp conceptualism, Toronto fully qualifies as a leader, having invented some of the strategies that New York artists would then go on to claim for themselves in the 1980s. But to be successful, an avant-garde or underground scene, paradoxically, can't be too visible. As it draws more people to it, as in the case of Toronto becoming the Queen Street art community, it sows the seeds of its own destruction. This particular art scene decomposed decades ago for reasons other than the Internet, but the immediate exposure the Internet circulates, I believe, is one condition for the present unsustainability of any idea of an avant-garde or underground art scene. Though we mistakenly continue to think within the trajectory of the historical avant-gardes, completely other conditions of cultural production rule now. This is part of the paradigm shift.

**THE MAGAZINE:** Is the book in any way a mourning about the move from an analogue culture to a digital one?

**MONK:** As part of a generation that has lived half a life in each era, I recognize how our perceptions and sense of temporality are shaped radically differently. Ditto for our sense of sociality. Part of my nostalgia perhaps is for a period whose sociality was not so captured by or entwined in the daily degradations of capitalism – think cell phones, Facebook etc. Not that capitalism could be escaped entirely. In the past, an underground art scene could only exist parasitically on the larger social system. But that was its freedom.

I am struck by the coincidence of publication of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* in 1980, with its famous phrase "that has been" applied to historical, i.e. analogue, photography precisely at the moment of the medium's transition to digital, with the demise of this art scene. Here, perhaps, is my nostalgia for the "that has been" – that the demise of the Toronto art scene corresponds as well to the end of the analogue era.

**THE MAGAZINE:** The book's title is interesting one. How exactly was Toronto's art scene both made and, interestingly, unmade in the space of the years 1977, '78 and '79? What forces were at play? The web, for instance, was still a long way off.

**MONK:** The late 1970s was a volatile period, with economies still in severe recession due to the 1973 oil crisis. New York City and Britain were virtually bankrupt. The punk slogan "no future" summed it up. It was also the radical chic moment of the Red Brigades in Italy and the Red Army Faction in Germany. Toronto, too, was infected by a generalized Maoist/Marxist moment in contemporary art. So I

distinguish between an art politics whereby Canada's then most famous artist-run gallery, A Space, was taken over in a "palace coup," which led the disenfranchised to open a slew of new endeavours elsewhere in Toronto; and a political art whereby, for instance, A Space's rival, the radicalized Centre for Experimental Art & Communication (CEAC), advocated knee-capping à la the Red Brigade, which fomented a media and political circus resulting in the loss of their funding and the building they owned, purchased with the help of Wintario. What is interesting in the conflicts and oppositions between the two Toronto cliques – on the one hand those representing performative frivolity and the other political earnestness – were the postures they shared in their fashion for politics or penchant for posing.

**THE MAGAZINE:** What part did the artist collective General Idea have to play during this time – that is, in getting Toronto's art scene considered seriously on an international scale?

**MONK:** General Idea were central to this myth-making moment when the downtown art scene created itself in Toronto. The collective not only articulated the scene's performative strategies in their own work (the 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant and Pavilion), but disseminated images of this semi-fictionalized scene in their *LIFE*-like artist magazine, *FILE*, which was circulated to the whole international "mondo arte." Who knows what the world thereby thought of Toronto, but such dissemination of images of the scene drew artists from across the country to join the Toronto art community.

**THE MAGAZINE:** There was a lot of band activity during this time: The Diodes, who played at Toronto's Crash 'n' Burn club, I believe; The Viletones; and later Martha and the Muffins; and others, as punk began to cross paths with '80s synth-pop. What kind of influence, if any, was that having on the visual or performance art of the time? It seemed to be a time of great theatricality and excess, especially in music and fashion as glitter and glam gave way to new wave.

**MONK:** As with Warhol and the Velvet Underground, Toronto artists had their own house bands: General Idea had the Dishes, CEAC, The Diodes. It was the moment, probably the only moment in Toronto, when the two scenes intersected; moreover, the music came out of the art scene. Crash 'n' Burn, where punk broke in summer 1977 in Toronto, was in the basement of CEAC. Although eventually dropped in favour of new wave, punk nevertheless had an important role to play: punk's demolition was instrumental in artists remaking themselves, transitioning from hippie sentimentality to new-wave irony.

**THE MAGAZINE:** What, for you, made Toronto's art scene distinctive then?

**MONK:** I wrote the book partly as if the participants of the time were the revolving cast of a soap opera, with frequent name changes and gender switches. What was unique to Toronto was how artists participated in each other's works, not only in the making of them – being the photographer, for instance, or video crew – but also in acting in others' videos: David Buchan's performance persona, La Monte del Monte, for instance, notably "guest" appeared in Colin Campbell's video. This constantly circulating and reappearing cast of characters created a critical mass giving the effect of an established community, but in reality it was only reflecting the nascent community back to itself. This televisual "feedback," in [Marshall] McLuhan's hometown, was essential to the art scene establishing its identity.

In the book, I suggest that Toronto developed a unique form of conceptual art: camp conceptualism. This art was embodied and gendered, and dealt with codes and the transgressing of them. And it partook of what I call "Toronto talk." Talk was Toronto's theatricality: not only bar chatter and gossip, or the near slanderous polemics of the myriad artist-run magazines, but the pervasive language of the scene's pop-cultural-oriented performance, video and wordy photo blowups that mimicked the strategies of advertising.

**THE MAGAZINE:** You lived through this era. What/who in Toronto were you seeing, following, experiencing and getting excited about?

**MONK:** I was an unusual critic in that I didn't discriminate between uptown and downtown or between media, but wrote about everything: painting, sculpture, video, performance, text works etc. – whether of phenomenological or performative cast. You would think, given what most critics wrote about, that criticism was a nine-to-five job, dependent on galleries being open during the day, but the art world happens at night too, and you have to be part of it. The rhetorical structure of the book discloses what side of the performative-political divide I come down on. In the art scene, you may start out a formal phenomenologist, but don't know how quickly you turn into a performative transgressive. My book revealed that to me.

**THE MAGAZINE:** If we can no longer have a true underground, what can we have? Or has the counterculture become over-the-counter culture?

**MONK:** The "underground" forms of contestation and conviviality I wrote about do seem to be of the past, but let's hope that they have been transformed in ways that are not yet immediately visible or available to someone like me – the older generation. ●

PHOTOGRAPHS AND POSTERS: COURTESY OF DON PYLE; BOTTOM RIGHT: PAGE FROM ART COMMUNICATION EDITION NO. 6, JULY 1977



# ROBOT INVASION

*What does it mean to interact with the world  
when everything is mediated through a machine?*

BY CYNTHIA MACDONALD  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MCKENZIE JAMES



**MARKUS GIESLER:**  
Letting down our collective guard

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**Stephen Hawking has a remarkable mind. But equally remarkable is the fact that the 75-year-old British scientist has changed the landscape of theoretical physics and cosmology while living with a neuromuscular disease that has robbed him of the ability to speak, walk or write.**

**H**ÉLÈNE MIALET BELIEVES that Hawking's physical life is just as fascinating as the mental one for which he's best known. A professor of science and technology studies at York University, she spent years studying the ways in which technology has enabled Hawking to live a full existence. By squeezing a cheek muscle, he activates a switch attached to his eyeglasses that sends messages to his wheelchair computer. This is how he writes speeches, watches television, surfs the Internet. Typing at a rate of one or two words a minute, he can also "talk" through a speech synthesizer.

Speaking (perhaps ironically) via Skype from her part-time base in California, Mialet asks: "What does it mean to interact with the world when everything is mediated through a machine?" Her 2012 book, *Hawking Incorporated: Stephen Hawking and the Anthropology of the Knowing Subject*, is an attempt to answer that question – but also to make a larger point. "We are all, now, more or less unable to function without technology doing most of the work for us," she says. "To a certain extent, we are all Stephen Hawking."

Years ago, computers sat in designated rooms and were used periodically. Now, with the advent of smartphones, exercise trackers and the "Internet of things," they are with us at all times: in our hands, on our wrists, in our cars, pockets, walls – even, in a primitive but increasing way, inside our bodies. In a very real sense, robots no longer live in the fantasy realm of science fiction. They live where we do, because they are us.

"Alexa's talking now," Markus Giesler tells me. "The device is right behind me, so whenever I say her name she starts listening." Giesler, chair of the marketing department at

York's Schulich School of Business, is an expert on how artificial intelligence is changing how we behave as consumers. He currently has a voice-enabled Google home assistant – commonly known as Alexa – in every room of his house. "We're ethnographically exploring how this changes family – whether it makes life easier, makes us happier, makes us lonelier," he says.

Even though Alexa can't move, her abilities are considerable. "She could be your maid, your storyteller, your DJ, your information source and many other things as well," says Giesler.

But unlike other sci-fi robots, Alexa doesn't look human: "she" is just a 23.5-centimetre cylinder. And yet, with her human name and voice, she is anthropomorphized, or given lifelike properties.

"Robotic technology is going to be huge," says Michael Jenkin, head of the Canadian Centre for Field Robotics at York. "But a lot of it won't look like science fiction robots, because in North America that's not what we want. We want our car to look like a car, our walker to look like a walker." This is the "uncanny valley" concept, which suggests that we are actually still terrified by robots, such as those found in Isaac Asimov stories or the TV show "Westworld," which uncannily resemble us.

There are areas in the world, however, where Jenkin says that isn't true. "In Japan, for example, there's a real interest in robots that look human. There was a really interesting study a few years back, looking at whether people wanted assistants in grocery stores to look like carts or robots. It turned out that in Japan, anyway, they liked robots." Not coincidentally, Japan is where you'll actually find a hotel

staffed entirely by humanoid machines – from concierges to bellhops to housekeepers.

But elsewhere, we've become more comfortable having robotic technology be a part of us, not apart from us. "Hawking's American computer voice has become part of his identity, even though he's British," says Mialet. Even though better technology now exists, "he wants to keep his voice. He's used it for a long time, and it's how people recognize him."

Like Giesler in his Google-enabled home, we now regularly converse with robots – even though current limits in artificial intelligence mean we're really just talking to ourselves, using

the intelligence we have on hand. I confess to Giesler that I find the Australian male voice for Siri, my iPhone's built-in voice assistant, rather comforting (putting me, perhaps, one step closer to Joaquin Phoenix's love struck computer-suitor in the 2013 movie *Her*).

Giesler says this is isn't unusual. "We'll pick whatever voice creates more intimacy," he says. "It's not uncommon for female consumers to pick a male Siri voice and vice versa. That kind of choice makes the experience more unique and emotionally rewarding."

He points out, however, that consumers don't always have

## WE'RE ETHNOGRAPHICALLY EXPLORING HOW THIS CHANGES FAMILY – WHETHER IT MAKES LIFE EASIER, MAKES US HAPPIER, MAKES US LONELIER

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### Robots to the Rescue

**J**ohn Tsotsos is the Canada Research Chair in Computational Vision at York's Lassonde School of Engineering. His lab is developing robots that can absorb visual information, then act on it if necessary. With a rapidly aging population, a major focus of his department is eldercare. "The job of a caregiver can be emotionally as well as physically draining, so we're looking at ways to lift some of the burden. A robot in your home could give you the independence to go from room to room without waiting for someone. It could monitor whether you've fallen, then call for help."

York Professor Michael Jenkin believes the involvement of robots in eldercare is critical. "This is our best opportunity to solve a problem," he says. "We're just not producing enough young people to look after the old people. In Canada we have socialized medicine, and you want to keep seniors from needing the high-cost housed care for as long as possible."

Down the hall from Tsotsos' office is his robotics lab. There, a team of computer science graduate students are working on a range of relevant problems. Vassil Halatchev and

Bir Bikram Dey are improving an autonomous wheelchair, and Markus Solbach is working on a seeing robot that can recognize when a human is in trouble and need of assistance.

I drop in on another student, Raghavender Sahdev. He and fellow student Bao Chen are currently perfecting the capabilities of a "person-following robot" that could theoretically help seniors and others by accompanying their charges from room to room. The wheeled robot is about the size of *Star Wars'* R2-D2, and its stereo camera "eyes" resemble those of an attentive animal. This work has received awards at two conferences this year.

Sahdev takes a picture of me and feeds it into the robot. "One of its special features is that it can handle appearance changes," he says. "So if you take your jacket off, it will still recognize you and follow you."

Sure enough, when I start to walk around the lab, the robot follows; when I stop, it stops. When I speed up, it does too, to the point where I am actually being chased around the room by a robot. It is, perhaps, the most 21st century experience I've ever had.

**RAGHAVENDER SAHDEV:**

Busy perfecting a "person-following robot"



ONE OF ITS SPECIAL FEATURES IS THAT  
IT CAN HANDLE APPEARANCE CHANGES.  
SO IF YOU TAKE YOUR JACKET OFF,  
IT WILL STILL RECOGNIZE YOU AND FOLLOW YOU

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that kind of choice, which is worrisome. "Alexa is female, or that's what her name suggests. So what does this mean for our notions of gender equality if all these virtual assistants are female? We could be experiencing a conservative return to patriarchy, through technology."

Our modern robot companions need not be mere voices, of course. They can do physical work too. The word robot actually comes from the Slavic root *robota*, or job; it was first coined in a 1920 Czech play.

**M**ODERN ROBOTS do, of course, spend a good deal of time away from their human overlords. One of their functions, in fact, is to do jobs that are impossible (or too dangerous) for humans to perform. Designing and building these kinds of robots is part of Michael Jenkin's research.

Jenkin is a principal in a firm called Independent Robotics. The underwater robot they manufacture, called AQUA, is used all over the world in a variety of innovative ways. It monitors reef decay, helps with environmental reconstruction and analyzes huge amounts of fish population data. Like live organisms, Jenkin says, "AQUA swims by moving legs. Instead of propellers, it uses flexible fins for propulsion, which means you can put your fingers on them and they won't get cut off. That's important, when you want to deploy a human being and a robot at the same time." The version at York is named Kroy – its alma mater's name spelled in reverse.

York is currently developing many other innovations in robotics, such as improved wheelchairs, on-screen avatars that respond to commands and autonomous car technology. This last item is something we're continually assured is right around the corner. But is it?

Tsotsos is skeptical. "We've got a long way to go before human safety is assured, because those cars still have quite a

few weaknesses," he says. "Drivers communicate with other cars, pedestrians, cyclists all the time. We need to figure out the intent of the people around us. And it's all done non-verbally, through gestures. How does an autonomous car do that?" Two more of his lab members, Amir Rasouli and Yulia Kotseruba, are developing algorithms for exactly this purpose.

City driving is certainly complicated. But Jenkin thinks, at least with respect to trucks on the highway, that autonomous driving is now a realistic prospect. "When the first truck goes on it'll be difficult, but when the thousandth does we'll be used to it," he says.

The trick, he says, is speed limits. Trucks will all drive the same speed in the slow lane, which could be frustrating for drivers used to weaving in and out of traffic. "If you want to go 20 over the speed limit, you may come across kilometres of trucks in the slow lane. There will be a beautiful geometry as you pass all these slow-moving vehicles. It'll be a very different model than the one we currently have."

And, as he points out, cars are already self-driving to some extent: cruise control, global positioning systems and automatic braking systems all testify to that. There are now cars that can parallel park for you, and ones that jam on the brakes when a pedestrian pops onto the road in front of you. We may still be in the driver's seat, but few of us realize how much help we are getting there.

The new robots may be better drivers, more patient caregivers, and smarter about weather and traffic than we are. But because we own, program and operate them, we assume we're still in full control of their activities. Giesler warns that the human-like qualities of a machine linked to the Internet may coax us into letting our collective guard down. This, he feels, is dangerous.

"Alexa listens to every conversation we have," he says. "Alexa can then transmit those conversations to Amazon, who can then store them. But when we talk to consumers about this,

## WE HAVE TO GET PEOPLE THINKING ABOUT TRAINING FOR STEM (SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATH) JOBS MUCH EARLIER IN CHILDHOOD

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they don't even mind – they consider that Alexa is part of the family. But this isn't a person! Alexa is linked to a corporation. The information we give her can be linked to my credit card transactions, health data and overall spending behaviour. It all goes to construct a fairly accurate profile of how much I can be worth to companies."

By far the biggest concern people have about robots is whether they will take their jobs away. Every day, gloomy statistics are rolled out: a 2013 study determined that 47 per cent of American jobs were at risk for automation. Robots work fast. They do not get distracted, catch the flu, require benefits, take vacations or have family responsibilities. In many ways, they're the perfect employees.

Then again, the perceived superiority of the machine is hardly new. For thousands of years, they've been replacing humans at work; generally, new and different jobs have been the result. But now, observers like Martin Ford (author of *Rise of the Robots*) think the pace is just too rapid for old jobs to simply get replaced by new ones. Further, advances in artificial intelligence mean that jobs in all classes are threatened: Machines can now diagnose illness, research case law and determine whether or not we should get a bank loan. As a recent article in *The Economist* puts it, "automation is blind to the colour of your collar."

But if this grim scenario is about to materialize, there's little sign of it yet. *The Economist* goes on to report that demand for legal clerks has actually increased, commensurate with how technology has made legal research increasingly available. It's true that retail stores are very much threatened by e-commerce, but the ease of online shopping has only encouraged people to buy more, increasing (though changing the nature of) the number of retail jobs.

At the end of the day, it's worth remembering that machines aren't infallible: people still need to create, repair and maintain them. "I think the person is going to be in the loop for a

long time to come," says Tsotsos. He says we should all spend more time learning about machines, instead of just using them. "There are lots of jobs in this field, and it's difficult to find enough people to staff all the high-tech companies. We have openings for professors all the time. We have to get people thinking about training for STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) jobs much earlier in childhood."

**L**IKE MOST PROFESSORS who have classes full of millennials, Mialet grapples daily with a sea of distracted students. On smartphones, tablets and laptops, they are simultaneously in her class and somewhere else at once. "It's difficult to get a sense of what they want, what they feel. They're not giving feedback when they're looking at their phones," she says.

She compares the experience to her conversations with Hawking, whose disembodied voice seemed to come from another person entirely, depersonalizing their interaction. "Our notions of politeness, of how we have conversations, are changing," she says. "I think my son is rude for texting when I'm talking to him, but he thinks I'm rude for talking to him while he texts!"

Perhaps the strangest thing about all this is how humans seek to deny this new reality. There is definite rage against the machines; some on the religious right have criticized Mialet for downplaying Hawking's humanity by emphasizing how thoroughly mechanized his life has become. And last year, an experimental hitchhiking robot called Hitchbot was viciously smashed to shreds by the very car that picked it up.

But is this rage misplaced? Robots are so much a part of our lives that they are here to stay. "We see ourselves as detached from this environment, when in fact we are totally enmeshed in it," says Mialet. "And we are able to do everything we do because of it." ●



**JOHN TSOTOS:**  
Self-driving cars? He's skeptical



# Power Play

*How York grad Sudarshan Maharaj turned his love of the game into his dream job*

BY LINDSAY MACADAM  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

**I**T WAS MAY 10, 1970, and the Maharaj family was gathered around the television in their west-end Toronto home watching what would turn out to be one of the most memorable scenes in the history of Canada's sport – the Stanley Cup final between the Boston Bruins and the St. Louis Blues, won in overtime with Bobby Orr's famous "flying goal." Brand-new immigrants from Trinidad, of Indian descent, that moment made lifelong hockey fans of them all. For Sudarshan "Sudsie" Maharaj (BA '93), the youngest of the family's three boys, this was his earliest hockey memory, as a dozing six-year-old nestled atop his mother's lap.

Two years later, after a move to a nearby suburb, Maharaj would gaze longingly out the window as the neighbourhood kids played ball hockey on the street. In typical Canuck fashion, it wasn't long before there was a knock on the door and an invitation to come out and join the fun. He took to the game instantly and soon registered in the local ice hockey league, adopting the role of goaltender after some

not-so-subtle sibling coaxing. "My oldest brother loved a goaltender playing for the Philadelphia Flyers by the name of Bernie Parent," says Maharaj. "When I first started house league, he grabbed me and he said, 'OK, you're going to be a goalie and you're going to play like Bernie Parent.'"

Little did they know that some 40 years later, Maharaj would be rubbing elbows with his brother's idol and working one-on-one with some of the world's most promising players, as a National Hockey League (NHL) goalie coach and one of the leading experts in his field. He credits his time at York University for helping him get there.

After mastering his shot-blocking technique throughout elementary and high school, and a brief stint playing for the University of Wisconsin, Maharaj transferred to York for his postsecondary studies. There, he double majored in physical education and English while goaltending for the York Yeomen. Financial constraints, however, meant he couldn't live on campus, something he regrets to this day. "My dad sold cars for a living and my mom worked in a factory," he says.



"We didn't have a lot of money, so the idea of living on campus when I had a perfectly good room at home wasn't something my parents saw as money well spent."

With no clear-cut career path in mind, but still a burning love of the game, when the opportunity to play professional hockey in Europe presented itself, Maharaj didn't hesitate. He left academia behind to follow his passion in Sweden. Six years later, he retired from pro hockey and headed back to Toronto.

After completing his undergraduate degree, teachers' college at the University of Toronto was his next stop. But instead of transitioning directly into the classroom, Maharaj took yet another detour and went back to his athletic roots – first, as the goalie coach for the York U hockey team he had once played for. "It gave me an opportunity to work with higher-skilled players, really sharpen my skill set and learn from my mistakes – and flat-out learn the art of coaching

on when I joined the Islanders that they were firing coaches every other week," says Maharaj. "At the time, our oldest daughter, Alexandra, was quite young, and my wife was pregnant with our second daughter, Catherine. I didn't want to shuffle them along and then find out two months later that we're out of work, so I worked out a deal where they stayed [in Toronto] and I flew back and forth."

But soon, reality set in. Realizing there wasn't much money to be made in hockey outside of the NHL, he decided to finally put his degree to good use. He took a teaching job in Etobicoke, Ont., where he taught for 12 years while continuing to consult up-and-coming goaltenders on the side – a move that would eventually pay off in a big way.

One of the players Maharaj worked with during that time, Stephen Valiquette, moved up the ranks to the NHL and introduced him to Rick DiPietro, a first overall draft pick for the New York Islanders who wasn't progressing as he should. A few years later, the management team asked the still-underperforming player what he would need to move forward in his career. "There's this guy in Toronto I would like to work with," DiPietro replied. From there, the elementary school teacher scored an interview with the Islanders, landed the job as goaltending coach and stayed with the team for

eight years before moving on to a similar role with the Anaheim Ducks.

Being an NHL coach might sound like every sports fanatic's dream come true, but Maharaj's jam-packed schedule is more gruelling than you'd think. On game days, he's in the office by 7:30am and doesn't clock out until 11pm. Practice days aren't much shorter: "You're in by 7:30 in the morning. You're doing your practice plan for that day, taking the goalies out for extra work, doing practice. And then after, because I do so much scouting, I'm looking at video, I'm watching American league goalies, I'm watching our prospects or I'm watching video of this year's crop of goalies – and eventually wandering out of there with my eyes crossed."

In addition to the long days, the job requires him to be away from his family for nine months of the year. "I learned very early

His current head coach, Randy Carlyle, requires him to be in Anaheim at least 20 days a month. "But 20 days turns into 24 very quickly," says Maharaj. "This year, fortunately, we had a very long run in the playoffs. So, unfortunately, it meant I was only home for two days of the last three months of the season. It's tough on everyone."

Although it's certainly an atypical lifestyle, Maharaj feels blessed to have found his way back to the sport he loves: "I say it all the time – it's the perfect job for somebody like myself because I'm nomadic by nature. To torture me, they could put me in a cubicle for eight hours. That would pretty much do me in." ●



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# Giving

FRIENDS & PHILANTHROPY

## All in the Family

Honderich gift  
changes students' lives

BY AMY STUPAVSKY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD



**B**ELAND HONDERICH'S 52-year tenure at the *Toronto Star*, Canada's largest-circulation newspaper, was marked by a rise from financial reporter to publisher to chair of the board – all of which he accomplished with only a Grade 9 education. Growing up in Baden, Ont., during the Depression, he had to leave school prematurely to help support his family.

"My father was fanatical about higher education," says John Honderich, current chair of the Torstar board, of his father. "He felt that he had to work twice as hard to compensate for lack of formal education. The fact that he had never received it was one of the driving forces in his life and guided his philanthropy."

That philanthropy came to life when he joined forces with the North York Board of Education to establish the Honderich Bursary, which encourages deserving high school students to pursue university education. The award includes tuition to York University, renewable over a four-year undergraduate degree, and a summer internship at the *Toronto Star* after each recipient's first-year studies. Since its inception in 1990, more than 100 students have benefitted from the award. Today, John and his brother, David, steward the family's philanthropic initiatives.

Giving back to the community defined the Honderich family's values. Beland, who espoused the principles of Joseph E. Atkinson, founder of Torstar Corp. and proponent of social welfare, was instrumental in the formation of Atkinson College at York University. His wife, Florence (Wilkinson) Honderich, was an early supporter of the David Suzuki Foundation and sponsored students attending the Lester B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific in Victoria, B.C., an international college that brings together students from around the world for pre-university education.

"My parents inculcated those values and principles very deeply in us," says John. "Giving back is part of being a responsible citizen and Canadian."

The Honderich Bursary is an embodiment of those values.

Providing opportunities for people to thrive in Toronto's high-priority, primarily immigrant Jane and Finch neighbourhood forms the cornerstone of the Honderich Bursary. It is open to students from four schools in the area: James Cardinal McGuigan Secondary School, C. W. Jeffreys Secondary School, Emery Collegiate Institute and Westview Centennial Secondary School.

"When we founded the bursary, the idea was to give students the ability to achieve and succeed without financial encumbrances," explains John. "It gives them the capacity to aspire to more than the confines of their neighbourhood."

John says that hearing recipients' stories – of their backgrounds, achievements and dreams – at the award ceremony always strikes him as amazing. "This bursary has changed my life" is the most common refrain.

"I don't think it can get more profound than that – to know that you've changed someone's life just by giving them an opportunity," he says. "It really speaks to how immigrants and the children of immigrants continue to make Canada grow and flourish. It demonstrates how new Canadians can help so much if they're given the chance. I feel extraordinarily proud and lucky to be a part of this."

## United by Opportunity

**N**URADIN MOHAMED-NUR, Phong Tran and Maithily Panchalingam vary in age, family background and academic focus. They have different dreams and philosophies, but their stories converge because each grew up in Toronto's

Jane and Finch community with a worldview shaped by the immigrant experience – and each received the Honderich Bursary. Here are their stories in their own words.

## Nuradin Mohamed-Nur

Second-year environmental and health studies major at Glendon College

**W**hat the media report about Jane and Finch isn't wrong – there are problems with violent crime and drugs – but what isn't often publicized is the strength of the inhabitants. Life

**Being immersed in a new environment, language, culture was challenging at first, but it pushed the limits of my resilience**

is a struggle here, but people get up in the morning and go on with their lives. There is so much potential in our neighbourhood, and it has been the greatest influence in my life. Growing up in a “priority” area has given me the resilience to tackle the struggles that come my way. If you’re not resilient, you’ll sink into apathy or succumb to negativity.

I knew from an early age that I wanted to go to university, but I encountered people from my neighbourhood who told themselves that university wasn’t for them, solely because of where they came from. When I’m feeling

demotivated, I remember that I have people who believe in me – my family, friends, peers, teachers and even the Honderich Bursary selection committee. That helps me to stay focused on my dreams.

My parents are from Somalia and came to Toronto during the civil war. I grew up in an apartment building with my mother and extended family. My father lives in Kenya, and he travels between Africa and Canada to visit us. My mom instilled a desire to understand the world in me. She enrolled me in various extracurriculars – taekwondo, tutoring, swimming lessons – to ensure that my mind was stimulated and to distract me from negative influences in my neighbourhood.

My understanding of the world grew with a momentous event: My mother and I moved to Kenya for three years while I was in middle school to be with my father. Those three years changed the way I think and act today. Being immersed in a new environment, language, culture was challenging at first, but it pushed the limits of my resilience. I became a better person and more focused on my education because of that experience. I grew as a person and gained a global perspective on the world. I still use those lessons to help calm my nerves in new environments.

When I was child, I would tell people that I wanted to be a paediatric neurologist, but over the years my dreams have changed and adapted to the issues I see in the world. One of those issues is climate change. Society continues to disregard the impact of its actions on our Earth and the overall quality of our health. York’s program in environmental sustainability and global health combined both of these issues, so when I heard about the Honderich Bursary and my educational dream

seemed feasible, I knew I had to chase the opportunity.

I am the first in my family to go to university, and the Honderich Bursary was a blessing for my entire family. By investing in my future, the bursary has made my university experience far more enjoyable and motivating. It demonstrates that people believe in students from my neighbourhood and gives us the opportunity to succeed so we can give back. I want to make a difference in the lives of others, especially in the lives of youth who grew up in similar areas.

## Phong Tran

Third-year physics and astronomy major

**O**ne of my favourite quotes is, “If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself.” For me, it means that life is what I make of it, and I shouldn’t expect anything from others. Growing up, I’d characterize my life as peripatetic. My family is from Vietnam. My parents separated when I was young, and my mom cared for my brother, sister and me. Money was tight, and in 2012, we were evicted from our home. From that point onwards, our living circumstances changed frequently. I’ve lived all over the GTA, but mainly around Jane and Finch, and I attended more than 10 schools in the 12 years leading up to my studies at York. Maybe it was because of the constant change of schools, but I stopped attending high school in Grade 10. When everyone graduated without me, I felt I would never walk the path of a scholar. It seemed impossible, especially given my family’s financial situation.

**I realized that I am the only person who has to face the consequences of my decisions**

There are many moments in my life that have molded me and pushed me to reach for success, but the event that sparked me to change direction was breaking my arm in an accident. I realized that I am the only person who has to face the consequences of my decisions. I have to credit losing things of great value – my home, my friends and loved ones – for bringing me to where I am today. Although one can never predict what one may lose next, the idea that we could lose everything at any moment makes me appreciate what I have while I have it and reach for what I don’t yet have while I can.

My greatest influence is my mother. She sacrificed so much to raise me and my siblings, and she inspires me to be strong in all situations. I want to work hard for her and make her proud. Eventually, I want to take care of her when she needs me the most. I enjoy life for what it is – meeting new people, learning about the lives of others and gaining wisdom every day.

I’ve always been extremely good at math, and when I re-enrolled in high school, I excelled. Before that, I had failed all of my courses, including Grade 11 math three times, because of truancy and lack of desire. I enjoyed Grade 12 physics so much that I couldn’t wait to see what York would offer me in the discipline. Without the Honderich Bursary, I would not have been able to sustain myself financially and continue my studies at my full potential. Without the bursary, I probably would not be attending university at all.

In the future, I want to pursue a PhD in physics, engineering, economical modelling or game design and development. While I’m not sure which path I’ll take, I’m interested in researching more efficient renewable energy resources. I want to change the world and make it easier for people to live comfortably. Helping others and working towards making the world a more equal, fair place is one of my main motivations in life.

## Maithily Panchalingam

BSc ‘01, kinesiology and health sciences major

**M**any South Asian immigrants will tell you that school is so important because it’s the path to success in a new country. I’m Sri Lankan, and I came to Toronto when I was 15. Canada was the land of opportunity, and as soon as my family arrived, Jane and Finch felt like home. The neighbourhood pulses with multiculturalism. I had friends from the West Indies, Poland and the Ukraine, and being among other newcomers helped me to settle in.

**My life has been a curious combination of happenstance and serendipity**

My life has been a curious combination of happenstance and serendipity. I never thought I’d one day work at the *Toronto Star* – or that it would form the backbone of my career. I didn’t think I’d be doing anything remotely similar to journalism. After I graduated from York, I thought I’d

enrol in teachers’ college or a chiropractic program.

The Honderich Bursary changed the course of my life, beginning with that *Star* internship. I remember arriving at the building on Queen’s Quay and pinching myself – the *Star* is a household name, and now I was a part of it. I began working in the newsroom. After that first summer, I worked part time in the advertising department while I was in school.

I now work as the public editor associate. I keep the newspaper accountable to our readers by checking facts and correcting errors. You never know what you’re going to get because you can’t predict the news.

Working at the *Star* has taught me that newspapers have the power to change people’s lives. You can’t work here and close your eyes to injustice. We’re making a difference. Writing stories can change social policy. We publish a lot of stories about immigrants and temporary workers in precarious situations, and by publicizing their struggles, we can help to effect change in their lives.

For me, the Honderich Bursary does the same thing – it helps the little people. Coming from Jane and Finch,

# On the Campaign Trail

An update on IMPACT:  
The Campaign for York University

BY AMY STUPAVSKY

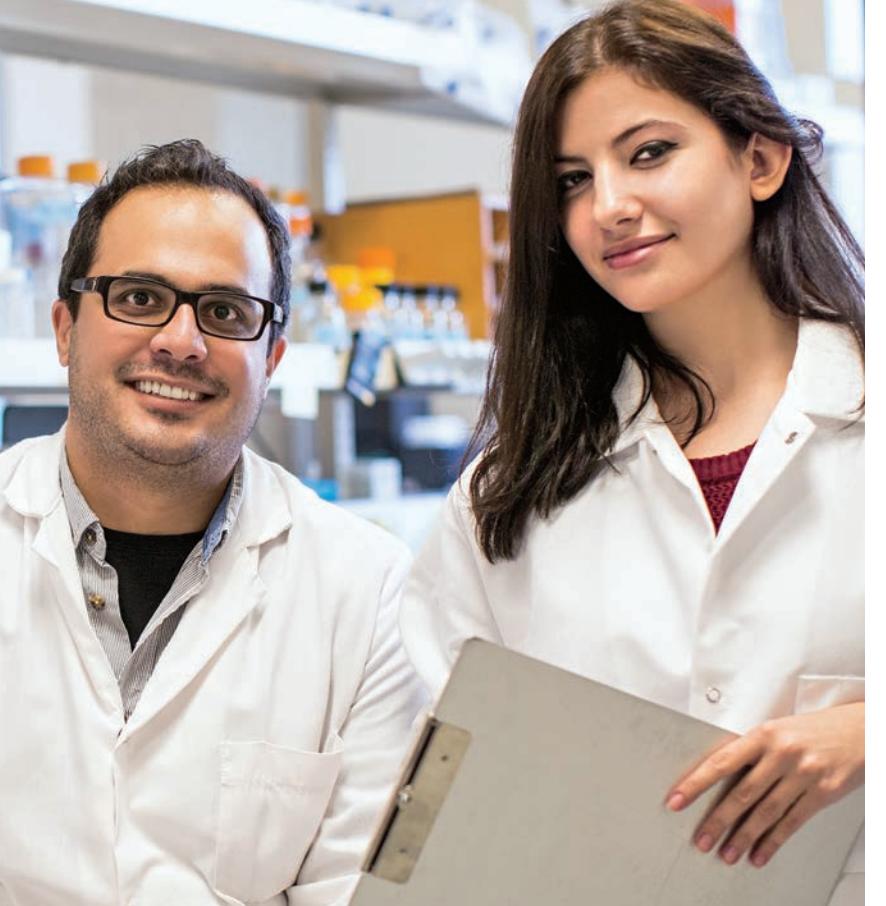
**T**HE NUMBERS ARE IN. Since its launch in April 2016, IMPACT: The Campaign for York University has raised a total of \$350 million for the University's programs, student scholarships and facilities across all Faculties and schools.

This new milestone brings the campaign closer to its \$500-million goal – and the York community has played a big part in ensuring this success. More than 35,000 donors, alumni and friends rallied behind the campaign's priorities: to mobilize new ways of thinking, to prepare engaged global citizens and to build stronger communities. To date, more funds have been raised in this campaign to increase student financial support, enrich learning experiences, and expand research and teaching capabilities than in the University's nearly 60-year history.

In addition to fundraising activities, the campaign also aims to double the number of alumni who are actively engaged in the University community. A record-breaking 75 per cent of campaign donors are alumni, and more than 78,000 alumni have participated in York events, benefits, services, mentorships and other initiatives.

"York's more than 300,000 alumni, who live and work in more than 170 countries, are our University's most important ambassadors and key players in the future of our institution," says Jeff O'Hagan, vice-president advancement. "Over the course of the campaign, we have made strong progress towards encouraging, supporting and celebrating alumni philanthropy, building connections between our alumni and our students, and strengthening York's reputation through our global alumni network. The success of the University can be measured by the success of our alumni, and as our efforts continue to expand, we will continue to foster a highly connected and engaged alumni community."

Want to make your own impact on York's future? To learn more, visit the Impact website at [impact.yorku.ca](http://impact.yorku.ca) ●



# Classes



**1976**

**KASMAN, RON** (BFA Winters) lives in Toronto with his wife, Jocelyn Perris, and his two-and-a-half-year-old daughter. He has a son in Vancouver and another in California. During his years at York, he was co-chair of the first Cosmicon, the groundbreaking comic book convention held at York University from 1972-76. His recent graphic novel, *The Tower of the Comic Book Freaks*, is a coming of age story set at a New York comic convention in 1971.



**FORREST, SEAN** (BA, BEd '03, Stong) is a physical education department head and coach at Castlebrook Secondary School in the Peel District School Board. He also teaches a York AQ course for physical education. In his spare time, he is a statistician for the Toronto Raptors. He now resides in Georgetown, Ont., with his wife, Lindsay, and newborn baby girl, Logan. Since leaving York, he has done a variety of charity work and has completed four Ironman triathlons.

**1972**

**COOMBS, DAVID** (BA McLaughlin, PhD '78) retired in 2004 to the bush just south of Barry's Bay, Ont., after 27 years as a stock broker. He and his wife, Sarah, continue to work on their 400 acres, enjoy their three grandchildren and travel. He wrote a column for his local paper for eight years, and four years ago he began to research and write his first novel, *The Beckoning Land*. The novel follows the journey of a 24-year-old Toronto boy to Barry's Bay in 1934, documenting his search for peace of mind through the Depression and the Second World War.

**1984**

**WILLIAMSON, DIANA** (BA Founders) recently returned to Canada after living in Los Angeles for many years, writing music for film and TV. She just published a book called *101 Tips and Tricks of Successful Songwriting*, which goes behind the scenes of the music industry, illustrating how successful songwriters craft and market their hits. Through a series of famous examples, insider secrets and amusing anecdotes, readers learn how to apply these winning strategies to their own work.

**1988**

**ROGAL, STAN** (MA) had his fifth novel and 20th book published in 2016. In 2017, he'll have his fifth and sixth collections of short stories published through Frontenac House and Insomniac Press respectively. He is currently putting finishing touches on his seventh collection of stories, which will be published in the spring of 2018 through Guernica Editions.

**1997**

**CANTKIER, LISA** (BA, BEd '98) co-authored *The Paleo Diabetes Diet Solution* cookbook with Jill Hillhouse and it has been nominated for a Taste of Canada Award for Best Health and

Special Diet Cookbook in Canada. It is a three-in-one guide, cookbook and meal plan aimed to help those who need to prevent or manage diabetes or blood sugar issues.

**2005**

**GOLDSTEIN, DAVID** (LLB) left the partnership of Cassels Brock & Blackwell LLP to become chief operating officer at U SPORTS. An accomplished journalist, his new book, *Alley-Oop to Aliyah: African American Hoopers in the Holy Land*, comes out on Nov. 7 from Skyhorse Publishing. It tells the incredible true story of four decades of African American basketball players who have hooped, lived and raised families in Israel since the 1970s.



**2009**

**KHAZAAL, CHAKER** (BA) wrote the *Confessions of a War Child* trilogy after graduation. He is about to release his

fourth novel, *Tale of Tala*, which tells the story of a refugee prostitute in Europe and is based on his reporting on the 2015 refugee crisis for the Huffington Post.



**NAQI, OMER** (BA '01, Atkinson) has written his debut publication, *My Eid Mubarak Storybook*, which introduces the Muslim holiday through the adventures of children, the passing down of traditions, and the special time spent with family and friends. He is a proud dad of three beautiful daughters, a fitness enthusiast and a banker by profession, with 16 years of experience in the financial industry. For him and his wife, Naima, it is important to be well connected to their heritage while also contributing to and being a part of the diverse Canadian society.

## Classes

**BYRON, KYLE** (BA '00, Bethune) has been running a fitness private practice in Toronto since 2006. His clients include professional fighters, dancers with the National Ballet of Canada, and busy moms and dads. Though he ended up in a science field, all his blogs and teaching materials are sharp thanks to his BA from York and the years he spent working for the phys ed and communications departments. He looks forward to the alumni rugby game each year.



### 2011

**CUENCA, MARCELO** (BSc Hons. Bethune) joined the Canadian Football League's Ottawa Redblacks in 2014 as assistant athletic therapist and won his first Grey Cup in 2016. He was promoted to head athletic therapist in 2017, and he thanks York University for giving him the knowledge, tools and experience to succeed in his field.

LordStone Consulting Inc., which specializes in critical infrastructure analysis, disaster management for carceral institutions and related legal ramifications. She is currently doing research with York PhD candidate Moira Scott on the military and emergency response to the 1917 Halifax explosion, in addition to co-authoring a more authoritative history text on disaster management in Canada.

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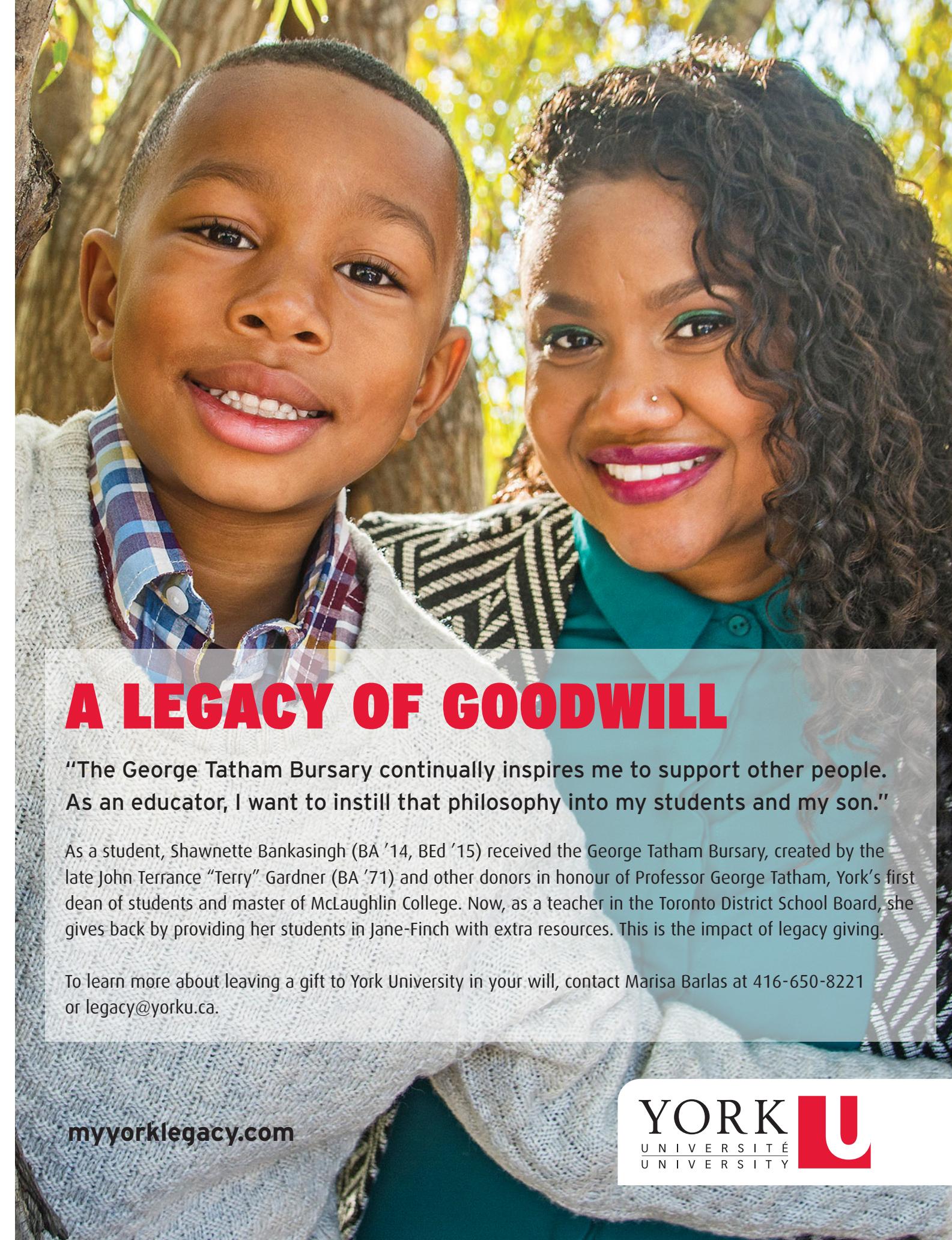
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### 2012

**CHISHOLM, SHARON** (BA, MDEM '15) published her first professional article, entitled "No Dogs Allowed: Ethics, Disaster Management and the Vulnerable Populations of Prisons," for the International Association of Emergency Managers. Along with alumnus **ANDREW CHISHOLM SNIDER** (BA '11), she also formed

**MAK, STEPHANIE** (BA Hons. '17, Glendon) is doing an internship at Fulbright Canada, located in Ottawa's downtown core. As part of her role, she organizes the annual fall orientation in Ottawa, where American scholars and students and Canadian undergraduate students meet up to broaden their networking opportunities and enhance their academic interests through panel discussions. This has given her the opportunity to put the communications and problem-solving skills she gained through her York University undergraduate experience to good use.



## Flashback



**A LOT HAS CHANGED FOR ALLISON WALKER** née MacAdam (BA '01, BEd '02) since she posed in her cap and gown with her then fiancé, now husband, in front of Vari Hall in 2002. Today, as a full-time elementary school teacher in eastern Ontario and a busy mom of three, she looks back fondly on her time at York University. "I always loved working with kids, so teaching was a natural fit for me," she says. "I came to York through a program with Seneca College, and I got through the courses thanks to lots of late-night study sessions with my classmates, some of whom I still keep in touch with. York's Faculty of Education helped prepare me for the real world as much as possible, and I landed my first job right after graduation. Now, after 15 years of teaching, I still think about the people I met and the lessons I learned there."

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

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