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Hope in a Time of Pandemic

Selected presentations from

*Stories of Hope:
A Celebration of Canada*

A conference held on June 29, 2020

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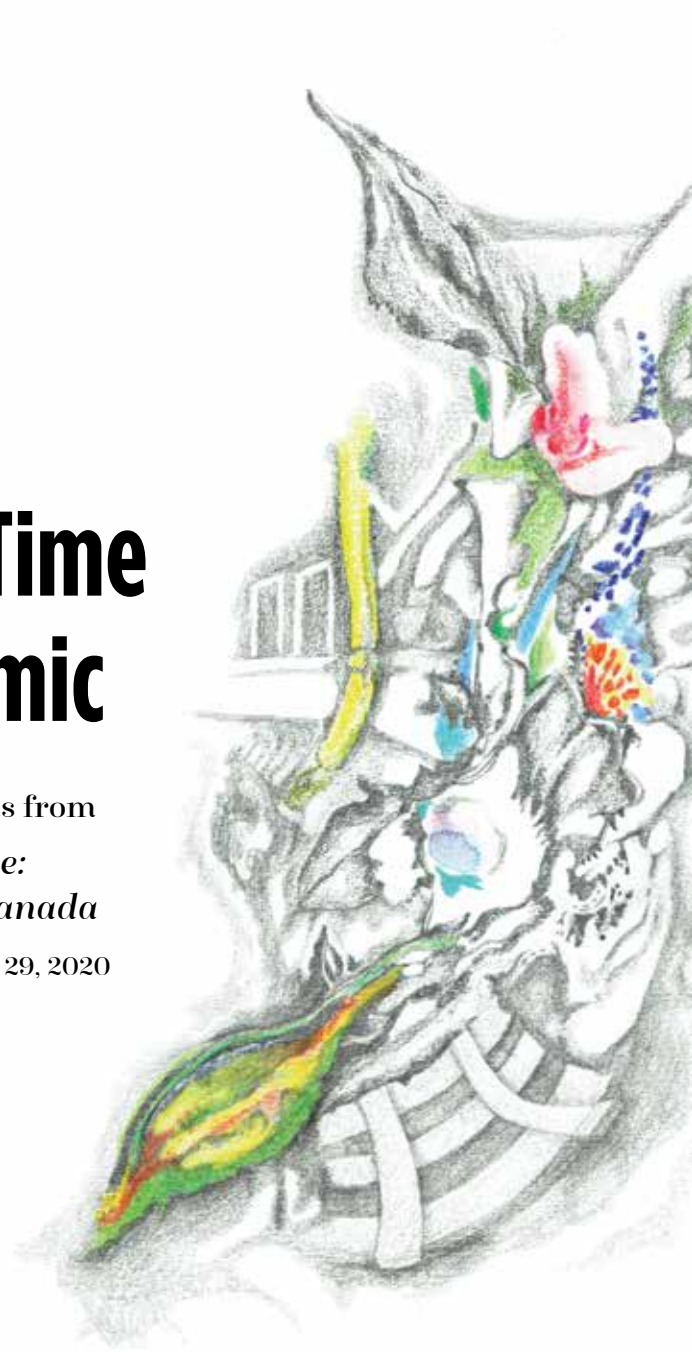


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LETTERS

Comments on this edition of *Canadian Issues*?

We want to hear from you!

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INTRODUCTION

BUILDING BONDS IN THE MIDST OF SOLITUDE

MIRIAM TAYLOR

Miriam Taylor is the Director of Publications and Partnerships at the Association for Canadian Studies and Metropolis Institute. She is the Managing Editor of ACS-Metropolis' flagship publications, *Canadian Issues*, *Canadian Diversity* and the recently launched *Metropolis* eBook.

In June 2020, as we entered the third month of lockdown, the world was struggling to come to grips with being plunged into a global pandemic. With regular reports of suffering and death and daily life at a standstill, fear and uncertainty became familiar emotions. Humankind faced a growing sense of social strife it could ill afford as the pandemic revealed the structural fault lines of our societies and tensions emerged over how to navigate the crisis.

To provide some badly needed hope and inspiration, the Association for Canadian Studies partnered with Metropolis Canada, Experiences Canada, Historica and the Social Sciences and Humanities and Research Council (SSHRC) to host a conference coinciding with Canada Day entitled, *Stories of Hope: A Celebration of Canada*. Bringing together

voices of Canadians from diverse communities who have overcome adversity and overwhelming challenges to make Canada a better place, the conference linked us to the past to imagine the future. By forging connections between us and reminding us of our common humanity, the stories also aspired to shed light on some of the vital lessons needed to tackle unprecedented global challenge.

Assembled in this special edition of *Canadian Issues* are selected conference presentations with a view to preserving and sharing some of the uplifting stories heard at the moving day-long event. The edition is divided into three sections. Section 1) **Inspiration from Immigration: Stories of Courage and Hope**, tells riveting immigrant stories. Section 2) **Learning from History: Transcending the Past, Transforming the**

Future, highlights historical victories in the struggle to secure the recognition of fundamental rights. The third section 3) **Building the Canada of Tomorrow: Youth Making a Difference Today**, focusses on youth as the builders of our future.

The issue opens with three texts tying hope to the imperative to recognize and correct the inequalities and injustices that continue to plague our society. In his welcoming remarks, transcribed here, Minister of Canadian Heritage Steven Guilbeault evokes the transformative power of stories: “it’s sharing our life experiences that puts us on the road to healing and to more meaningful relationships.” He also affirms his government’s commitment to build a more inclusive society by combatting racism, discrimination, exclusion and obstacles to self-actualization that leave minority communities at a disadvantage.

In a searing and powerful opening address, the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean makes a poetic uncompromising indictment of injustices past and present, evoking those left behind by the pandemic and condemning the structural blind spots that led to the brutal murder of George Floyd. If we want hope to flourish, insists Madame Jean, we need to have the courage to look reality in the eye, and root out the hatred and indifference that suffocate and poison our world.

Philosopher Charles Taylor also finds hope in the opportunity that global adversity has afforded us. The COVID-19 pandemic and the harrowing murder of George Floyd that transfixed the entire world have laid bare the structural inequalities that impede communal action and highlighted the essential importance of solidarity for our survival. The crisis has provided us with a chance for

renewal, an opening to learn from and act on these lessons, an opportunity that Taylor hopes will not be squandered.

The first section 1) **Inspiration from Immigration: Stories of Courage and Hope** contains four extraordinary immigrant stories exhibiting exemplary courage and triumph over adversity. The stories are those of an Olympian, an innovator, a parliamentarian and a peacekeeper.

Born in Somalia in the grips of civil war, Mohammed Ahmed started competing as a runner as a teenager and overcame seemingly insurmountable odds to become an Olympian and a bronze medallist at the 2019 World Athletic Championships.

One of an estimated two million “boat people”, Can Nguyen left his native Vietnam in 1980 and narrowly escaped death to become an award-winning eco-innovator finding creative environmental ways to turn waste into an agent of growth.

Jean Augustine came from Grenada on a program that secured her Canadian permanent residence in exchange for a year working as a domestic servant. She went on to incarnate a series of firsts, becoming the first African Canadian Member of Parliament and Minister in the Canadian government and leaving a lasting legacy as a mentor and advocate.

Major Samson Young fled Laos, lived in a refugee camp in Thailand, and eventually settled in Canada where he distinguished himself as a peacekeeper in the Canadian Armed Forces and continues to inspire through his lifelong desire to learn and share.

Section 2) **Learning from History: Transcending**

the Past, Transforming the Future highlights hard-won historical battles for the respect and recognition of minority rights. The stories demonstrate that even when the struggles seem initially hopeless, the courage to stand up and persevere have the power to transform our future. Michelle Douglas was a proud member of the Canadian military with a bright future ahead of her, until she was subjected to intense interrogation and eventually dismissed from the service because of her sexual orientation. With a group of fellow activists, she challenged the system, reversed the policy and secured a historic apology for the LGBTQ+ community.

Jean Teillet, the great-grandniece of Louis Riel and the author of a book telling Canada's history from the Métis perspective, illustrates the power of teaching our children to invest in a better future even when immediate results are impossible. Rosemary Sadlier recounts the tenacity required for a stay-at-home mom to fight for and eventually gain official recognition for Black History Month in Canada. Senator Wanda Bernard shares her extraordinary journey as one of thirteen fatherless children living in extreme poverty and attending a segregated school. She went on to become a civil rights advocate with a career in social work and ultimately a Senator in the Canadian parliament.

The final section 3) **Building the Canada of Tomorrow: Youth Making a Difference Today** focusses on youth, their potential and their unique talents as the future builders of our country. Drawing on data from two surveys of 12- to 17-year-olds, Ashley Manuel, Managing Director of ACS, reflects on the optimism and resilience of these rarely heard from young Canadians amid an unprecedented pandemic with all its challenges and

difficulties. Ilona Dougherty, a widely consulted expert on the unique abilities of young people, counters negative misconceptions about this group known as generation Z. She points to the way in which their unique abilities will be essential in tackling the problems of the 21st century. She also notes the intergenerational solidarity that has been fostered by the pandemic, a perhaps unanticipated yet positive outcome of being thrown together in isolation, that will no doubt help us to face the challenges that lie ahead.

Deborah Morrison, the president and chief executive officer (CEO) of Experiences Canada, the largest and oldest youth travel and exchange program in Canada, characterizes Canada's youth as actively involved in social justice and seized with the desire to effect change. She remarks on their remarkable resilience and leadership and introduces us to five exceptional young leaders who will be shaping the Canada of tomorrow. Tessa Erikson, a member of the Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation, created an application to revitalize Dakehl, the native language of her people. Emma Lim created and galvanized an impressive network of student climate change activists. Stella Bowles used social media to alert her neighbourhood to the dangerous pollution in the local river and succeeded in pushing three levels of government to address and correct the problem. Abhayjeet and Sukhmeet Singh Sachal are a brother duo who became cultural connectors. In the final article of the publication, the brothers tell the story of how a tragedy sparked a movement and led to the creation of a foundation bringing youth together to break down barriers.



WELCOME REMARKS FROM THE MINISTER
OF CANADIAN HERITAGE,
THE HONOURABLE STEVEN GUILBEAULT



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA

Distinguished guests,
Dear friends,

It is a pleasure to be with you to celebrate Canada and hear your stories of hope.

I am speaking to you from Montreal, on the traditional territory of the Mohawk First Nation, and I am honoured to join such an inspiring group.

Thank you to the Association of Canadian Studies and all its partners for bringing us together. So often, it's sharing our life experiences that puts us on the road to healing and to more meaningful relationships.

This week is a week of celebration in Canada. What better time to recognize and salute everything that we as a society owe to Indigenous peoples, Francophones, and Canadians of all origins?

This year in particular, we remember how Manitoba joined Confederation 150 years ago through the efforts of the Métis Nation.

We've come a long way in all that history. Far enough to start to realize how far we still have to go to make this country truly inclusive.

Indeed, the last few weeks have reminded us that in Canada we can do better.

Whether we are talking about racism against Aboriginal people, Blacks, or Asian Canadians...
Whether we are talking about discrimination against women or the LGBTQ2 community...
Whether we are talking about obstacles to the self-actualization of young people or minority groups...

All this has no place in our society. And yet, we still see it. It is even a daily reality for millions of people in Canada.

That's why our government is working hard to build a more inclusive Canada for everyone: a country where everyone has equal rights and equal opportunities to succeed.

In recent months, I've been working closely with my fellow ministers, Bardish Chagger and Mélanie Joly, to roll out a range of programs and initiatives.

Our Anti-Racism Strategy has us working together with our government and non-government partners, Indigenous peoples, and community groups to figure out what needs to be done and work towards those goals.

We're also striving to better support Black Canadians, and to establish the conditions for the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages.

Young people are an integral part of it all. Our Youth Policy aims to get young people involved in setting the course for the future and shaping the decisions that affect them.

Which reminds me, I'd like to salute the young people who are going to be tackling issues relating to Indigenous languages and the environment with us today.¹

Our government's commitment to LGBTQ2 communities can also be seen in a number of actions, such as making conversion therapy illegal, protecting people's rights, and supporting Pride celebrations.

Finally, our long-standing support for official language minority communities remains unwavering.

Across the country, these communities can find in our Government a faithful ally who is deeply convinced of the essential, unique and remarkable role they play in the development of our society.

Our efforts are manifold, but they serve one cause: the cause of an increasingly inclusive, safe, open and welcoming Canada.

Today, we have a golden opportunity to open up to others and listen to their stories, their poems, their music and, above all, their words of hope. Let's make the most of it!

Have a good conference!

1 One of the conference panels is entitled "Building the Canada of Tomorrow: Youth Making a Difference Today." The panelists are listed in the bilingual [program](#).

OPENING ADDRESS

SPEAKING THE TRUTH FOR A NEW BEGINNING

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE MICHAËLLE JEAN

The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean is the 27th Governor General, Commander-in-Chief of Canada, former UNESCO Special Envoy to Haiti, 3rd Secretary General of La Francophonie, and co-founder of the Michaëlle Jean Foundation.

Dear Friends,

I would like to begin by recognizing, with all my love and infinite gratitude, the First Peoples who have carried the breath and soul of this immense boreal land that is Canada, since time immemorial.

For First Nations, the Métis and Inuit peoples, this land holds no secret. For millennia, they have been the guardians and custodians of a rich and diverse, natural, cultural and linguistic heritage of great tangible and intangible importance... only a sliver of which we can now appreciate.

The loss is abyssal. How many languages and precious artifacts have now disappeared, depriving of critical knowledge not only the peoples whose identity and

existence were its originators, but all of us, humanity as a whole.

Time and again, our Indigenous brothers and sisters persist in reminding us of the treasured memories that they hold, ones they long to share with us and with the rest of the world, on the importance of safeguarding the land with all the life that it shelters. They say it with fervour, in the vibrant, beating heart of their drums, songs and incantations, dances and stories that not only evoke the Creator, but also summon the spirit of the ancestors, their precious teachings, an appreciation for all the knowledge and wisdom they passed down to us.

The depth of Indigenous words never ceases to move and amaze me. They are living testimony to

the scale of the hardships, the suffering, the wounds.

Above all, these are words that speak the language of resistance, tongues that stand proud and fierce, to this day, over no less than five centuries of colonization, and struggles.



National Black Canadians Summit, Ottawa, February 2019.

Indigenous words speak of an incredible willpower to safeguard experience, knowledge, stories, civilizational traits and that constant relationship to the universe, the sacredness of all creatures and the land.

How hard it must be to remain perpetually excluded, kept at the margins of this very land, land of which they were abruptly dispossessed, while they gave so much and still have so much to offer.

And it is in these terms that Indigenous peoples wish to be heard, so that we can conceive with them of a future together.

As Governor General of Canada, on October 15, 2009, when I had the immense privilege of

launching the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with survivors of the residential schools, accompanied by their children and grandchildren, I had these words:

"When the present doesn't recognize the wrongs of the past, the future takes its revenge. For that reason, we must never, never turn away from the opportunity of confronting history together – the opportunity to right a historical wrong."

Isn't that what we are confronted with, now more than ever in these days of social strife, even as we look into what this pandemic is revealing?

“ Indigenous words speak of an incredible willpower to safeguard experience, knowledge, stories, civilizational traits and that constant relationship to the universe, the sacredness of all creatures and the land.”

See how critical it is that we, Canadians from all walks of life, strive to come together by remembering where we come from, the stumbling blocks, the difficult and painful times, the long winding path we have travelled as well as our many accomplishments, the achievements and the values we want to continue to see prevail in order to move forward, together.

We can only celebrate Canada on the basis of this vibrant hope; an urgent, fundamental, foundational hope.

In these times of great uncertainty and anxiety, who can say how and in what state we will emerge from this crisis?

After putting so much distance between ourselves, after the lockdown, with shops, offices and businesses closed up for months, will we see with infinite sadness our efforts falter?

We have feared. We have seen many of our elders die. We often could not attend to their final moments with dignity. Neither could we pay them the tribute they deserved.

The grief does not leave us.

A full light has finally been shed on the abuse our elders have suffered.

It took a pandemic to expose the horror and the consequences of the irresponsible blind spots that we now need to take into account, in shame.

It took the pandemic to realize, with shame, the horrific consequences of our carelessness, the irresponsibility behind our structural blind spots.

We will have to do everything we can to make sure the words of goodwill are put into action.

For the most vulnerable among us, for our most underserved communities, for marginalized young people, for abused and imperiled women and their children, for migrants, asylum seekers and seasonal workers, we see the worst scenarios unfold. We are deeply concerned by the gaps widening.

What gives us hope, however, is the valour of the

women and men on the front lines. The many who do not spare any effort, who, on the contrary, answer the call of duty with a sense of dedication that commands admiration. Those, many of them immigrants, who face all manner of risk to alleviate the suffering of others, to save lives, and provide essential services.

“It took the pandemic to realize, with shame, the horrific consequences of our carelessness, the irresponsibility behind our structural blind spots.”

I remember my beloved mother, a psychiatric and geriatric nurse, who followed the same vocation, with the same work ethic. Like my aunt, who died alone in Montreal in a long-term care centre, stricken by COVID-19. No member of her family was allowed to assist her.

Our gratitude also goes to those along the chain links of solidarity who persist in making the voices of the most vulnerable and the most deprived heard, their realities known.

What is also being vocally expressed these days are much heightened demands towards respect for life, human rights, the rule of law, key principles and values. Thousands of citizens are taking to the streets to demand, clamour, speak up with a concern for constant vigilance.

The brutality and agony inflicted on George Floyd in the course of a murderous police intervention in Minneapolis did not fail to ignite outrage and fright.

The black man pinned to the ground.

The white man in uniform, leisurely putting his weight through his knee on the neck of his prey.

The black man moaning, crying out in pain, clearly saying that he is dying.

The white man in uniform, leisurely pushing even harder to suffocate him. Until his very last breath.

George Floyd is neither the first nor the last one on the receiving end of such rage. The list is unending and overwhelming, not just in the United States, but elsewhere, right here at home as well.

The list that includes George Floyd is a long and damning one. The rage has taken so many lives, not only in the US, but elsewhere and here at home also.

Police brutality, the use of excessive force, racial profiling are realities that Blacks and Indigenous people know too much about.

“The air has become increasingly unbreathable, fouled with hatred of the other.”

The data, statistics, studies, reports, testimonies and the images of assault and brutality abound, all pointing with evidence to the heinous nature of racism.

They also conjure up the heritage and stigma of a certain colonial history that, for centuries, denied

Black and Indigenous peoples their humanity, that put them down, as the least of the least, the last of the last; Let us remember that Black and Indigenous peoples were enslaved together in the founding years of this country and across this continent.



National Black Canadians Summit, Ottawa, February 2019.

Hope that this may change is now within our grasp. It is found in the hearts and courage of thousands of demonstrators of all skin colour, shades and origins, many of them young who, in the midst of the pandemic, have taken to the streets in cities across Canada and around the world, chanting: “Black Lives Matter! Our lives matter too! All lives matter!”... along with George Floyd’s last words, “I can’t breathe!”

Because this much is clear: the air has become increasingly unbreathable, fouled with hatred of the other, the creeping stench of xenophobia, racism against Blacks, the dark-skinned, the Asian, the Aboriginal, so many brutal and deadly homophobic incidents or against Muslims, recurrent antisemitism, extremism, terrorism, mass shootings and massacres, some targeting women. This madness is suffocating and poisoning the world.

But worse is the indifference.

Do we betray our country when we say the racism is systemic, that it is cunningly embedded in the attitudes, biases and practices found within many sectors of our society, businesses and institutions?

Do we betray our country when we say that such systemic racism undermines and destroys lives?

Some people seem to think so and would rather take refuge in denial.

Hope is in the desire to serve our country, the courage to speak the truth as a call of duty, crying out for a new beginning. Nothing shows greater determination than this rallying call to end, yes, systemic discrimination and racism.

Individuals and communities are rising, asking for more, making their voices heard, demanding action. Respect! Recognition! Equity for all!

The time has come, I believe, to take action and to build together upon the strong foundation of everything we share, our universal humanistic values, and invest our best selves in the cause of justice.

Hope is in our sense of urgency, our pressing calls to combat all forms of economic and social inequality, to ensure that all have a right to freedom, peace of mind, dignity coupled with serenity, physical and mental wellbeing, safety, along with decent living conditions, and the same confidence towards the future.

Hope is in the loud calls and manifest desire to break down the walls of indifference, to let it be

known that nothing good comes from excluding others, to help everyone understand that marginalization is one of the worst forms of aggression, that it leads to so much violence.

Hope is in all of us, the life forces of Canadian communities coming together to press relentlessly for uncompromising public policies that address and redress inequalities.

Hope is in our combined qualities and capacities coming together, our collective intelligence towards nothing less than the eradication of all forms of discrimination and injustice.

Hope is in all our voices united, as sisters and brothers of a unique race, the human race, clamouring for change, through all the small gestures that make a difference and allow us to move forward, to overcome terror, cruelty and contempt.



Planning Committee for the National Black Canadians Summit, Halifax, March 2020 (postponed to March, 2021-2022).

Dear friends,

The Canada we love, the Canada we want to celebrate today cannot be on the wrong side of history.

We will not let the country that we love go adrift, turn its back on the hope that is within our reach, even in these difficult times.

“This hope also requires courage. The courage to look reality in the eye, to see clearly and understand better so we can take action in a truly inclusive and exemplary manner.”

The hope requires us to spare no effort. It demands we always remain vigilant.

We are marking Canadian Multiculturalism Day, an ideal established as a system in Canada and for which we celebrate 50 years of implementation filled with good intentions, an intent in marked contrast to policies of assimilation, seeking to highlight the richness of our diversity.

However, this ideal of multiculturalism that we celebrate today should not distract us from the sum total of the persistent inequalities and injustices that jeopardize our ability to live well together.

This hope also requires courage. The courage to look reality in the eye, to see clearly and understand better so we can take action in a truly inclusive and exemplary manner.

I heard, “nothing about us, without us!” and I agree. The change we want to see has to include all, matter to all and be a shared responsibility.

The voices of the oppressed, their experiences and outlooks are part of the solution.

The time is ripe for all of our hopes, ripe for recognizing and celebrating each and every stone that women, men and youth, organizations and institutions bring to the edifice, the building of the country that we want, a Canada founded upon justice and equity.

RENEWAL

CHARLES TAYLOR

Charles Taylor, CC GOQ FRSC FBA, Professor Emeritus, McGill University, Canadian political philosopher, Author of *Sources of the Self, A Secular Age* and co-author of a forthcoming book on the degenerations of democracy, Co-Chair, Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (for the Government of Quebec), Montreal, Quebec. Professor Taylor is best known for his contributions to political philosophy, the philosophy of social science, the history of philosophy, and intellectual history. His work has earned him the Kyoto Prize, the Templeton Prize, the Berggruen Prize for Philosophy, and the John W. Kluge Prize.

Thank you very much. I'm very, very pleased to be here. Today we're talking about hope, and I think we're living one of the potentially most hopeful moments I've lived for a long time, and all in the wake of two terrible occurrences: first of all, the COVID-19 (pandemic), and then the horrific murder of George Floyd.

I am convinced that the world reaction to Floyd's death, which was really extraordinary, not just in the U.S. and Canada but around the world, owed something to it occurring in the midst of the pandemic. I think of COVID-19 – and this has been said over and over again – as equivalent in some ways to a war experience. Everyone feels threatened. Everyone has friends and family members who have gotten or could get the disease, so it endangers everyone. And that feeling of all being in the same boat can produce, and did produce, a sense of solidarity in almost all the countries of

the world. It's quite remarkable. Countries and communities that had experienced tensions before now feel they must come together to stop the spread of the pandemic.

We have also become all too aware, as the pandemic has progressed, of the things we have neglected to do, a neglect that has made the threat of COVID-19 all the greater. The threat to our health systems that were run down, the severe lack of provisions to keep our elders safe. Things of this kind, that had been somewhat hidden from general public view beforehand, suddenly became very evident. COVID-19 revealed that we really had the wrong priorities in many ways. The production of goods for individual consumption was being accorded much too high a priority, while the production of goods for collective needs was much too low on the scale of priorities. That has really come back to haunt us.

Also, we are beginning to see with greater clarity the great inequalities that exist in our society. It is obvious that certain vulnerable populations are much more exposed, are suffering much more from COVID-19, for reasons to do with their social and economic conditions, their living and housing conditions, their lack of accessibility to health institutions, as well as racism and prejudice, among other things.

COVID-19 has created a kind of X-ray of our society, where all the gaps and deficiencies have been laid bare. And it is in this context that the murder of Georges Floyd occurred, an event that was completely traumatic for me, and, judging from the reaction around the world, traumatic on a massive scale. And it triggered reactions that are much stronger and therefore much healthier than what we usually see in the normal course of things.

The response to the murder of George Floyd came at a moment when we were ready for a movement of solidarity, as we became aware that the pandemic affected certain groups in very disproportionate ways. This was the case not only in the United States, but also in lots of other countries. So, we witnessed this tremendous movement. I'm not really astonished to see it in the States or that a reaction to it came across the frontier to Canada, but it is surprising to watch as this movement has been spreading throughout the entire world.

We might wonder exactly what it was that produced this incredible response. The motivation behind the movement is what gives us grounds for hope. Because we now witness people, lots of people, not only young people, really demanding change, demanding, first of all, that we equalize things, that

we create equal conditions where great inequalities exist. Those protesting are also demanding that we break down some of the existing barriers in our societies, that we become united as we never have been before. This demand to eliminate barriers is in the very nature of solidarity, and it has spread like a groundswell across the world. It is aimed against discrimination, and inequalities, and in favour of the creation of greater channels of communication between people.

There are realities that really worry people in the present situation, some of which have suddenly become unbearable. One is that many of us in our society live under very privileged conditions, and because of the richness that our economy and technology have produced, we have lives that go way beyond those of our ancestors. You're looking at an old man and I've lived way beyond what would have been considered the normal age 50 years ago. That's just one example. But now the insight is unavoidable, particularly when we see what has occurred during the pandemic, that our privilege exists at the expense of people who don't enjoy these same advantages. We benefit from resources coming to us instead of to them. We have been made aware of the exceptional privileges we enjoy and that make our life so wonderful and at the same time of the fact that this standard of living is often achieved at the expense of others. This causes a very uncomfortable feeling, one which is hard to experience without wishing to right the imbalances. We want to make the changes necessary so that everyone has access to this wonderful life that our modernity has made possible.

That's the first goal. The second is to break down the barriers between different people and different

groups, so that we can finally recognize each other as being on an equal footing. These are two aspects of the response to the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd that are very, very powerful. Some of us are now putting pressure on our political systems and our social systems to address these obstacles.

There is also another issue, and that is the burden of hatred. There is a lot of hatred in our societies because we have been pitted against one another under false pretexts. Our societies have shown themselves to be very adept at adopting attitudes of hatred and of mobilizing against those described as other. This hate is a burden which gnaws at us from the inside and is not a good way to live. However, this burden of hatred is something that we can come to grips with, that we can throw off. The groups that have been the object of hate are our brothers, our sisters, our fellow citizens. Eliminating this hatred from our midst will ultimately create a feeling of great relief.

“We’ve got to go forward and address the problems that are undermining our solidarity while also taking up the challenge of global warming that is threatening us.”

I believe there’s a moment here, in the wake of the George Floyd movement, where people are becoming more aware of the need to make these changes. But that’s the problem – this is only a moment. It is a moment that can pass and be forgotten. There’s a part of us, going through these times, that is dying

to get back to normal. On the other hand, some of us want to get back not to “that normal,” but to a new kind of normal. I imagine as we move forward that these two conflicting desires are going to be driven apart. We will witness political forces that will say, “Oh, we’re so indebted, we’re indebted up to our necks, we can’t possibly afford a better health system, better conditions to equalize the situations of certain populations that have been excluded”. And other voices will say: “No, on the contrary, we can’t go back to what we’ve seen before. We’ve got to go forward and address the problems that are undermining our solidarity while also taking up the challenge of global warming that is threatening us.” And I anticipate that we’re going to have a huge battle about which of these directions to take.

There’s no doubt in my mind about which one we should take, but if we take the option of getting back to the old “normal,” this wonderful moment of opportunity will have been wasted, and that would be a great tragedy. We have hope today because there are real grounds for hope, but only if we heed the call for change that we are hearing across the world right now.

Thank you very much.

THE NOMADIC OLYMPIAN

MOHAMMED AHMED

Mohammed Ahmed is a Canadian long-distance runner. Ahmed won the bronze medal in the 5000 m at the 2019 World Athletics Championships in Doha, the first Canadian to medal in the event, and is a two-time silver medalist at the Commonwealth Games in the 5000 and 10,000 m events. Ahmed competed at the 2012 and 2016 Summer Olympics. He also ran the eleventh fastest indoor 5000m in history in Boston in 2017, setting the Canadian national record in the process. He was born in Mogadishu, Somalia to Said Yusuf and Halimo Farah, and moved to Canada at the age of 11. He began running track at the age of 16. Ahmed's family is originally from Hargeisa, Somaliland.

Whenever I am asked to share my story, I am always a little hesitant. I am not sure of the exact reason for my reluctance, besides maybe the feeling of having told the story so many times. But another reason may be knowing that Canada, a country built by immigrants, sustains itself through the contributions of millions of us with similar stories. In this context, one might wonder whether mine would be considered all that special or different from the typical immigrant Canadian story. This, however, does not mean I downplay the importance of sharing ideas and experiences and the positive impact doing so can have in our society.

One can choose to identify who someone is in a

variety of ways and, for me, my nomadic way of life is an interesting part of how I see myself. I would describe myself as someone who wasn't meant to be here. Pardon the melodrama, but I say that based on the circumstance of my birth. I was born in Somalia, the country that sits on the eastern-most corner of Africa, straddling the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.

I was born there in 1991 at the height of the country's civil war. The thing about conflict is it displaces things and obviously people. But the way my parents stuck it out together at ages 22 and 23 and decided to bring me into the world is a testament to their indomitable spirit. Two months after

my birth, my parents decided to escape to safety. I like to think they finally had enough of the bullet-riddled life marked by tremendous uncertainty, but my arrival was the thing that finally gave them the push to leave.

My parents arrived in Kenya at a refugee camp and then, through monetary help from uncles abroad, were able to relocate and settle in Nairobi. It is there that we lived for some time until, unexpectedly, my parents decided to uproot our growing family once more – this time under slightly different circumstances than those of our first move. For logistical reasons, my dad was not going to be making the journey with us this time. In November 2001, just as winter was approaching, my mom, my twin brothers Kadar and Ibrahim, two-year-old little brother Hamza, my cousin and I arrived in Canada – with nothing but the few suitcases holding our African weather-specific attire.

I look back on our first year to 18 months in Canada and recall how all I seemed to do was complain. It's dissimilarity to our place of origin, the foreignness of the language, the fact that I missed my friends, my father and, yes, the sun. I recall one day in particular. My mom dragged me along with her to make a grocery run on our only means of getting around the city during that time, public transportation. As we waited for the bus to arrive, which was running a few minutes late on a bitter cold winter day, I turned to my mom, freezing and asked her: "why Mom? Why did we come here? We don't know anyone or have anything. How are we supposed to make it?" Despite her reply: "calm down, relax my son", I kept on and on with my complaining. So, my mom turned to a Somali verse to soothe me. She recited:

*Oh, you I bore first with delight
No matter the circumstances of life
No matter how bleak the plight
No matter who might attack at night
Or out at sea who might pass one another in full flight
We seek protection in Allah's might
For his companionship is never out of sight
So darling never hesitate with fright
From our present circumstance we will rise
From uncertainty we will take flight
So darling never hesitate with fright
The future is full of bright light
So darling never hesitate with fright.*

It was a tough and bitter cold adjustment, but we managed.

The lessons I learned from my family's move to Canada are many, but a few in particular stand out: first, you ought to take risks in whatever endeavour you choose. My mom deciding to bring her kids to a country she knew very little about, unable to speak the language, without a partner or father figure to help with raising four boys, represented risk-taking on a tremendous scale. How did she know we were going to stay on the straight and narrow and follow the life that she had envisioned for us? She didn't. She only made what she thought was the best decision for herself and her kids, uprooting her whole existence and hoping for the best. How did she manage to shoulder all the worry associated with raising kids in a foreign land and also providing for so many mouths? She believed in herself, leaning on whatever supports she could find – friends, one another, God.

They say heroes wear capes, and I'll agree to that if a hijab can be included in this definition too. If

a hero exists in my life; it is my mom. The stubbornness, courage and will in that woman have propelled my brothers and me very far in our lives. My brothers and I are all university educated, most of us with multiple degrees and still working on making mama proud. I share this story not to elicit pity, but rather to underscore the importance of risk-taking, of going for it when you don't know the outcome. Be brave, be fearless!

Believe it or not, it was in Canada that I discovered running, despite having lived in the country that dominates the sport for most of my early childhood.



Mohammed with his superhero Mom, Halimo Farah

In the summer of 2004, my brothers and I watched the Athens Olympic Games in our basement. Watching the victories of Kenenisa Bekele over 10 thousand metres, Hicham El-Garrouj's textbook finish in the 1500-metre event, and both of their epic battles with Eliud Kipchoge over 5000 metres, provided me with a push towards running. I can vividly recall how after each one of those races, I quickly proceeded to do laps in my basement. It was those Olympic Games that instilled in me the desire to one day want to compete at such a level.

“They say heroes wear capes, and I’ll agree to that if a hijab can be included in this definition too.”

When school started in September, the first thing I made sure to do was sign up for the cross-country team and, though I was not a terrible runner, I quickly discovered I was not great either. I had plenty of baby fat around the face and had not stretched out quite enough, just yet. I was a middle of the pack runner for the majority of my middle school years, but that did not stop me from writing in my grade 8 graduation yearbook next to future occupation: Olympian.

When I arrived in high school, I continued with my streak of signing up for the cross-country team. On my first full high school cross-country season, things were changing a little for me. I was finishing up slightly more towards the front of the pack than I had in the past. It might have been the little bit of training that I was introduced to, or maybe the fact that my body finally stretched out to pretty much

its current long and lanky frame. Throughout high school, year by year, I made slight improvements; initially one place from making it to OFSAA – the Olympics of high school running in Ontario, to top ten my second year, and finally back-to-back OFSAA XC Champion my junior and senior years. With the guidance, training, and knowledge I gained from the local track club I had joined, I learned that I could get my education paid for and race alongside some of the best in the sport in the NCAA.

I chose the University of Wisconsin-Madison and I remember one of my pleas before I committed to Mick Byrne – Dublin born and bred, but with a terrible New York accent too: “Hey, Mick, on my third year, I want to be on that 2012 Canadian Olympic Team. He replied: ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever. Just initial and sign those damn papers and we’ll discuss it when you get there,’ ‘Deal!’, I said. I came to Madison with dreams of gaining individual success, team titles and, most importantly, of joining the Olympic team. I can vividly remember during the 2010 World Junior track and field Championships after my freshman campaign, where I competed in the 10k and finished 4th. Athletics Canada leadership, our country’s governing body, sat all the members of Team Canada down and told us we were the 2016 candidates, and all I could think of was that I wanted to make it in 2012 and fulfill my 8th-grade ambition of being an Olympian, at the earliest opportunity.

When that third year came around, having capped off a national team title in the fall, I convinced Mick to redshirt me during the winter in order to put in the necessary preparation to tackle the Olympic standard for the outdoor season. I don’t know how

I did it, but on a cool night in May, at the Payton Jordan invitational, I managed to get together a decent enough effort to snag the Olympic standard. I surprised even myself because, despite my deep desire and drive going into that race, I needed to improve on my Personal Best by almost a minute in order to have a fighting chance. I went into those Olympic Games, running on fumes – a-tired college kid, just happy to be there – but also determined to soak in all the experience I could for the years to follow.

I left the 2012 games with the 2016 Rio Olympics in my sights and a podium finish on my mind. After graduating from UW-Madison, I joined the Bowerman Track club – a Nike group in Portland with plenty of talented athletes. I was intimidated at first, as I am sure my teammates could attest to, with all the nervous tics I displayed. But the nurturing environment at Bowerman and the high goal-oriented nature of the group was a perfect fit. After a transitional 2015 year, where I was a world championship finalist and set a Canadian national record in the 5000 metres, I welcomed 2016 with plenty of excitement. Right out of the gate, I bested my Canadian record by almost 10 seconds in the first race of the outdoor season at the Prefontaine Classic, just narrowly missing the 13-minute mark with a time of 1:01 p.m. to finish third. That race took me to the games as a potential medallist. Something I had been dreaming of by this point for almost two decades. I put in a lot of work at altitude in Park City Utah in preparation and was setting personal bests in training.

My confidence going into the games had never been higher. Besides the Canadian Olympic Trials where I got to compete alongside my little

brother Ibrahim – I did not run another race after the Pre-Classic. I qualified in both the 5K and 10K. Dating back to my days as a youth athlete, I had always perceived myself as 10,000-metre athlete – I ran the 10K on the track as early as Grade 11, competing at World Juniors, where I ran a personal best and just sneaked in the top 10 with a 9th-place finish. Suffice it to say, I really liked my chances in the 10K at Rio and thought, if I was going to medal, it would be in that race. Those who have watched the race would know that I certainly did not medal and, after getting dropped at around 7k, I would go on to finish in 32nd place – dead effing last.

Going from hopes of medalling and maybe even winning, to getting lapped multiple times and finishing last, left me feeling devastated. I couldn't believe what had happened. How did it go so badly? I was questioning everything – Am I not fit enough, am I not mentally strong enough? I had almost a week before the 5K to toil with my emotions. I stayed at a Hotel in Rio de Janeiro far away from the hoopla of the Olympic Village in solitude. I would call my mom and little brother in the days leading up to the 5000m heats just unloading all of my emotions and insecurities. As always, my mom, was there for me once again, my hero in a hijab. She reassured me and built me back up the way only a mother can.

After many days I finally put the disappointment of the 10K behind me and stepped on the line for the 5000m heats in the sunny Rio de Janeiro daytime heat, where I made it through to the finals. I was determined not to repeat the failure from the previous week. More than anything, I wanted to get some revenge – that was my mantra, seek vengeance. Wearing an all-white Canada kit, I took the

lane and shadowed the reigning Olympic champion. The Ethiopians were determined to make an honest race. They strung together laps of 62 and 63 seconds, taking us through four laps in 4:12. I stayed patient and geared up for a big kick, ready to show the world my newfound speed. As we rounded the turn to take the Penultimate lap, I was in a bad position, stuck on the inside. I managed to find an escape and latch on to the breakaway group of 4, after taking some elbows. At the 200m mark, I was still in it and with 150 metres to go, I attempted to pass wide and overtake for third, where I was met with some fiercer elbows, as the saying goes: if you're not rubbing, you're not racing. My momentum was derailed, and I ran out of gas in the last 50 metres – once again finishing outside of the medals.

After initially getting disqualified along with two other athletes, I was reinstated and was officially fourth in the final standings – which to me might as well have been last. I didn't take any solace in being close. Looking back on it, I am proud of the way I bounced back and the lesson I drew from those games is the importance of not panicking when things get difficult. You will experience bad patches, you just have to fight through them and show up with more vigour the next time – when things got difficult at around 7K on my first race, pandemonium ensued and I mentally shut down. But I was able to grow from those disappointments and not let them define me. The fondest memory from the 2016 Rio Olympic games was finding my coaches, Jerry Schumacher and Pascal Dobert, outside the stadium after the 5000 m final and telling them: 'I have gained something from this. I am ten... even a hundred times the athlete I was entering these games.' Experiences leave marks that have lasting influence and create sparks.

In 2019, I achieved my highest accolade to date, placing third in the 5000-metre race at the World Championships, a demonstration of my growth as an athlete and strength in overcoming past disappointments in Rio and the years that followed. My podium finish in Doha was not a first for only me, but also marked the first time the Canadian maple leaf flew above the medal stand on a track event longer than 800 metres. If I were asked which I am the proudest of, the former (the individual achievement itself) or the latter (the fact of securing Canada its first medal in a distance event), I would choose the latter; the Canadian Heritage moment, because historic achievements will always have meaning and significance to someone or somewhere in society by the mere fact of being 'the first.' In contrast, individual achievement's apex of celebration is only in the moment it happened. It can be replaced by accomplishments in the ensuing years.

Comparison is a major part of the business of sports, and I am certain my Doha performance will most likely be celebrated not for the mere fact that I did it, but for that fact that it happened – the former uniquely tied to the circumstances it was accomplished in and leaving it open to critique, the latter forever linked to and venerated for its place in the history of Canadian distance running. If I were asked to name my most defining moment to date as a Canadian, I would most certainly name this moment. It is impossible to isolate one event in one's life and derive all meaning from it alone. The experiences I had of growing up in Canada shaped who I am as a person and manifest themselves through me everywhere I go. However, I have often had to examine the nuance of my identity, given its complexity.

The dichotomy of a hyphenated body (Somali-Canadian) as well as the duality of being simultaneously both an immigrant and a citizen raised in me questions of belonging and meaning, which proved too difficult to grapple with at certain junctures of my life. By representing Canada around the world in the last two decades, I have had the chance to work through these varying dimensions of my identity and have come to a better understanding of each



Mohammed at the 2019 World Championships

aspect. The diversity of names, background and skin colour of my national teammates allowed me to develop an appreciation for what being Canadian means and solidified in me a deeper understanding of how I fit into the country.

Securing Canada's first ever global medal in a distance event will always be an event I take immense pride in, because Canada provided my family and me with a home when it did not have to and gave us a chance for better opportunities. This event further adds to my bond to this nation, just as the different experiences in wearing the maple leaf on my chest have helped forge a confidence in my Somali and Canadian identity and made sense of my nomadic way of life.

FROM REFUGEE TO ECO-INNOVATOR

CAN NGUYEN

Can Nguyen is the President and CEO of Nurture Growth Bio Fertilizer. He is one of the early Vietnamese refugees / boat people and is a true great Canadian success story.

It was 1975 and Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, was under siege. The Communists had taken over the country as well as our family business and property at this point. My parents, hoping to get us away from the chaos that was occurring in Vietnam, had me and my older brothers flee from our homeland. I was the fourth born of six sons and escaped from Vietnam to Thailand in 1980 by boat. I was one of the estimated two million “boat people” who fled Vietnam by boat and other means over the span of almost two decades – knowing the great risk of getting caught, as it was illegal to leave now that Saigon was now under Communist rule. We were at sea for over 10 days on a 30 ft boat with over 120 people. As we got closer to Thailand, we had to fight off Thai pirates on five separate occasions. Once we finally made it to Thailand, we stayed at a small refugee camp with extremely poor living conditions, holding thousands of refugees. I was eventually able to make it to North America

with my brothers. We were definitely among the lucky ones as anywhere from 200,000 to 400,000 people who tried to flee Vietnam by boat never made it to safety.

“ My father had ingrained in me the drive to strive constantly, always doing and being more – wanting to be better than I was yesterday.”

I faced a lot of adversity when first coming to Canada in my early high school years. Not only was there a major language barrier for me with a new life in a new place, I was also working two jobs to support myself. I was working as a packer at Spalding company and a dishwasher in order to be able to put myself through school full time. I finished a degree

in Electrical Engineering in 1985. Shortly afterwards, I landed a position at Macro Engineering as an entry-level engineer. Once again, I was in an environment where I was the only visible minority. To prove that I had the right work ethic, I would work over 40 hours a week. After a few years, I was promoted within the company and five years later I was the engineering manager. I worked for that company for about 17 years.

My father had ingrained in me the drive to strive constantly, always doing and being more – wanting to be better than I was yesterday. I began to feel like the job was no longer fulfilling, as I wasn't being challenged to learn more. At that point, I decided I wanted to open up my own business and become an entrepreneur. In 2001 I left Macro Engineering and opened Kentech Automation Inc. At Kentech Automation, we specialized in plastic machinery, automotive industry systems and water treatment for city projects.

In 2008-09, I began to see industries moving towards the green/eco and waste-free lifestyle. I created and patented a machine that took recycled tires and dirty plastics to convert them into gasoline and diesel. Unfortunately, this project did not go as far as I would have liked because it couldn't be commercialized here in North America against the big box gas companies.

I also founded Oil Screen Technologies in 2013 after identifying a problem in the restaurant industry that I wanted to help fix. Restaurants emit a high volume of oil vapour and mist from cooking. Regular filters remove about 40% of the oil in the air whereas Oil Screen allows one to filter up to 98.1% of the oil in the air (UL Approved). During

this time, I also wanted to further my knowledge in Biochemistry and completed my master's degree in that field.

Still, with that little itch to do more, I saw another problem that I wanted to solve – efficient composting. We know that compost contains an abundance of nutrients that plants need and love. However, the issue with composting is that it can create problems as it is also a friendly environment for insects and fungi.



Can Nguyen

The problem with fungi and insects and potential pathogens is that you typically have to use chemicals to kill all of these things. We wanted to find an alternative way that avoids the use of chemicals. What we came up was using biologicals to control fungi, bacteria and insects. We use powerful living microorganisms to do this work.

In 2015, we launched Nurture Growth Bio but it took us about three years before we were really able to establish a presence after waiting to receive all the necessary certifications. We eventually met all the government requirements and received all the necessary certifications from OMRI in the US, OMRI Canada, Pro-cert and Eco-Cert.

Nurture Growth's first commercial client was a winery in Grimsby. Since they began using Nurture Growth, they've noticed increased sugar levels in their grapes and they no longer need to use any pesticides or fungicides. Since then, we've quickly gained traction working with many fruit and vegetable farmers, greenhouses, cannabis facilities, ornamental industries and more, by offering free trials for farmers to test our product and observe the difference Nurture Growth makes to their crops. With the success for our Nurture Growth Pro, we decided to launch our residential line in 2019 called Nurture Growth Home.

We were approved in 2020 and are now carried in a number of major stores and online shopping websites. In 2019 we were one of 50 companies in Canada awarded the Ontario Agriculture Disruptor Award. We pride ourselves on providing our customers with a 100% organic and environmentally friendly fertilizer option.

BEING THE MESSENGER AND THE MESSAGE

THE HONOURABLE JEAN AUGUSTINE

Jean Augustine made history in 1993 as the first African-Canadian woman to be elected to Canada's House of Commons as the Member of Parliament from the Greater Toronto Area constituency of Etobicoke-Lakeshore. She was reelected in four consecutive elections, serving as Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and Minister of Multiculturalism and the Status of Women, and securing unanimous legislative support to pass a historic motion designating February as Black History Month in Canada. The Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community and Diaspora, aiming to advance access, equity and inclusivity to education through community engagement and collaborative action was launched at York University in Toronto to honour her work and commitment. In 2007, Augustine was called on by the Government of Ontario to lead an initiative commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the 1807 British Slave Trade Act. Later that year, she was appointed the first-ever Fairness Commissioner for the Province of Ontario. In 2021, Ms. Augustine was Lifetime Achievement recipient for the Maclean's Parliamentarian of the Year Awards.

I came to Canada 60 years ago. Thank you for celebrating my 60th anniversary in this country with me. I am so very pleased to be part of this celebration of hope. I like the word "hope".

I left Grenada knowing that I would miss all the festivities and preparations for the 29th of June which is called the Feastday of St Peter and St Paul. In Grenada, this is commonly known as the Fishermen's birthday. It is a big celebration. The fishermen would bring their boats on shore and decorate them with colourful ribbons, flowers and medals of saints and good luck charms. There would a parade from the Roman Catholic Church to

the beach where the priests would bless the boats with holy water and pray for the safety of the fishermen and for an excellent fishing season. It was really a big celebration; a fun time and I would be missing this time with my friends as we had always collected ribbons for our favourite fisherman.

I knew that I was going to miss such fun and festivities as the beach parties, the Shango celebrations the cultural foods and drinks such as the sorrel, mauby, ginger beer, and seamoss punch.

I got ready for my flight on TCA Trans Canada Airlines (the name was changed to Air Canada

later on). Securing my British passport and my Oxford and Cambridge Overseas School Certificate, I figured I was on my way to big things.

I arrived on what was called the Canada-Caribbean Domestic Scheme. It was a program that was set up by the Canadian government to assist young people in the Caribbean where there were large numbers of unemployed youth. Prior to 1960, Canada's involvement in the Caribbean was really in terms of assisting in the building of schools. A number of schools were built throughout the various islands with Canadian aid and Canadian assistance. Canada was very much engaged with the Caribbean as part of the Commonwealth. By the way, Grenada was ceded to Britain in 1763 in the same year as Canada was. Arriving here on the Canada-Caribbean Domestic Scheme, I had committed to work as a domestic in the home of a Canadian family for one year in exchange for Landed Immigrant Status. Fulfilling my obligation in a wonderful Canadian household, I started to get the feel and the taste for what Canadian life was like.

I went on to Toronto Teachers College. At the time, if you wanted to teach, you had to go to teachers' college. In Grenada, I had obtained what was called a pupil-teacher certificate and I wanted to parlay that into getting into teachers' college here. Upon completion, I started teaching with the Catholic School Board.

At the time, Toronto was a different place and Canada was a different place. We did not talk multiculturalism. We were still querying who we were as Canadians. Are we just English and French? There were a good number of Canadians who had come earlier especially from the Ukrainian and other

communities out West who were saying, we are not just English and French. We are multicultural. Look around us. We are multiracial. We are multi-ethnic. We are multireligious. And so, the question that was being looked at the time drew me into the midst of all that discussion.

In 1960, we had no *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. In 1960 in Toronto and in Ontario, there was no Human Rights Commission/Code. Where did you complain when there were things that were done that you needed to have some investigation around? We had no Special Investigations Unit (SIU). The police were reporting to themselves. A number of things were happening in the community and we had to organize. Marches and demonstrations were the modus operandi to bring concerns and cries for change. And so, I became almost a closet activist. By that I mean, that I would use my penmanship to do the placards, I would do the research, make the phone calls, but I was not always at the front line of the marches. We were demonstrating and protesting and knocking on government doors for many many years.

Many of the changes that we see today that make me such a proud Canadian were due to the fact that we were able to get bureaucrats, politicians and institutions to listen. We made the point that there was no one in the media who had a brown or black face and looked like us. There was no representation at all in certain parts of society. The department stores put out back to school flyers with pictures of beautiful kids in which none of the kids looked like ours. And so, we were able to push institutions and corporate bodies for change. When I talk about being a proud Canadian, I talk about those things that we were able to do together to move the society

and to move things forward. I was given the ability and the opportunity to reach my full potential, to work in places, to be with individuals, to have my voice heard in many many areas.



Jean teaching social studies in the 1970s.

I was honoured with a YWCA woman of distinction award. I stood there with so many other women who were accomplishing things. I proudly felt that I was in a place where there was hope, a place where there was understanding, a place where there were people who could organize and who could tell the various and the varying stories of what Canada is and what Canada is about.

So, you can imagine after I was elected in 1993 as the first African Canadian Woman, I was so very pleased because as I knocked on doors, and as I asked people to support me, and my candidacy, I felt that there was an understanding that we had to begin to move the agenda. I found that there were so many of us who came in different ships but that were all in the same boat in the Canadian sea and that we all had to work together. I got lots of support and I'm not going to talk about the negatives

because we're talking about hope today and we're talking about celebration.

“When I stood up to speak, I was a Canadian minister who was both the messenger and the message”

When as a Member of Parliament and as a minister, I was able to travel the world on behalf of Canada, I felt that I was both bringing the message of Canada in my words and in my person. I felt that I myself was also the message. When I stood up to speak, I was a Canadian minister who was both the messenger and the message. When I talk about hope and when I talk about being a proud Canadian, I reflect on the fact that I raised two beautiful daughters and gave them all the opportunities there are in Canadian society, I enabled so many other young people to move forward and mentored so many



Jean elected as the first African-Canadian woman Member of Parliament in Etobicoke- Lakeshore in 2004.

young women. I headed various women's organizations and my record in helping women is well known.

So, I can say that Canada has given me the opportunity to reach my full potential. Growing up in Grenada and graduating from High School, I had about four avenues of employment open to me. I could be a nurse, I could be a teacher, I could be a civil servant, or I could be a housewife. I came to Canada and I was able to see choices, do many things and reach what I consider to be my full potential. Sure, there is prejudice, discrimination and anti-Black systemic racism in Canadian society. With hard work, one can move oneself in the society. There are allies and always supporters who can help to see the big picture.

What I am hoping today is that in 2020 we all can come together and recognize that we can talk about what Pierre Trudeau used to refer to as the just society. We can talk about the ability of each person to reach their full potential and what Martin Luther King Jr. said that we will be judged not by the colour of our skin but by the intelligence, the contribution and all that we have within us. So, I'm very pleased to hear all the Canadian stories of hope and celebration. These celebrate the immigrant story along with the thanks that we owe to the Indigenous peoples who accommodated and allowed us to share the land and to be here as immigrants enjoying the spoils of the society.

NEVER-ENDING LEARNING

MAJOR SAMSON YOUNG

Major Samson Young is a first-generation Canadian who immigrated to Canada as one of those thousands of refugees from South-East Asia. He is a signals officer (RCCS) who joined the Canadian Armed Forces in 1990 and has been to two peacekeeping missions and two taskings (one in Canada and one at SHAPE (NATO)): 2006 in Bosnia, 2013 in D.R. Congo, 2014 in North West Territories and 2016 in Belgium. He has lived in three countries in three different political systems, from monarchy to communist in Laos, to monarchy in Thailand and now in a democratic system in Canada.

GROWING UP IN LAOS

The American foreign policy began soon after WWII ended and lasted until the early 1970s with an attempt to contain the Communist expansion into South-East Asian nations, namely, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The American involvement in the civil war in Vietnam that lasted 30 years is also known as “The Ten Thousand Day War.”

During the civil war, and before I was even born, my family moved frequently over the 1950s and 1960s, whenever the civil wars in Cambodia and Laos were approaching close to where they lived. I was the second youngest of seven siblings and was born in Laos. Due to poverty, my parents could only

afford to send my sister, along with my younger brother and me, to a local school at a much older age than most of our classmates. At one point, my parents sent me far away to live with a Laotian family so I could attend a Laotian public school because it cost less. Only after my parents’ financial situation had slightly improved could they afford to send me back to the same Chinese language school that I had attended a couple of years prior.

Although we lived only a few kilometres away from Paksé, a town situated on a shore of the Mekong River in Southern Laos, our house had no electricity or running water. At a very young age, one of my after-school chores was to fetch water from a nearby stream and transport about 200 litres to

the house. I would then water a small vegetable and herb garden we had at the back of our house. It was also my job to feed the chickens, ducks, swans, pigs, rabbits my parents raised as well as our pet dogs and cats. After supper I would do my homework under a gas lantern and sometimes just under flickering candlelight, while at the same time fighting off mosquitos, which were a constant nuisance. We were only able to enjoy electricity and running water when my parents later moved into town in my early teenage years. I recall I had a very normal



October 1969 in Paksé. Samson is the tallest boy, with his young brother, his nephew and three of his four elder sisters.

and happy childhood though life was hard. I could hear the government aircraft and artillery round explosions day and night some 50 km. away and I saw soldiers marching past our house toward the battle areas daily.

Laos came under Communist rule in 1975.

LIVING AS A REFUGEE IN A LAO REFUGEE CAMP IN THE TOWN OF UBON RATCHATHANI, THAILAND

After one of my elder sisters was released from a “re-education” camp and because we were burdened with food shortages and many other difficulties, my parents decided it was time for us to move again. On this occasion, we left the country for good, with much uncertainty for our future and constant worry of what would become of us in a new country.

To increase the chances of our family’s survival, my parents decided that we should go in separate groups. My third elder sister and I were the first to flee with a paid guide, right after midnight. We walked barefoot to minimize the noise we made, under a clear autumn sky that was windy and cold. Dogs were barking along our path as we were led toward the shore where a small fishing boat awaited us. We crossed the Mekong River in that tiny fishing boat with almost 30 people riding in it. Some were carrying their newborn babies who were drugged to prevent them from crying if they suddenly woke up, since that could result in us being arrested by the border guards and being sent to a concentration camp. In this tiny fishing boat, we held our breath and headed for the shores of Thailand.

Fortunately, a few months later, the rest of the



January 1979 in the Ubon Lao Refugee Camp. Samson is the boy in red.

family members arrived safely, and we were together again and lived in a Lao Refugee Camp (LRC) just outside the town of Ubon Ratchathani, situated in the North-East of Thailand.

Life in the Ubon L.R.C. was tough, as we could not really work legally. Despite this, many of us did find work in the town and had to return to the camp before 6 p.m. each day. Although I was too young to realize or share the burden with my parents, they always worried about our future (they were not sure if we would be able to go to any other country to start a new life, or be allowed to remain and live

in Thailand, or worse, be sent back to Laos). We lived in this refugee camp for two and half years before we were interviewed, medically screened and accepted to immigrate to Canada, among thousands of others, including refugees from Vietnam, who were known widely as the “boat people.”

We arrived and settled in Ottawa in September of 1980. It was the first time we saw and experienced the beautiful autumn colours. Since that moment, every year when the autumn season arrives, I am transported through time and space to that very moment when we were looking through the glass windows of the Voyageur bus leaving the military base of Longue-Pointe Québec for our new hometown in Ottawa.



April 1984. First family photo in Canada. Samson in blue.

SECOND CHANCE FOR LIFE IN CANADA

From the moment we arrived in Ottawa and lived in our rental apartment and later in a house, my parents and older sisters sighed a breath of relief that we were legally settling in Canada, this time

for good. After a year or less of schooling in the ESL (English as Second Language) classes, both my sisters started working as seamstresses, making women's undergarments in a local company. I decided to attend a local high school (Fisher Park), starting at grade 10 but with very little English fluency. I said to myself that I would progress faster if I was immersed and studying among other Canadian students. In retrospect, I made the right decision.

After ten years of schooling (high school then Computer Engineering Technologist studies at Algonquin College), I started working as a computer programmer in a small company for several months and came to the realization that I wanted something more in life than just working a 9 – 5 job. I wanted a life that would push me out of my comfort zone, that would allow me to do something challenging, something none of my friends or family members thought was a wise idea – joining the CAF (Canadian Armed Forces)!

LIFE IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

On Dec. 18, 1990, I was officially sworn in to be one of the Queen's soldiers to serve my newly adopted country. I would start my basic military training at the CFOCS (Canadian Forces Officer Candidate School) at the CFB (Canadian Forces Base) Chilliwack in British Columbia on Jan. 5, 1991. After passing my 13 long weeks of basic training, I was sent to Canadian Forces Language School in St.-Jean-sur-Richelieu, QC for a seven-month-long French language training course.

I finished by military Communications trade training to become one of the signals officers at C.F.B. Kingston in 1994 and started my first job as a

junior troop commander at the 1CDHSR (1st Canadian Division Headquarters and Signals Regiment) in 1995.



January 1991. Basic Military Training Chilliwack, BC. Samson in front row, second from the left.

Through the almost 30 years of my military career, I have done many things that I could never have imagined before my life in Canada and in the CAF. In 1995, I led a team on the Nijmegen March in the Netherlands, in which we carried 10 kg of weight in our rucksacks and walked 40 km per day for four consecutive days. I loved the challenge so much I did the march again in 1999. In 1998, at 37 years old, I was the oldest among 50 plus soldiers to jump from a military aircraft and thereby earned my jump wings as a basic parachutist. With the parachutist training serving as a confidence booster, I learned to snowboard at the age of 39 years old. A year later, I became a CASI (Canadian Association of Snowboard Instructors) certified Level 1 snowboard instructor and have been teaching this winter outdoor sport ever since. From 1999 to 2003, I designed the first logos for

Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force sportswear (t-shirts, sweatshirts, pants shorts, jackets, baseball caps, etc.), which were sold in Canex stores on all military bases across Canada. These designs helped influence what Canex stores sell today, with a huge selection of various logos/designs on CAF-themed merchandise. In 2003, I was very fortunate to be selected as one of the 29 members to take part in the military adventure exercise as part of the centennial celebration¹, and we cycled from Victoria, B.C., to St. John's, NL, with a total distance of more than 8,000 km in 59 days.

In 2006, I went on to my first six-month-long peacekeeping mission under EUFOR (European Union Forces) in Bosnia and Hercegovina. In 2008, I was one among more than 30 Canadian volunteers to assist our athletes, their family members

and friends during the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, China. In 2012, because I could speak Mandarin fluently, I was chosen to accompany the CDS (Chief of the Defence Staff) at the time, General Walter Natynczyk, during the CDS Delegation's visit to China military bases. In 2013, I went on to my second peacekeeping mission, this time with the UN (United Nations), to the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was also very happy to be part of the operation NANOOK, Canadian cross-departmental exercise, in the North where I had an opportunity to see and appreciate the amazing Northern Lights in Yellowknife, NT. In 2016, I was very proud to be selected to work as one of the three staff officers at the NMR (National Military Representative) office at SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) for six months. SHAPE is the operational arms as NATO is the political entity. Both are located in Belgium.



June 2003 on Signals Hill, NL. After having cycled 8,000 kms with 29 military signalers from Victoria, BC.

“Being brought up in one culture and growing up in another has allowed me to combine the eastern and western ways of thinking, and they have served as guides for me.”

I believe that the military has given me a sense of purpose and the confidence to pursue anything I set my mind to. At my current age, I am still learning new things, gaining new experience and new

¹ Regarding the founding of the Military Communications Branch, the Canadian military was at that time the first in the British Empire to have an independent Military Communications Branch. It was connected to the military engineer trade.

perspectives at each and every opportunity that presents itself to me. I leant to ride a motorcycle in 2014 and I rode it across Canada and camped along the way, from Ottawa to Fort McMurray, AB then to Vancouver, BC and back to Ottawa. In 2017 and again in 2018, I rode out from Ottawa once again, crossing all five Eastern provinces to the Viking historic site near the town of L'Anse aux Meadows, NL.

WHAT THE FUTURE MAY HOLD

My goal in life is to learn at least one new skill or do at least one new activity each year. I plan to learn to fly and obtain a single engine pilot license; learn to speak ten languages (including the six official languages of the UN), aiming to achieve a functional level in each; play musical drums; fly an airplane and/or walk across Canada. Whether I will be able to achieve all this or not will depend on how good my health remains and how long I live. For all these opportunities in the past, the present and the future I owe a profound gratitude to Canada.

Being brought up in one culture and growing up in another has allowed me to combine the eastern and western ways of thinking, and they have served as guides for me: A Chinese proverb I learned many decades ago states: "Continue learning into one's old age." As Henry Ford once said: "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't - you're right."

A BATTLE WON FOR LGBTQ+ RIGHTS

MICHELLE DOUGLAS

Michelle Douglas is an LGBTQ Human Rights Activist. She served as an officer in the Canadian Armed Forces from 1986 to 1989. Despite an exemplary service record, Michelle was fired from the military in 1989 as part of the military's "LGBT Purge". She launched a landmark legal challenge against the military's discriminatory policies and her lawsuit resulted in the ending of Canada's formalized discriminatory policies against LGBT members of the military in 1992. She has been an active part of the movement to seek legal equality for the LGBTQ+ community for the past 30 years. Michelle currently serves as the Executive Director of a newly established organization, known as the LGBT Purge Fund, that administers a \$15,000,000 fund that was established as part of the LGBT Purge Class Action lawsuit settlement.

Let me start by telling you a little bit about my personal story. In 1986, I joined the Canadian armed forces. I was so honoured to serve in the Canadian armed forces. I never saw myself becoming any kind of a soldier, but realized it was a huge pillar in my life's set of values. I thought it would work out as part of my general university education, which was pretty mediocre. As it turned out, the military was a really good fit for me. I thrived and excelled in an environment that was splendid and quite structured. It was just such an honour to be serving. At the same time that I was excelling in my training – indeed I was finishing as a top candidate in each course I took – I also had the very lovely, very human experience of falling in love for the first time.

I fell in love with a fellow officer in the military, and she was incredible. So, as I was going about my training, I kind of knew that the military had a policy towards homosexuals – a policy that was headed by the words "sexual abnormality." We tell people what the policy was in the mid-1980s regarding the service of LGBT people, because many still don't know. The policy stated if you are gay, you can stay in the military, but there are a few rules: you are to never get a promotion, never to get a pay raise, no more training, and no more posting. But please, "feel free to serve your country."

As I was learning about that policy and, having fallen in love at the same time with a person of the same sex, I was also trying to advance my career.

That's when things really started to get tricky. I was serving in a unit of the military police and part of their mandate was to investigate allegations of homosexuality. One day, my boss came to see me, and he said: we have to fly to Ottawa for an important investigation. You're to gather your things. We're going immediately. So, I got into the undercover K-car and headed for the Toronto airport with my boss, not really suspecting anything at that moment.



Michelle Douglas

However, just before getting to the airport, he turns into the hotel strip just before the airport. I then spent two days in a hotel room by the Toronto airport being interrogated about my sexual orientation. It was an interrogation that was conducted by two male military officers, and it was actually very devastating. It had a kind of life-scarring impact that was to come out later, one that other people have also experienced. After denying my identity to them in order to save my career, this interrogation session was followed up by subsequent interrogations – more hotel rooms and a police polygraph in another city. I finally told them I was in love with a woman, and that, pretty soon afterward, led to my being fired by the military.

“Between the 1950s until quite recently, we think 9,000 Canadians, people serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP, and the federal public service, experienced this kind of discrimination.”

I was dismissed in 1989 by the Canadian Armed Forces, under the category of not being “advantageously employable” due to my homosexuality. The reason I shared with you how well I’d done in all my training courses is that this makes it quite obvious the kind of depth of sheer discrimination within the system at the time: it was codified. Systemic discrimination: it was codified, on the books. I was a young woman at this point, 23, 24 years old, not sure what to do. I did get the support of one Member of Parliament by the name of Svend Robinson, and I was able to hire a lawyer. In 1992, it

was my legal challenge against this discriminatory policy that ended Canada's so-called ban on gays in the Canadian Armed Forces.

So, that was a pretty historic outcome, and it's always important for me to say that, while we're still serving under that terrible policy, as part of the settlement of my case, all those people in the same situation had their ranks, their training restored, and as I like to say, their dignity restored. What I did not know was that I was not alone in the experience that I'd been through. I was a victim of what we now call the "LGBT purge." Between the 1950s until quite recently, we think 9,000 Canadians, people serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP, and the federal public service, experienced this kind of discrimination.

So, when I received some measure of justice from my lawsuit in 1992, there were literally thousands of people who had had no such justice. Many took their own lives, or went back into the closet, or were shamed and never had their potential fulfilled. They were humiliated because of their identity, but some other courageous activists took up the mantle, and by 2018 there was a large class-action lawsuit that was settled with the Canadian government. This brought some measure of justice to about 750 living people who finally got some remedy, some financial settlement, and some restoration of dignity for what they went through.

The other thing that's important is that Prime Minister Trudeau apologized in 2017 to the LGBTQ community for the systemic, state-sponsored discrimination against our communities. That was a really powerful moment, and I know some people say: "We give out so many apologies. Why do we do

that?" You know, if you were an aggrieved person who felt there was never any way to get justice, an apology from the prime minister is a pretty powerful thing. There were also some very special things that came from the settlement of that lawsuit. One of them was the founding of the LGBT Purge Fund, which I now have the honour of leading. We're doing some really cool things now, and it is just a mark of the hopeful progress that Canada has made on the journey for equality for LGBT people.

We're building a national monument in Ottawa – the LGBTQ national monument – that's going to be inaugurated in 2024. And finally, as I'm wrapping up, I'll just let you know that we're also trying to tell our story, to tell you about the purge and let you know that thousands of your fellow citizens who went through this are still out there today, being courageous, still serving, and still being activists in striving for equality and being great allies with other communities along the path to justice.



RESOURCES OF HOPE

JEAN TEILLET

Ms. Teillet's legal career has focused on Indigenous rights and reproductive rights. She is currently a treaty negotiation advisor for the Stó:lō Xwexwilmexw, a coalition of six Stó:lō bands in BC. Ms. Teillet has appeared at the Supreme Court of Canada in twelve Indigenous rights cases. She maintains an active role as a public speaker on Indigenous rights, identity, access to justice and Charter issues. She is the author of *Métis Law in Canada* and her popular history, *The North-West is Our Mother: The Story of Louis Riel's People, the Métis Nation*, was listed in *The Globe and Mail's* top 100 books of 2019.

Ms. Teillet is an adjunct professor of law at UBC. She is on the board of Indspire, Save the Children Canada and the Association of Canadian Studies. She has been awarded three honorary doctorates: Guelph University (2014), the Law Society of Upper Canada (2015) and University of Windsor (2017). In 2016, the Association of Ontario Midwives made Jean an honorary lifetime member in recognition of her services to midwives and Indigenous women. Best Lawyers in Canada 2019 ranked Ms. Teillet as a "best lawyer" in Vancouver and Chambers and Partners ranks her nationally as a "leading lawyer".

Ms. Teillet is the great grandniece of Louis Riel.

I have two stories of hope.

My first story of hope comes from my Métis ancestry. I am a great grandniece of Louis Riel. I was raised to be very proud of my heritage in a time when Métis was a derogatory term and Riel was generally dismissed as an insane traitor. That was what most Canadians thought and were taught. But I was taught differently. I was taught to be proud, very proud, of being a Riel.

In the early 1900s my grandfather was on a historical committee for the Union nationale métisse St-Joseph du Manitoba. They commissioned, edited and worked hard to publish their own story, the first popular history of the Métis Nation. *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l'ouest Canadien* was published in 1935 and I've just written what I believe is the only other popular history written by the Métis.¹ *The North-West is Our Mother: the Story of Louis Riel's People, the Métis Nation* was published

1 Trémaudan, A. H. de. *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l'ouest Canadien*. (Montreal: Éditions Albert Lévesque, 1935). Translated by Elizabeth Maguet as *Hold High Your Heads: History of the Métis Nation of Canada*. (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1982).

in 2019.² The point of both books was to tell history from a different point of view, from the Métis perspective. Both books reject the settler's version of history, which is what most people are taught in school and most Canadians believe is the history of Canada's acquisition of the North-West. The Canadian state has constructed and perpetuated its own version of its history and it doesn't have very much to do with what the Indigenous people did or what actually happened.

Let me give you an example of history that is virtually unknown. It is the story of what actually happened when Canada acquired Manitoba and the North-West in 1870. In that year on July 1st, while Canada Day was being celebrated in eastern and central Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald was preparing an armed attack on the people who were about to become Canadian citizens. Since January of 1870 the Prime Minister had quietly been assembling an army, largely composed of Orange Lodge members.³ On July 1st 1870 this army was waiting at Fort William on Lake Superior. Waiting for July 15th when Canada legally acquired the North-West so that they could head out to Winnipeg. They arrived in Winnipeg in the end of August and immediately began a two-year reign of terror in which they engaged in unchecked murder, arson,



Louis Riel's provisional government, 1869-70

rape, home invasions, and brutal assaults of Métis people. Some of the Orange Lodge militia members took vows to exterminate all those connected with Riel's provisional government.⁴ There was a white, supremacist, protestant vision of what they wanted Canada to be. Sir John A. Macdonald was also a member of the Orange Lodge and he tacitly supported the reign of terror. The vicious campaign was so notorious that the *New York Times* called it a "military reign of terror". The Orange Lodge had a grand plan, their "ascendency" plan, to ascend to all positions of power. Through the brutality of the military reign of terror and their political connections they succeeded. Their brutal suppression of the Métis and their removal of virtually all French

2 Teillet, Jean. *The North-West is Our Mother: The Story of Louis Riel's People, the Métis Nation*. (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2019)

3 Approximately 2/3 of the Red River Expedition was made up of Orange Lodge members. Houston, Cecil J. and William J. Smyth. *The Sash Canada Wore: A Historical Geography of the Orange Order in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Waite, P. B. *Canada 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971). The full name of the Orange Lodge was the Loyal Orange Association of British America. It was a society characterized by its penchant for violence and secrecy. Its members viewed Catholics and French as disloyal and culturally inferior. By 1860 there were over twenty lodges in Toronto alone. It is estimated that fully one-third of all Protestant men over twenty-one in Canada were members of the Orange Lodge. In the late nineteenth century, Toronto was known as the "Belfast of Canada," a reference to the Orange influences in municipal government. The Orange Lodge permeated all levels of the English-Canadian establishment. The Orange Lodge is still very active in Canada in 2020.

4 1869-70 *Select Committee Report*, 140, "Memorandum connected with Fenian Invasion of Manitoba in October, 1871," Lieutenant-Governor Archibald, November 1871.

speaking Catholic men from positions of influence enabled the ascendancy. The members of the Lodge who came west with the militia were rewarded with land and became the first of many generations of politicians, police, politicians, lawyers, mayors and judges in Manitoba.

“I was raised with this understanding – that the history one is taught in school is not the Indigenous people’s history of Canada because it tells none of their stories.”

In my family, because we are Riels, we kept the story of the reign of terror alive and I grew up learning the stories of what really happened, not the stories of how wonderful it was when the North-West joined Canada, but the stories of what was actually going on in Manitoba in the 1870s. I was raised with this understanding – that the history one is taught in school is not the Indigenous peoples history of Canada because it tells none of their stories. To date, it has generally been silent on the stories of the people who stood up against injustice and inequality.

Riel created a provisional government in Manitoba that had an Ojibwe representative on it. The practice of his government was to speak in English, French or Ojibwe and there was translation. He had an egalitarian vision of government in 1869 and if it had continued, we would be in a different Canada today because Indigenous peoples would have been a valued part of the decision-making in

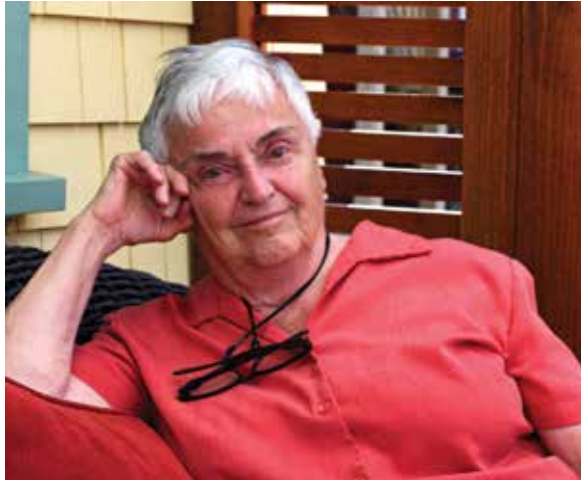


Jean Teillet

this country. Indigenous people would have had a voice and a say. Instead, after Canada acquired the North-West, Métis were tried and jailed and killed. They were cheated out of their lands. Women and girls were raped, some were gang raped by the soldiers. No soldier faced criminal charges for any of the violence. And this was not war. There was no violence to be put down in Red River at the time. So it should be remembered that Canada’s first act of governance in the North-West was to instigate and perpetuate a two and a half year reign of terror on its own people.

My ancestors fought back against the reign of terror and the injustices and the theft of their land. They fought and died for a vision of Canada that was simply impossible in their day. But they still fought for that vision. Canadian history says Riel was

hanged for treason. But he was hanged for trying to preserve his people and for his basic belief that the Métis were equal to white Anglo-Saxon protestants. He hoped that this equality would become a fact in the future. That vision was the story of hope I learned as a child and it is the story I still believe Canada needs to hear. Canadians need to hear the truth of Canada's history, but they also need to hear about the men and women who hoped for and stood up for a different vision of Canada, one that could guide us today.



Kathleen Teillet, Jean's mother, at 90 years of age

My second story of hope comes from 1963. I was 10 and my mother, who is not Metis, was in a women's singing group called the Sweet Adelines. They sang in a choir and also in quartets. My mother was on the executive of the Sweet

Adelines in Winnipeg, which was part of the American organization. When the bylaws were changed to ensure that membership was restricted to "white" women my mother put forward a motion to protest it or at the very least to exempt Canadian chapters from having to adhere to the restriction. But not one of the ninety plus women members in Winnipeg even seconded the motion. All the others argued that they would not be allowed to compete in the States and might even be dismissed from the international organization entirely.

My mother decided that she had to take a stand. What I remember is her conclusion. That no one should be judged or excluded based on the colour of their skin. She knew that if she didn't stand up for what she believed, her children would never learn to stand up against racism and injustice. My mother quit and the story hit the press. She lost friends and never sang in public again. She knew the by-laws weren't going to change and that Black women wouldn't be admitted in Winnipeg, and she certainly knew it would have no effect on what was happening in the United States. But she did it for her children.

There's an expression coined by Raymond Williams called the "resources of hope".⁵ I use it here somewhat differently than Williams intended. I adopt the phrase as appropriate because I believe my mother was investing in her children, her resources of hope. She couldn't change her friends or the racist institution, but she could make sure that her children knew to stand up when they met racism and injustice. We were well steeped in injustice

5 Williams, Raymond. *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism* (New York and London: Verso, 1988).

from my Métis side of the family, but my mother's act of courage was her investment in her children as the resources of hope for the future of this country. My mother's action has been a life-long inspiration for me.

“She couldn't change her friends or the racist institution, but she could make sure that her children knew to stand up when they met racism and injustice.”

Canada has many racist elements and institutions – in our criminal justice system, our education system, our judicial system – in every part of this country. But I hope there is a future Canada in the making that can and will be different. We are not the hateful, misogynistic, blatantly racist country we were in 1870. We are not the same as we were in 1963 either. I think Riel invested in a better vision of Canada and the Métis died for a vision that, 150 years later, we're just edging toward. But they acted on it and they passed it down to their children and to their children's children and to me now, the third generation. Their message was that it's worth it to fight these battles. Big battles like Riel fought and small battles like my mother fought. They may have seemed hopeless at the time. But they did it anyway. They stood their ground and made their statement.

These stories of hope look to a better future where this country will be a better place to stand for all people, especially for Indigenous people and people of colour.

PROMOTING BLACK HISTORY: A PERSONAL JOURNEY SHARED

ROSEMARY SADLIER

Rosemary Sadlier OOnt (Order of Ontario) is a social justice advocate, researcher, writer, consultant, and international speaker on Black History, anti-racism and women's issues. She is the past president, serving for 22 years as the unpaid leader of the Ontario Black History Society – being the driving force of the secured commemoration of February as Black History Month at all levels of government; she secured August 1st as Emancipation Day municipally in 1995 and provincially in 2008 with a national declaration pending.

She saw to the creation of the national day for the Hon. Lincoln Alexander. She has given deputations to the UN Rapporteur on Race Relations, the Federal and Provincial Governments and on consultative work with the Royal Ontario Museum, The Ward heritage interpretative group, the Bi-National Study of the Underground Railroad and heritage conferences. Previously she served on the final selection committee of the national Mathieu Da Costa Challenge for Canadian Heritage and is now on the Canada Post Stamp Advisory Committee. An educator, she has developed or contributed to the African Canadian curriculum, national exhibits and she was an appointed member of the College of Early Childhood Educators. She was among the first Canadians designated a Global Defender of Human Rights (CTF & Robert Kennedy Center). An author, Sadlier has written 7 books on African Canadian history. Sadlier is dedicated to social justice and using the frame of Black History, seeks to educate and empower others.

Did you know that we almost did not have a Black History Month?

I was an at-home mom, still nursing my third child, and I found myself also serving as the newly elected president of the Ontario Black History Society (OBHS), the only Provincial Heritage Organization in Canada dedicated to Black History. Holding the position was a sacred trust, allowing me to support

and reflect the Black experience. We realized a few weeks before February 1994 that we were required to formally request a petition from the City of Toronto for Black History Month. Luckily, we got it done, and I vowed to avoid last minute appeals in the future. I secured an annual, automatic proclamation from the City of Toronto, then with the Province of Ontario (through our contact with the Ministry: Daniel O'Brien), then with all the

provinces. After outreach to many in the Federal Government, I again approached Jean Augustine, at a fundraiser being held at Denham Jolly's home, to facilitate a national declaration. She agreed to do so, in the presence of Lloyd Perry, and the declaration was passed by December 1995. I was notified of the course of events and orchestrated a bus tour to Ottawa for the first national celebration of February as Black History Month. I was honoured to bring remarks, on behalf of the Black community, at that momentous occasion with the Prime Minister and the Black Caucus in February 1996. I had built upon the efforts of those who had gone before to raise awareness, to create an appetite for such a celebration: Carter G. Woodson the "father of Black History Month"; the Canadian Negro Women's Association (CANEWA); the founders of the OBHS. I had likely given over 2000 talks in schools and community settings between my first volunteer efforts with the OBHS and my tenure as President of the Board of Directors. Such was my

commitment, my resilience and my hope for a more equitable society.

I felt that if Black and other racial/ethnic groups just learned more about the contributions, achievements and experiences of Black people in this country, it would help. I hoped that Black History education would roll out from Kindergarten to grade 12, inspired and supported by a now national declaration of February as Black History Month because Black History Month had so much to do with affirming our presence and connection to this place.

“Black History is Canadian History, a history that is not widely nor routinely shared. Black History is seminal anti-racist education.”



2014. Gala event in St. John, NB with fellow descendants of the Black Loyalists/Late Loyalists and Refugees of the War of 1812.

I was also the proponent for many other commemorations of people, places and events at all levels of government. In 1995, I advanced the commemoration of August 1st as Emancipation Day as proposed to me by a fellow public education activist from Trinidad and Tobago. This commemoration has been instituted by the City of Toronto, Metro Toronto and the City of Ottawa. It formed the first unanimous all-party supported Bill in Ontario. At the Federal level, it went to second reading twice in the House, twice in the Senate and most recently was given first reading back in the House*. As of this moment, with COVID-19 disruptions, it is still pending. Why do this? Because Black History is Canadian History, a history that is not widely nor

routinely shared. Black History is seminal anti-racist education.

We can connect the current (re) awakening about the presence of systemic racism to our history in this country. We share a history with the United States:

1. We too had slavery – the enslavement of “panis” [First Nations] and Africans. It started with the French and continued under British rule. The first named enslaved African was a child, named Olivier le Jeune about 1628/1629;
2. We too had race riots with one of the earliest and longest taking place in Shelburne, Nova Scotia in 1734;
3. While we were the free north for those on the Underground Railroad – the first freedom movement of the Americas, we too had segregation in schools, residences, restaurants, hotels, skating rinks, and ongoing restrictions denying entrance to professional schools and other workplaces;
4. We too had members and activity by the KKK;
5. We too have the over surveillance and overuse of charges and lethal force by the police.

**OUR HOPE LIES IN OUR RESISTANCE.
BLACK LIVES MATTER.**

Thank you so much to the organizers for bringing attention to the idea of hope.

Thank you to those who have chosen to watch

for their efforts to isolate and social distance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I know how challenging this is for us all.

But it has given us time to reflect, time like we have not had for a very long time, time to consider those things that are important to us now and things that we hold dear. It has provided us with time to consider how we might take action as things open up to overcome the challenges that the murder, the public execution, of George Floyd has sparked globally. What is happening now, with the ongoing protests and the demands for anti-racist actions, is the manifestation of the hope, the resilience, the action of generations. People are calling for human rights, social justice, for economic rights—they are calling for the end of racism.

The land we now call Canada, and its institutions, were built upon the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the displacement and colonization of Indigenous peoples. This is true even though the first-named African who came to Canada in 1604 acting as an interpreter for Samuel de Champlain was a free man. Indeed, from vital, functioning African civilizations (e.g. Mali, Songhai) people were captured, enslaved, and transported to the Caribbean, the United States, South America and Canada. The first being a young boy, Olivier le Jeune about 1628/1629. He had hoped that his conversion to Catholicism would make him free. It did not. Marie-Joseph Angelique hoped for her freedom but when it proved elusive, her escape ended up causing the burning of much of what was the city of Montreal. She was tortured and hanged for her audacity.

Many other documented situations exist where hope was dashed. Chloe Cooley resisted enslavement

and when bound and carried across the Niagara River to be sold, her story of stolen hope led the First Lieutenant Governor of Ontario to draft what would become the first anti-slavery legislation. It was compromise legislation because other slave-holding members of government were unwilling to see an end to their property rights over their enslaved Africans. The enslaved African Americans who supported the British during the American Revolutionary War hoped that their support to the British forces would be honoured with promised freedom in Canada. The thousands who came to Canada on the Underground Railroad following the passage of the *Slavery Abolition Act*, hoped for a life free from bondage. The “Exodusters”, African Americans who hoped to claim land in Canada’s west only to be “deemed unsuitable” for Canada or to be faced with exclusionary immigration laws, came anyways. And, in the 1950 and 60s, advocacy by Black people to amend the immigration laws opened the way for change in admission requirements.

“I am here because of the resilience, the actions, the hopes of generations of people of African descent in Canada.”

Hope was there even earlier, when Black men joined the war effort to defend this country from the American Revolutionary War, through to WWI and WWII. Many members of both sides of my family helped to defend this country, from women working in the “war plant” creating munitions through to all of the brothers in the Carty family (my cousins) serving. That they all came back was perhaps proof

of hope, but what did they come back to?...

I am here because of the resilience, the actions, the hopes of generations of people of African descent in Canada.

I am the hope of the Black Loyalists.

I am the hope of the Late Loyalists.

I am the hope of the Refugees of the War of 1812.

I am the hope of the descendants of the Underground Railroad.

I am the hope of these first four major waves of migration to this place we call Canada because my presence here (our presence here) is built upon their agency, their survival, their perseverance and their hope. Their stories of hope. Black History is what I have worked to promote in order to affirm the Black community and to assist others in learning and understanding the long-term presence of Africans in Canada.

Black History is about hope since hope is about resilience, about action.

I am also the hope of my children and many years ago, when I saw that they were being negatively impacted by the colour of their skin, I was faced with an urgency and commitment to act.

Will you act??

*This bill went to second reading twice in the House with MP Deepak Obdrai and was supported by Preston Manning. I proposed this again with numerous members of the federal government and

senators in 2016 and I effected a Parliamentary Petition reaching the required number of signatures in short order. I submitted this to Parliament expecting that the head of the Black Caucus MP Greg Fergus would act upon it, but instead it was picked up by Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard. It went to second reading twice in The Senate. In March 2020 it was back in the House and was given first reading by MP Majid Jowhari. With COVID-19 interruptions and a delay in resuming the sitting of Parliament, I am unsure of the timing for the potential passage of this initiative. I offer it as an example of a story of hope. It has been in the works since 1995. It is not my paid position to “stay on top of this” even though it was my initiative. It is my hope that this will be passed and become a touchstone of freedom because of the further discussions it will facilitate in Black History, anti-racism and systemic racism.

Black Lives Matter.

How better to celebrate Canada in these times?

HOPE IN ADVERSITY: A WELL-TRAVELLED JOURNEY

SENATOR WANDA THOMAS BERNARD

Dr. Wanda Thomas Bernard is a highly regarded social worker, educator, researcher, community activist and advocate of social change. She has worked in mental health at the provincial level, in rural community practice at the municipal level, and, since 1990, as a professor at the Dalhousie School of Social Work, where she also served as director for a decade. In 2016, she was appointed Special Advisor on Diversity and Inclusiveness at Dalhousie University and she is the first African Nova Scotian to hold a tenure track position at Dalhousie University and to be promoted to full professor. Dr. Thomas Bernard has worked with provincial organizations to bring diversity to the political processes in Nova Scotia and teach community members about Canada's legislative process and citizen engagement. She is a founding member of the Association of Black Social Workers (ABSW) which helps address the needs of marginalized citizens, especially those of African descent. As a former member of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and as its past Chair, was instrumental in the development of advice to ministers regarding frameworks for gender violence prevention and health equity. At the national level, she has served as a member of the National Coalition of Advisory Councils on the Status of Women. She has served as an expert witness in human rights cases and has presented at many local, national and international forums. Dr. Thomas Bernard has received many honours for her work and community leadership, notably the Order of Nova Scotia and the Order of Canada.

When asked to speak on this panel about adversity, my biggest struggle was deciding which experience of adversity I would share. I have had so many, some of which I have never spoken about in a public forum. After much reflection, I decided to start at my beginning, my first memory of managing a set of traumatic events. I was born into poverty and

struggle that was rooted in racism and sexism, and these issues really came to surface at the age of 12.

I am from a family of thirteen children. I am the sixth of ten children born to my parents, who also raised two grandchildren and a godchild for a few years when her parents died at a young age. We

are from the Black Loyalist community of East Preston, where I now live on a parcel of land that was granted to my ancestors in the 1700's. My mother had dreams of going on to post secondary education, but the segregated school in East Preston only went to grade eight. Furthermore, her father refused to send her to the neighbouring integrated school because he did not believe that education should be 'wasted' on girls. My father dropped out of school early and went to work to help his parents. My parents had a turbulent marriage, with multiple struggles that were rooted in systemic barriers and challenges. In my adult years, I have come to accept that they did the best they could with the resources that were available to them.



Senator Bernard and her sister, Valerie Thomas Hodges, as children

Our family struggles were magnified when my father was killed in a drunk driving car accident, days before his 40th birthday. My mother was 39 with 13 children at home. The oldest was 18 years, the youngest was 18 months old and I was 12. My

father's death was life changing and was a transformative moment in my life. His death was the first major disaster that I had faced, and the way I managed through the pain and trauma set a strategy that has helped me to thrive through adversity. The sudden death of my father left our family in extreme poverty, simultaneously thrusting us into the category of 'deserving poor'. People inside and outside our community were more willing to help us survive the catastrophic event because they could see the hardship our future held without our father. During this time, we learned to help ourselves and each other and it was at this time that the helping tradition came to life in our family.

At the ages of 12 and 14, my older sister Valerie and I became "othermothers" to our younger siblings. The reality of sexism was very visible in our family, because despite having three older brothers, my sister and I were expected to step up and help raise the rest of the children. We became responsible for domestic chores, like cooking and cleaning, and providing most of the childcare. This pattern communicated a clear message that domestic labour was women and girls' labour.

While I was dealing with issues of poverty including food insecurity, inadequate housing and complex family dynamics, I was simultaneously becoming increasingly aware of racism and the fight for rights through the Civil Rights Movement. A few days after my father's untimely death, I left the safety and security of my segregated school, to attend an integrated junior and senior high school for the first time. I was young for my grade level since I had skipped grade one. I was 12 years old, in grade 8a, the highest academic level. Everyone questioned my right to be there, teachers, students and even

my friends. The number of Black students increased steadily as the academic standing decreased. I was the only Black student in 8a, there were two Black students in 8b and 8f was primarily Black. Even at that age I was very aware of the systemic racism inherent in the academic placement of Black students. It was a lonely, frightening, frustrating, traumatic experience being in my position, placed where I was constantly othered, watching my

Black classmates be streamed out of academics. In addition to this systemic discrimination happening before my eyes, there were acts of blatant and more covert racism as well against the Black students as we integrated into this mixed school. It was a traumatic experience to be pulled out of the familiar learning environment in which Black teachers taught to our strengths and supported our learning, to an environment in which we were assumed to be unable to keep up with our white classmates, while enduring daily racism from other students and the teachers themselves.

“The most important lesson is to learn to create brave spaces to speak out against injustice.”



Marguerite Thomas Parent, The Senator's mother

To this day, that academic experience remains a trauma that I continually fight against. The transition into integrated school my peers and I endured was during the 1965-66 academic year. That experience continued throughout my high school years, and even as I write this, I am reliving that trauma. I faced constant questions of belonging and endured subversive microaggressions that communicated doubt in my ability, and intelligence. These messages of doubt and othering continue to take place in my everyday world. I truly believe the fact that I not only survived, but thrived, is nothing short of a miracle. It is an example of resilience in action. The lessons of survival that I learned during those traumatic high school years were to: work hard, stay focused, and prove your ability with actions, not words. Those who are able to advocate for themselves with words alone likely benefit from white

privilege, male privilege or the intersection of both. It was always a necessity for me to prove my ability and intelligence through my strong academic standing.

The most important lesson is to learn to create brave spaces to speak out against injustice. This is the lesson that I have continued to use over the years, and I share with young Black people I meet who ask me for advice.

RESILIENCE: THRIVING THROUGH ADVERSITY

After surviving these traumas early in life, I was determined to continue along this path, not just to survive, but to thrive. I was academically strong, which was my primary social capital. I had experienced such positive affirmations from my teachers in the segregated school, that I entered high school with a strong sense of my academic ability and worked hard to maintain my high academic standing. I had to prove that I belonged in the academic stream despite assumptions that I did not.

As a result of being a member of the “deserving poor”, an opportunity for post-secondary education presented itself that otherwise would not have been available to me. Although I was bright and strong academically, none of my teachers talked with me about post secondary education. Access to university for my sister Valerie and me was made possible due to the intervention of Don Denison, a white community member, an ally, who was a member of the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NSAACP). He was a Captain in the Canadian Armed Forces, who had just returned to Nova Scotia from Ghana, at the time of my father’s accident. It was a very public death, because two

men were killed, and a third man sustained major brain damage. Don Denison believed in the value of post secondary education and he believed that it could break barriers and change lives. He maintained contact with us over the ensuing years and learned that Valerie and I were both doing very well in school, so he started conversations about university. After he gauged our interest and assessed our academic ability, he reached out to a childhood friend of his who happened to be the President of Mount Saint Vincent University. Through this connection, the doors were opened for me, Valerie, and our cousin Connie Glasgow. Valerie and Connie were in grade 12, and I was in grade 11. Mr. Denison had to convince my mother to allow me to go with my sister since I was only 15, and somehow, she agreed. Valerie, Connie and I headed to Halifax to begin our post-secondary education.



November 2017. In the Senate Chamber with a group of young women.

Despite being very grateful for the opportunity to pursue post-secondary studies, I was not socially mature enough to handle the pressure. At the end of my first year, I had failed all but one subject, so I was not permitted to return the following year. This was a devastating blow to my ego, my confidence and my self-esteem. I had to find a job and within a

week I was hired on at a local bakery. A week later I was fired from the bakery because I was too slow making the donuts. This major set back impacted my self esteem and my mental health. At this point I had to find a job, but no one would hire me. One day, I stepped out in faith, and called a radio talk show to ask for help. To my surprise, there was a response. A manager of Beaver Foods, at Dalhousie University Medical School, offered me a job as a short order cook. After about 12 months in the position, I became aware that if I wanted a future beyond minimum wage, I must return to university.

One year after that realization, I managed to return to Mount St Vincent and three years later I graduated with my Bachelor of Arts Degree. I went on to get my Masters Degree in Social Work at Dalhousie University. I later moved to England to complete a PhD in Social Work at Sheffield University. While my 47-page Curriculum Vitae (CV) looks impressive, what it does not show is the adversity I faced in some form at every step along this life journey. My CV does not show how I learned to persevere and learn from my setbacks. Most importantly, it does not show how I learned to challenge adversity using positive coping strategies and advocating for myself.

In addition to personal adversity, I experienced deep learning through advocacy and activism, through the civil rights movement. I was drawn to the work of the Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X. I was equally drawn to our Nova Scotian Black civil rights leaders like Rocky Jones, HAJ Gus Wedderburn and Calvin Ruck. I could see that these leaders who were in front of the movements were all men, while the women were working behind the scenes. I often wondered how my life story would have been different had I been born a man.

I became aware of the intersection of racism and sexism and how these women were often invisible, and their contributions overlooked. I could see my own reality at that same intersection. Was it even possible to break through the barriers that existed at the intersection of race and gender, or the lived realities of racism and sexism?

“In addition to personal adversity, I experienced deep learning through advocacy and activism, through the civil rights movement”

My first taste of activism was in high school when Martin Luther King was killed. Some of my peers and I started a protest in our school to advocate for our rights as Black students. I remember feeling empowered and hopeful. I remember believing that change was possible. And I remember that hopeful feeling associated with using my voice and my presence for change.

FINDING AND MAINTAINING CRITICAL HOPE

As I reflect over my life journey, and the many points of adversity, I find critical hope in a myriad of places. Part of my critical hope comes from a firm belief that fundamentally people want to do the right thing for the right reasons. They may just need some help in understanding what the right thing is. I find incredible critical hope in the fact that there are so many people who are willing to stand up, speak out and take action against injustices they experience or witness. What gives me critical hope is how many people are willing to be mentors

and allies. I know this because I have been helped along my journey by many different mentors and allies, some visible and others invisible. Along each step of the way I have had someone guiding, supporting, mentoring, encouraging and helping me in one way or another. I find critical hope in lessons learned from significant movements like the civil rights movement, the feminist movement and most recently the Black Lives Matter movement. Activism, mentorship and allyship have built my resilience and give me critical hope, and it's my critical hope that helps me stay strong in the struggle.

THE OPTIMISM OF CANADIAN YOUTH IN A HOPELESS PANDEMIC

ASHLEY MANUEL

Ashley holds an M.A. in Education and Society from McGill University and an Honours B.Soc.Sc. in Conflict Studies and Human Rights, with a minor in Sociology from the University of Ottawa. Her work in government, non-profit and academic sectors has involved research in the fields of immigration, multiculturalism, security, education, human rights and public policy.

The year 2020 was one for the history books. Youth across the globe faced unprecedented shifts to their daily lives, filled with drastic changes and challenges that this generation never witnessed before. Canadians between the ages of 12 and 17 years old have had their worlds turned upside down due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and both them and their families will continue to face long term social and economic impacts from this crisis; but researchers caution that the pandemic will also

have a toll on youth mental and physical health that will linger for years down the road.¹ Practical solutions to lessen their stress and help them adjust during this difficult time must be observed.

Despite this sense of hopelessness, there is much evidence to suggest that this demographic has been remarkably resilient in these uncertain times, demonstrating adaptability, creativity and innovation.^{2,3} To echo Ilona Dougherty's sentiments

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- 1 Hawke LD, Monga S, Korczak D, Hayes E, Relihan J, Darnay K, Cleverley K, Lunskey Y, Szatmari P, and Henderson J. 2020. [Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Youth Mental Health among Youth with Physical Health Challenges](#). *Early Intervention in Psychiatry* 2020 Oct 12.
 - 2 Bartlett JD, and Vivrette R. [Ways to Promote Children's Resilience to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). *Child Trends* (2020).
 - 3 Pabalan P. [#YouthOnCOVID19: Young people's resilience is the boost we need right now](#). *World Bank Blogs* (2020).

within this publication, it is clear there is a unique value young people have to offer. This article will draw on the results of two youth surveys to highlight the lived experiences of Canadian youth between the age of 12 and 17 years old during the COVID-19 crisis. It will demonstrate upon analysis of youth attitudes, school and home environments, and outlook towards the future that the majority of survey respondents remained relatively optimistic in the midst of a hopeless pandemic.

METHODS

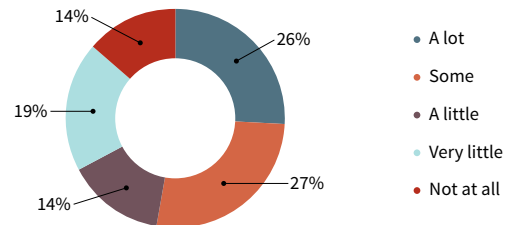
The Association for Canadian Studies (ACS), in partnership with Experiences Canada, administered two rounds of web-based surveys – including both quantitative and qualitative questions – in the Spring and Summer of 2020 to youth across Canada between the ages of 12 and 17 years old. The Spring youth survey was administered via Survey Monkey from April 29th to May 5th, 2020 and a total of 1191 responses were collected with a probabilistic margin of error of $\pm 3\%$. At the time, it was the largest and most detailed nation-wide COVID-19 survey among this age group.

The Summer survey was also administered via Survey Monkey from June 12th to 25th, 2020, but a smaller sample of 344 responses were received, resulting in a probabilistic margin of error of $\pm 5\%$. Despite including an incentive this time around where respondents had the option to enter for a chance to win one of five \$10 Tim Hortons gift cards, the response rate for the first survey could not be matched. This can be attributed to the timing of the survey which was very close to the end of the school year.

YOUTH ATTITUDES NOT ALL GRIM

Several studies have suggested that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadian youth have been experiencing increased levels of anxiety. Although these negative feelings are prominent and must not be overlooked – particularly given the current generation's struggle with mental health issues – the ACS survey findings paint a more complex picture. The Summer survey found that although 50 percent of youth reported that COVID-19 had a lot or some negative impact on their mental health, a significant 47% of respondents reported a little, very little, or no impact at all on their mental health (see Graph 1).

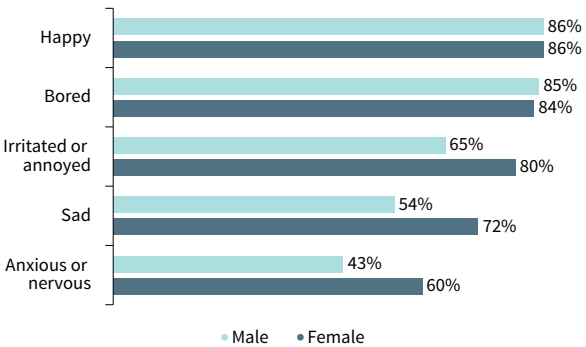
GRAPH 1. NEGATIVE IMPACT THE COVID-19 CRISIS HAS HAD ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



The Spring survey results also suggested that youth experienced a mixed range of emotions since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed feelings of happiness more than any other single attitude. This showcases that despite the challenges the pandemic brought, this segment of the population has remained quite positive. When asked to identify on a four-point scale (often, sometimes,

rarely, or never) how often respondents felt a series of emotions, Graph 2 reveals that both male and female youth reported feeling happy more often than any other sentiment since the start of the COVID-19 crisis.⁴

GRAPH 2. SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS, YOUTH HAVE OFTEN AND SOMETIMES FELT...



Yet a closer examination in Table 1 demonstrates that a significant number of those youth who reported often and sometimes feeling happy also reported feeling sad since the start of the crisis.

Although issues around mental health and the negative emotions of sadness and anxiety as a result of COVID-19 must be addressed to ensure the success of our youth, the graphs and tables above do not paint such a bleak picture of youth attitudes during these challenging times. The resilience of Canada’s youth must be praised, speaking to the unique set

of skills young people have to manage disruptions to their education and the continuity of their skills development at such a critical time.

TABLE 1. YOUTH REPORTED FEELING BOTH HAPPY AND SAD

SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS, HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU...		FELT HAPPY		
		Often	Sometimes	Rarely
FELT SAD	Often and sometimes	47%	75%	88%
	Rarely and never	53%	25%	12%

SUCCESS IN BOTH THE SCHOOL AND HOME LIFE

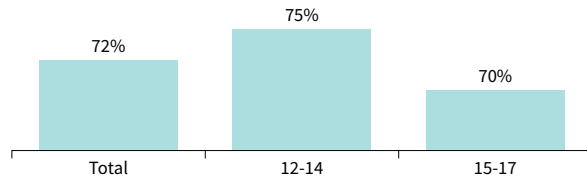
Despite disturbances in their 2020 academic life, ACS Summer survey findings reveal that the majority of Canadian youth believed they were doing a good job getting their schoolwork done from home since the beginning of the pandemic (see Graph 3). Though online learning continues to be a steep learning curve both for youth and parents across the country, youth for the most part have demonstrated quite a bit of flexibility and success in doing so when self-evaluating their efforts.

On the home front, the ACS Spring survey demonstrated that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, a strong majority of youth have seen

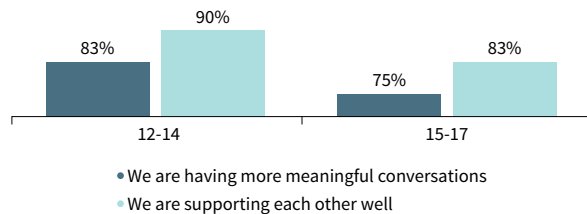
4 Note that respondents were given the option to self-identify as “other” when asked about their gender identity, but low sample sizes did not permit for relevant analysis.

their relationships with their family improve and foster additional support during these difficult times (see Graph 4). This unexpected positive effect of the COVID-19 crisis has led to more meaningful conversations and fostering stronger support systems within the home.

GRAPH 3. TOTAL PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH THAT AGREE THEY ARE DOING A GOOD JOB GETTING THEIR SCHOOLWORK DONE FROM HOME SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC



GRAPH 4. WHEN THINKING OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR FAMILY OR THE SITUATION AT HOME SINCE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH TOTALLY AND SOMEWHAT AGREEING TO THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS...



This intergenerational solidarity within the home is also touched upon in Ilona Dougherty's piece discussing how millennials and their parents are getting along better than previous generations. As

restrictions and lockdowns force youth to readjust their school life and households spend more time together, it is reassuring to see that approximately three quarters of Canada's youth report good experiences in both regards.

OPTIMISM IN THE PANDEMIC

The ACS Spring survey also included an optional qualitative open answer question asking youth when thinking about the future, in what ways did they think life would be different, better or worse. Youth across the country were given a platform to share their experiences about a unique and challenging time in their lives and an overwhelming number of responses were submitted (879 responses out of 1191). Although there were several replies that expressed fear, concern and anxiety about what the future has in store, hundreds of optimistic comments were submitted that emphasized the lessons learned from the pandemic and how this time has been valuable in shaping the future.

The predominant theme that emerged from the positive responses was one of gratitude. Highlighting a few of these responses, youth shared:

"This pandemic has made us value what we have."

"I [...] think that most people will not take their freedom for granted and we will be more appreciative of our daily lives."

"People will be more thankful of the time we have with each other and being more grateful of physical touch and having the presence of people you care about in your life available to you whenever you need."

“Appreciate connecting with friends and family – more meaningful.”

“I think we have learned to value interaction, and I think family and friends will be no longer taken for granted.”

Several youth also revealed the positive impact the pandemic had on their lives and the world at large, stating:

“I think it’s the change that will help motivate everyone to fix the world at least a little bit.”

“Because of this pandemic, I’ve been given the opportunity to get enough sleep, go for walks in the morning, spend more time with my sister, and focus on my mental and emotional well-being. I hope that in the future I’ll be able to continue living like this even when there is school, and I’m excit[ed] to see my friends again when it’s all over.”

As people in Canada and around the world suffer due to an invisible virus in terms of their mental and physical health, as well as the social and economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is promising to see youth reflect on their experiences in such a hopeful light. Their ability to work through challenges, cope with stress and overcome hardships is unlike any other age demographic.

“It is promising to see youth reflect on their experiences in such a hopeful light.”

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The ACS Spring and Summer 2020 surveys aimed to better understand how youth were coping with the COVID-19 pandemic in order to inform relevant social policy. An unexpected outcome from the survey results was its ability to shed light on the positive perceptions and experience of youth in terms of their attitudes, school and home environments, and outlook towards the future. Thankfully as of Summer of 2020, 12 to 17-year-olds across Canada have for the most part been able to remain resilient and share their stories of hope in the midst of the unforeseen challenges and difficulties that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon them. However, more research must be conducted in order to continue to monitor their sentiments and experiences as the pandemic persists into 2021.

INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY: THE PANDEMIC'S SILVER LINING

ILONA DOUGHERTY

Ilona Dougherty is the Co-creator and Managing Director of the Youth & Innovation Project at the University of Waterloo. She is an award-winning social innovator and a regular voice in the Canadian media advising business, civil society and government on how they can tap into the value and unique abilities of young people.

We are almost a year into the pandemic, and cases have spiked again in several provinces across Canada. The second wave is upon us, there is no doubt. Who is getting sick this time has shifted from the spring, with young people¹ taking the place of the elderly, for now. But what hasn't changed is that the narrative surrounding young people throughout this pandemic has predominately been a negative one. Shifting our views of young people and basing these views on facts rather than sweeping generalizations has upsides for all of us.

From the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic the narrative that young people are to blame for the spread has been consistent, from spring breakers²

to warnings about partying³, painting young people with a broad brush has been a go to. Of course, this type of narrative about young people is not new. As Jon Savage writes in his 2007 book *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture*, young people in the West over the last 200 years, have often been viewed as a problem to be solved; of danger to both themselves and to society at large. This narrative has only been reinforced in recent years as millennials came of age, with an entire generation being blamed for killing multiple industries from beer to napkins⁴ and, of course, ruining their own future by eating avocado toast.

These narratives paint a one-dimensional picture

1 [We can "own" this pandemic if young Canadians step up: Dr. Theresa Tam](#), Daily Hive

2 ['Like, we're here': Spring breakers defy coronavirus fears to party](#), Global News

3 [Ontario premier warns young people to stop partying as COVID-19 cases spike](#), CTV News

4 [Someone Rounded Up All The Industries Millennials Are 'Killing,' And Here's How Millennials Responded](#), Bored Panda

of young people, one that tends to focus on a far-off unruly mob, very much disconnected from the young people we know and love in our own lives.



Youth Advisory Council members, Youth & Innovation Project, University of Waterloo. photo: Nima Latifpour

In fact, research⁵ tells us that even when our interactions with family and friends across age groups are positive, we still maintain our ageist stereotypes about the young people we do not know. This gulf between our own interactions and the stereotypes we are so intent on holding on to has only intensified in recent years as our interactions with family have become increasingly positive. As Paul Taylor writes in his book *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown*, Millennials and their parents are getting

along better than previous generations of parents and kids, with research confirming that Millennials have great respect for their elders.

“But a silver lining in this challenging time has been the fact that within our own families, generations have come together to face these challenges united.”

The research conducted during COVID-19 has continued to bear out these trends. A poll by Common Sense Media⁶ in the United States found that forty percent of young people felt more connected to their families during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic and a poll⁷ in the UK reported similar results. An Abacus Data poll⁸ in March found that young people are just as worried about the pandemic as their elders, with a 37% of young people between the ages of 18 and 34 are worried about COVID-19 while 36% of those over 60 years of age were worried. Experts⁹ also remind us that young people are also often on the frontlines of this pandemic through their work in retail and food industries and as such the reasons why young people might be contracting COVID-19 in higher numbers are complex.

5 [The Social Separation of Old and Young: A Root of Ageism](#), Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)

6 [Common Sense Media | SurveyMonkey Poll: How Teens Are Coping and Connecting in the Time of the Coronavirus](#), commonsensemedia.org

7 [Quarantine Quality Time: 4 In 5 Parents Say Coronavirus Lockdown Has Brought Family Closer Together](#), studyfinds.org

8 [COVID-19 and Canadians' State of Mind: Worried, lonely, and expecting disruption for at least 2 to 3 months](#), abacusdata.ca

9 [The Dose Podcast](#), CBC Listen

Our research at the Youth & Innovation Project at the University of Waterloo has detailed the unique value that young people have to offer, especially in the context we are now living in. In a time of rapid change and increasing complexity, the neuroscience tells us¹⁰ that young people's unique abilities are an essential part of what is needed if we hope to find solutions to the complex social, environmental and economic we all face. Our research¹¹ has also identified the importance of intergenerational collaboration in achieving positive social and environmental change.

can find ways of translating this intergenerational solidarity more broadly, focus on the facts about young people not the stereotypes, and work towards intergenerational collaboration in our workplaces and our communities, there is no doubt that we will be much more equipped to face whatever challenges the pandemic presents in the months to come.



Youth Advisory Council members, Youth & Innovation Project, University of Waterloo. photo: Nima Latifpour

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed endless challenges to our society and our economy, and a second wave will no doubt continue to both intensify these challenges as well as pose new ones. But a silver lining in this challenging time has been the fact that within our own families, generations have come together to face these challenges united. If we

10 [Wired for Innovation: Valuing the unique innovation abilities of emerging adults](#), University of Waterloo

11 [Youth-led social change: Topics, engagement types, organizational types, strategies, and impacts](#), Sciencedirect.com

GENERATION ZED: LEADING THE WAY TOWARD AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

DEBORAH LYNN MORRISON

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On June 29th, I had the honour of speaking with a group of five inspirational Canadians under the age of 20. Despite the pandemic causing massive disruption in their lives and exacerbating an already uncertain future, each one of them reflected the strong spirit of resilience, adaptability, and inclusiveness that are hallmarks of this generation.

But let's start with what we know about this generation.¹ Almost all of them were born after the year 2000. Often referred to as "digital natives," they are first generation to grow up with the Internet as a more ubiquitous information medium than the newspaper or telephone ever was. Although most are too young to remember it, the first event that marked this generation was 9/11. Other significant

geopolitical markers include the rise of global terrorism, the economic collapse of 2008, and one of greatest preoccupation to this generation – the global climate crisis. They are the first generation to believe that in their lifetime, they will be worse off than their parents were.² Given the significant amount of economic and political instability they witnessed throughout their childhood, it is not surprising that this generation is also characterized as being more anxious, more stressed, and more susceptible to mental health challenges.

The pandemic will most certainly be the hallmark of their generation, although most youth view the current health emergency as simply exacerbating pre-existing economic uncertainties and dispar-

1 [On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far](#), pewsocialtrends.org

2 [ANOTHER YOUTHQUAKE? Exploring the concerns, priorities, and political engagement of Canadian youth aged 15 to 30](#), April 25, 2019, Abacus Data.

ities rather than adding to them, according to recent surveys.³ The pandemic may be doing the most damage in curtailing social connections, particularly among younger youth who are just developing their social skills, which are critical to mental health and wellness.⁴

“They are seized with the urgent need for change and believe in the power of the individual to effect it.”

While youth in this cohort are very concerned about future job prospects and the rising costs of living, they tend to have a broader world view and avoid prioritizing individual needs and concerns. This is likely due to their connectedness through social media, which heavily influences their perspectives about diversity, inclusion, and equality. They live more frugally for environmental as well as economic reasons and are more actively engaged in social justice causes such as the Black Lives Matter movement both at home and around the globe. They are more inclined to trust activist movements and community organization rather than governments to implement change. Most importantly, they are seized with the urgent need for change and believe in the power of the individual to effect it.

Tessa Erickson sees herself as an 18-year old STEM



Tessa Erickson

student from Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation. We see her as an important language and culture defender.⁵ Although she grew up in a family and community strongly connected to their traditional culture, her father lamented the fact that few people in their community, including him, could speak their traditional Dakehl language due to their being sent away to Residential Schools. As had happened in so many Indigenous communities, he was concerned that as Elders able to speak and teach the language became fewer and youth were less

3 COVID-19 and Canadian Youth Impacts, Perspectives and The Recovery: A report based on a national survey of 1,000 Canadians aged 15 to 30. A proprietary survey conducted for a coalition of national youth serving agencies by Abacus Data in September 2020.

4 [Youth and COVID-19: Response, recovery and resilience](https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/2020/06/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-2020/), oecd.org

5 [B.C. teen creating app, summer camp to revive First Nations language](https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/bc-teen-creating-app-summer-camp-to-revive-first-nations-language-1.5688888), Canada's National Observer

frequently exposed to hearing the language, it might be lost entirely with this generation.

Ironically, Tessa grew up learning French as a second language and had an interest in learning others, including Spanish. She attributed her experience with the popular language app “Duolingo” as her inspiration for finding a way to revitalize Dakehl among her peers. When she listened to her father’s concern, she knew she had to do something. She developed a plan to work with elders and create an app that could assist community members, young and old, in relearning their traditional language. The project would be supported by a series of summer camps because, as she put it, “I always remembered summer camps as being fun, and I wanted learning our traditional language to be an experience they

enjoyed.” Her father took her proposal to the band council and much to her surprise; Tessa received confirmation of a \$50,000 grant just before the pandemic struck.

Unable to continue with plans for summer camps, Tessa has been focusing on developing the app. She learned quickly that the technical aspects of the project would be too demanding for her to complete alone so she is working with a professional app developer. She has redirected her own energies towards building her own Dakehl speaking skills and working with Elders on the content plan. When we asked about where she sees the project going next, Tessa gave a slight shrug and said “When her own community’s language is documented thoroughly, she would like to move onto other dialects and other languages across Canada... because speakers and the culture are fading and I would like to save [them] and revitalize [them] and I hope we can manage to get as many languages revitalized as we can.”



Emma Lim

Emma Lim is a 19-year-old Biomedical Science student at McGill who grew up in London, Ontario. Her father was from Hong Kong, and her mother Anishanabeh. As she tells it, she has been a climate activist since she was a baby attending protests with her mother. So, it was no surprise that Emma was among the first Canadian high schoolers to notice the challenge set by Greta Thunberg and organize a climate strike at her school. Through these events, Emma fostered deep connections with climate activists here in Canada and around the world who she considers her community, because of the inspiration and support they provide to her. For her, networks like this are the most underestimated part of social change. She says people tend to talk

about activism in terms of individuals who lead these movements as the result of individual leadership, when in fact “Every time you see an action, there’s often hundreds and maybe even thousands of young people behind it.”

Part of Emma’s actions in 2019 included encouraging youth to pledge not to have children until governments took the climate emergency seriously and take meaningful steps to mitigate the current trajectory of global warming and other scientific indicators.⁶ The startling petition attracted many headlines around the world, and thousands of signatories. A year later she was less sanguine about the future for the petition, feeling it may have served its purpose in raising awareness, but recognized there were other actions that also merited her time and attention. This is not to say the pledge was ever contemplated as a cavalier move, quite the opposite. The responsibility to future generations is at the very core of her motivation. “I am an activist because even if I don’t think it’s possible to win every fight, I do think its possible to shape a better world for my children,” Emma said. “So that’s what motivates me to get out of bed and plan an action... or start the pledge, it’s the only thing we have – to leave something for our children.”

Stella Bowles began her quest for change when she was in Grade 6 and she couldn’t understand why her mother wouldn’t let her go swimming in the LaHave River in Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia. With a little research, she learnt that many homes in her community were dumping septic waste directly into the river through straight pipes.



Stella Bowles

It bothered her so much, that she continued to pepper her parents with questions, many they couldn’t answer. In grade 8 they connected her with Coastal Action and a retired medical doctor, David Maxwell, who was conducting river testing in the region. He helped Stella learn how to do the testing for fecal bacteria and oversaw her research project to test four areas where kids frequently swam in the region. The results from her experiments confirmed that the river was not safe for swimming, in fact the water quality was so poor it wasn’t even safe for it to come in contact with skin. The research project garnered her a silver medal at the Canada-Wide Science Fair.

6 [Hundreds join student’s climate-change pledge: No kids until Canada takes action](#), CBC.ca

For Stella, this wasn't the end of her project. Deeply concerned that more community residents needed to be aware of the dangers of the water and the impact of continued straight piping – being underage to register on her own, she begged her mother to give her permission to set up a Facebook page. Eventually, her mother consented and with her Mom's help, Stella began posting about the dangers of swimming in the river. Stella attributes the power

of social media as critical to garnering community attention and political support to address the problem. Within two years, all three levels of government came together to ban straight pipes altogether and embark on a \$15.7 million dollar river clean-up project.⁷

Today, the Municipality of Lunenburg is well underway to replacing the 600 straight pipes along the waterway with an estimated completion date of 2023. Still in high school, Stella has subsequently shared her story with other communities in Nova Scotia and around the world, traveling to places like New York, Sweden, and Equator. Although her travels have been postponed during the pandemic, she says she hopes to continue to help teach others how to conduct water tests and advocate for polluted waterways endangering their communities.



Abhayjeet and Sukhmeet Singh Sachal

Abhayjeet and Sukhmeet Singh Sachal are brothers who immigrated to Canada with their families when they were 1 and 7 years old respectively. Sukhmeet talks about how those first few years in Canada were starkly different from the life he imagined, when he was often bullied and harassed simply because of the way he talked, the way he dressed, and what he ate. One could image such a challenging childhood would lead a person to be more introverted and cautious about standing out and standing up. But Sukhmeet chose instead to double down on drawing attention to himself in grade 7 when he noticed that Indigenous students in his school had an ever-tougher time than he did. In hopes of creating change, he spoke to a teacher about organizing a Pow-Wow Dance in the school

7 [Girl's quest to clean up LaHave River nets \\$15.7M in funding, CBC.ca](#)

as a way of highlighting and celebrating Indigenous culture. The event had such a positive change on the student community, it became a key annual event in the school calendar by the time Sukhmeet graduated from high school.

Now a 25-year old medical student, Sukhmeet has always been an inspiration and a mentor to his younger brother Abhayjeet, who is now 18. Abhayjeet's keen interest in understanding the impacts of climate change led him to apply for Students on Ice's arctic expeditions in 2017. While the experience definitely reinforced his commitment and concern for the effects of climate change, the greatest learnings came from the knowledge and lived experiences of his fellow Inuit participants. So inspired by his experience, he and his brother brainstormed about ways they could help connect more students from their own community of Delta, British Columbia, with Inuit communities in the North. They founded Break the Divide⁸ that effectively operates like a virtual exchange program, connecting youth in different communities so they can discuss issues affecting their communities and ideally work toward collaborative projects that can effect change. Over the past year, they have expanded their connections to include Siberia, India, Taiwan, Bolivia, and Cape Town, opening up even more conversations about the issues that set communities apart, and the issues that bind them together. According the Abhayjeet, the bottom line is "If we foster empathy, if we begin to talk to one another and learn about one another and our problems in our communities, and we work together to

solve these issues, then we can really break down racial, social, and geographic barriers."

These youth represent four examples of how Generation Zed is embracing our changing world. While their accomplishments at such a young age are exceptional, fortunately for us, their commitment to action is not. Indeed, we see this spirit all the time in Experiences Canada's programming⁹. This is a generation that cares about their communities, understands the uncertainty and is fearless about taking action. What they need most from us, is our support – a connection to the past so they don't repeat our mistakes, an invitation to share their opinions and make a meaningful contribution, and an openness to letting them try new ways of addressing our challenges.

Most importantly, we need to facilitate ways so they can learn from each other. All of these youth spoke about the power of social media in sharing their own stories and being a source of inspiration to others. Indeed, one of the best things about this digital generation is their growing connectedness, awareness of the challenges and hardships faced by others, and the resulting empathy and compulsion to want to help and make a difference. They know the challenges facing their generation can be overwhelming and they know their world is not going to get better on its own but they refuse to become hopeless or lost.

"We've grown up helpless. So there's that...," Emma Lim said with a catch in her voice as she

8 breakthedivide.net

9 experiencescanada.ca

fought for composure at the end of the session.
“For me, I feel I am an activist because I have no other choice. I have no other choice, because I am in a position where I am able to do something. And if I don’t, I don’t think that I could live with myself.”

Compassion. Resiliency. Determination. Innovation. These are the true hallmarks of Generation Zed. And I have never been more confident and assured that our future will, in fact, be better with them in charge.

CONNECTING YOUTH AND BREAKING THE DIVIDE

ABHAY SINGH SACHAL

CO-WRITTEN WITH HIS BROTHER SUKHMEET SINGH SACHAL

Abhayjeet and Sukhmeet Singh Sachal, Cultural Connectors, Surrey, BC

Following a life-changing experience with the Students on Ice Program, Abhay, with the help of his brother Sukmeet, founded Break the Divide Foundation to create opportunities for students to connect with other youth and communities first in the North, but now globally, to foster deeper understanding and greater opportunities to make meaningful change.

In 2016, I travelled to the Canadian Arctic where I saw the impacts of climate change firsthand. I delved deep into the social and ecological determinants of health for the Inuit. I also learned that suicide rates in the Arctic are eleven times the Canadian national average. After returning home, I discovered shocking news: my Inuit friend's boyfriend had shot himself while she was away on the Arctic expedition with me.

I was shaken to the core.

It was then that these issues became personal for me. No longer was climate change an issue of a 1.5 or 2 degree change in temperature. No longer was suicide a mere statistic. It was real.

Coming back from the expedition, I was inspired, and I realized this inspiration stemmed from my personal connections to real people in the Arctic. I

wanted other people to experience similar personalized learning.

Then, Sukhmeet had the chance to live in Inuvik, Northwest Territories for six months. He, too, saw the impacts of climate change firsthand. The effects on the community were profound.

This led us to start a non-profit called Break The Divide (BTD). It was a simple idea at first – that conversations between youth living in British Columbia and students in Inuvik could serve to change mindsets.

That's exactly what happened. Through video calls, students talked to one another and learned about each other's lifestyles.

We then realized the potential of BTD and expanded our program to schools around the world.

We talked to students in Cape Town, South Africa about access to clean drinking water. We talked to youth in rural India about poverty in their communities. Currently, students from Siberia, Bolivia, China, Taiwan, India, and Canada connect with one another to discuss the most pertinent issues of our times such as climate change, mental health, Indigenous reconciliation, and so much more.



Trip to the Canadian Arctic

BTD follows a three-step approach to change: connect, communicate, and create change. Essentially, we connect youth with one another, they communicate about issues in their communities, and then work together to leverage shared knowledge to create change.

In this age and in this society, empathy is everything. It allows communities to be at the forefront of dialogue and decision-making. At BTD, we turn empathy into action. And we enable thousands of youth to do exactly that.

BTD is an innovative idea that is perfect for this time of record polarization and apathy.

“BTD follows a three-step approach to change: connect, communicate, and create change.”

When Sukhmeet and I see a problem, we take action. This is at the root of our passion for social entrepreneurship. To flourish as a global community, we need to care about one another and take action locally.



Trip to the Canadian Arctic

For Sukhmeet and me, this tendency for hope and altruism comes from our parents. Sukhmeet was seven years old when we immigrated to Canada from India. I was only 11 months old. I saw my parents struggle to provide a good life for us. We recognized the importance of seizing opportunities whilst learning about the atrocities committed

against Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Therefore, we knew we had to work with communities to create positive change, leading to our passion for reconciliation and community connections.



Abhay and Sukhmeet spreading their message of hope.

Since founding BTS, Sukhmeet and I have spoken about our work in promoting inclusivity, sustainability, and dialogue to deconstruct barriers at international conferences in Washington DC, Spokane, Florida, and Toronto, engaging with tens of thousands in the process. We have also spoken about holistic learning practices at teacher development conferences across North America. In 2018, Sukhmeet and I were guest lecturers at the University of Kassel in Germany, speaking about BTS's role in tackling the UN SDG of Good Health and Wellbeing. Currently, we are co-administering a course about Intercultural Competencies in Delhi, India.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, we have scaled our efforts to help our community. In Sukhmeet's

role as the Health and Wellness Ambassador for the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), representing 70,000 physicians and medical students, he hosted an event with the CMA's past president to dispel COVID-19 myths. To reach a broad population and humanize the effects of the pandemic, I started an international podcast named "Different Boat, Same Storm". Locally, Sukhmeet and I have partnered with tech companies to produce 3D printed face shields for healthcare workers. We have also received grants from the Clinton Foundation and the Government of Canada to implement public health safety measures in Sikh temples to protect the elderly.

As the world continues to change in the wake of COVID-19 and other growing challenges, Sukhmeet and I are optimistic about the power of young people.

Youth are not only the future. We are leaders today, with unique and innovative ideas that can spark dialogue and long-standing change.

At this moment in time, when we recognize the intersections of this pandemic, the climate crisis, systemic injustices, mental health issues, and the urgent need for reconciliation, it is critical that we remain optimistic.

As youth, we must have hope and work hard to create the future we want to see.

This is how, together, we will break the divide.