

27 Stories

by

Laura MacKenzie Smith

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

Invisible Cities is Italo Calvino's description, in fifty-five stories of fifty-five cities, of the travels of Marco Polo. Each city is fictitious, but collectively they make up Marco Polo's Venice.

A city is distinct; we know Venice (or Manhattan or London) by its buildings, its landmarks, the nature of the city's fabric, and by the lives of the citizens who gather, work, and live there. As much as the fabric itself, those citizens are unique to the city's character. The suburbs that developed around major urban centers are not cultural artifacts, built over centuries from traditions and local practices, but products: predictable, marketable *en masse*, and relatively interchangeable. Conceived of as the ideal blend of city and country, the suburbs are homogeneous, universally accessible, and familiar; so it is with suburban stories.

The Stories here are true. The people, places, and events are all real. Isolated, they would be anecdotes, gossip, or reports; in this case, they may be considered postcards – snapshots of everyday life. As a whole they begin to portray the home of millions of people across North America.

The twenty-seven stories of this thesis create a window into lives lived in the edge condition called Suburbia.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, for always believing in me.

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“But our notebooks give us away, for however dutifully we record what we see around us, the common denominator of all we see is always, transparently, shamelessly, the implacable “I.” We are not talking here about the kind of notebook that is patently for public consumption, a structural conceit for binding together a series of graceful penseses; we are talking about something private, about bits of the mind’s string too short to use, an indiscriminate and erratic assemblage with meaning only for its maker.”

-Joan Didion. On Keeping a Notebook. p.5



50

CANADIAN SOUVENIR POST CARD

POSTAGE
ONE CENT
FOR
CANADA
AND U.S.
TWO CENTS
FOR
ABROAD

Sunday, Oct. 28, 1990
**THE OLD PAPER
 SHOW & SALE**
 11 a.m. until 5 p.m.
 old postcards, advertising, books,
 magazines, posters, photographs
 and other forms of paper ephemera
 Admission: \$5.00
 Information (416) 366-1310

THE OLD PAPER SHOW AND SALE
 St. Lawrence North Market
 92 Front St. East
 Toronto

CHROME CARDS

I first learned about *Chrome Cards* from a sixty year old retired school teacher, who looked a little like Clint Eastwood in a plaid shirt. His table was the second one I stopped at, on my first visit to a Postcard Show. The first table had been crowded with people; I hadn't been able to get a good look at anything. I was flipping through a box of cards from Northumberland County on Clint's table when he came up and asked if there was anything in particular I was looking for. I told him I wanted postcards of the suburbs, and he asked which county I was interested in. I hesitated. I didn't really care which one as long as the image was something I thought I could use, and I would have to see it before I could make that decision. So I said, "Pickering?"

Clint led me over to a box marked Durham, that had postcards of the old post office in Oshawa, black and white scenes of Main Street Whitby from the 1920s and a few of Lake Simcoe and a general store in rural North Pickering. I told him those weren't exactly what I was looking for, but he seemed like he really wanted to help me out, so I asked him how he determined the price of each card. I had seen some for \$2 and similar ones for \$12. He pulled a book out from under the table and showed me his personal collection of postcards as he explained that age was the biggest factor. If the card had a date printed on it or stamped from when it was mailed, that helped him determine how rare it was likely to be. If there was a recognizable landmark or event depicted, the card would be more valuable than one that was a generic scene requiring one to check the back for the location.

After flipping through pages of old, valuable postcards, I asked him if he had any newer ones; from the 1950s onward. Clint told me that those were called *Chrome Cards* and he didn't collect them, but might have a

couple mixed in with his main stock. There were at least thirty shoeboxes filled with postcards on his table; I was reasonably sure I wouldn't find what I was looking for. So to make the rest of my search easier, I asked what defined a *Chrome Card*, and whether he knew of any other vendors who had them. He told me that *Chrome Cards* were first printed in 1939 and are the mass produced colour photo cards that are still found in souvenir shops today. Most collectors don't carry them because they're so common, but a few keep some in stock for customers looking for specific topic cards, such as amusement parks, holidays or transportation, which were mainly manufactured as *Chromes*. He then pointed me towards the opposite end of the show room to a middle aged man in a green polo shirt and said, "Mike usually carries some *Chrome Cards*, you should go talk to him."

I decided to look at these accounts of the suburbs, and of Pickering in particular, because that is where I grew up and because it is what I know. Many theses on suburbia are based in planning, and focus on typology and attempt to fix what the author sees as a problem. I wanted to do something else. There are problems with the vast areas around major cities that we call the suburbs, but I wanted to present suburbia, and my hometown of Pickering, Ontario as a place distinct from the image of tract housing, parking lots and super malls.

I didn't want to write an essay on the suburban condition and its culture because that has been done many times before. I wanted to tell a story, which led me back to Italo Calvino and his 1972 book Invisible Cities, in which Marco Polo describes fifty-five individual cities, each one distinct, but when considered as a whole, are seen as his hometown of Venice. From there I read short stories by Joan Didion, David Bezmozgis, Jacques Reda and Alice Munro. I started writing stories of my childhood and stories of my town. I wanted the reader to see it the way it is, not just the way they think it is, or should be.

I then moved on to images. I have been collecting postcards for most of my life. It started when my father would bring me a card from each city he visited on his various business trips. When I started going on trips

myself, I continued to buy a postcard from each city and each landmark that I visited. My friends also started to bring me postcards from the places that they had been.

I like postcards because they show what's important in an instant, with almost no explanation. They literally provide a snapshot of a place, a quick sketch, getting across what makes that place special. I decided to use postcards to illustrate my stories because I felt that they embodied what I was trying to do: show the reader aspects of Pickering as a snapshot, a short story, focusing on one place, thing or person.

Now that I know what to ask for, I am discovering a contempt for this type of postcard. Not just the subject, though that is also not popular, but for the style of card itself. The vendors who actually carry *Chrome Cards*, will intersperse a few rare or interesting ones with their primary stock, and then have a box at the end of the table – or in some cases, under the table – full of these generic, coloured cards that they can usually be persuaded to sell for between twenty-five cents and a dollar each.



Map of Whites Road Prestige Business Park

PRESTIGE

The first school I went to was Blaisdale Montessori. It was in South Pickering (as in south of the 401). I was three years old when I started, but most of my memories are from the last year I attended, when I was five. Both of my parents worked; they arranged their schedules so that one of them would be around to take my younger sister and I to school and the other would pick us up. This meant that my mother went to work very early, and my father came home late.

Every morning he would drive us to school. We would drive through a business and industrial area called The Whites Road Prestige Business Park. I didn't know its name at the time, or what any of the buildings were, but I did know that people worked in them. And since my father went to work every day, I thought it would be a good idea if he worked close to my school. That way, he could come home earlier in the evenings. I didn't notice my mother's absence as much in the mornings because she left before I got up and we were always rushed out of the house, so there wasn't much time anyway. Not like at night when we would sit at the dinner table without my dad.

The building I thought he should work in was the tallest one in the Park. It was four stories of precast concrete, with bands of green-tinted glass. On each floor, the windows angled outward making the profile look – to my five-year-old mind – like an air traffic control tower. It was by far the best building to work in; the others were all one or two stories tall, very long and plain-looking. Brown brick, grey siding and striated concrete were the predominant materials.

Once I left Blaisdale and started grade one at the public school three blocks from our house, I rarely had reason to go through the Business Park anymore.

After graduating from university, one of my friends got a job with an engineering firm in the building that backed onto the highway off-ramp in the Prestige Park. Getting off the 401, we could always see if there was anyone working in her office at night or on the weekend. She loved the fact that her office was only a five minute drive from her house and that it was possible to go home and have lunch if she wasn't too busy at work. I and two other friends who lived nearby were very jealous, as we each had much longer commutes into Toronto or North York to work.

Last year, around the end of November, my friend's company moved their office over to Highway 7 and the 400. The five minute commute she had enjoyed so much became fifty minutes, if there were no accidents, and if there were good weather conditions. Once the snow started, the 'white death' that turned sane drivers incompetent, the drive could take significantly longer. It wasn't long after that when she decided to move to North York. Her drive now takes twenty-five minutes each way, unless she is required to work out of the office in Mississauga.



Map of Salvation Army Food Bank

SALLY ANN

The small, red brick bungalow on King's Crescent is about equidistant from Ajax City Hall and what, in a larger city, might be called The Projects. The house looks exactly like dozens of other single-storey homes on the street and you probably wouldn't look twice at it if you were driving or walking by. It's only distinguishing feature is the diminutive red and white sign on the front lawn: Salvation Army, Ajax Food Bank. The food bank is run by a retired couple in their seventies, who rely on volunteers to do much of the heavy lifting.

A group of four people from the Presbyterian Church in Pickering pack food into bags for a couple of hours every Monday morning. The first Monday of the month is always the slowest day; government cheques are delivered at the end of the month and many people who would usually come in for a bag choose to shop for themselves that week.

You can see the volunteers enter the house from the side door and go straight downstairs to the basement, where the space is divided into three rooms they reach from the area at the bottom of the stairs. The rooms are organized into sorting, storage, and packing. The retirees, Bob and Nora, take care of sorting the food that comes in every week. Bags of non-perishables are dropped off through a chute into a large plastic bin. They are then sorted by type and stored in crates, dated the week they arrived. These crates are stored on industrial shelving in the storage room. When the shelves in the packing room run low, the crate with the oldest date is brought in to replenish them.

The volunteers have a list, and three types of bags to fill: the basic bag, the supplementary family bag, and the emergency bag. Different items in different quantities are put in each, and then stacked on yet another shelf at the bottom of the stairs for distribution upstairs in the Family Services office.

The only other full-time volunteer in the packing area is Walter. Walter is a forty-something former line worker who was forced to take early retirement after an accident at work. He doesn't like to talk about it. But he will talk about anything and everything else. He's very friendly and just a little slow. His job is to separate the large kilogram bags of things like sugar and flour into two cup ration bags. In his latex gloves and Salvation Army vest, he stands at a counter just outside the packing room, where he can hear requests for more rice or sugar as the packers run out.

There are certain times of the year when the Salvation Army has more supplies. The months immediately following Christmas are one of those times. The donations at Christmas are outstanding, but come March, the shelves are sparse again. At those times, it is sometimes necessary to substitute what the list specifies with what is currently available. Like sardines. There is never a shortage of sardines. Or canned beans. You never seem to run low on those either. Canned stew or fruit run out all the time, but there are always beans and sardines on the shelves.

So on the first Monday of the month, the volunteers arrive, pack, and depart within an hour, shelves stocked with bags waiting to be picked up. The parking lot is in what used to be the backyard, and as the last house before the intersection, it has an entrance from the street, that is separate from the main one used by clients.

The other houses on the street range from well-kept, to run-down. Just like the neighbourhood. Turn right when leaving the food bank and in a few minutes you will reach a brand new subdivision, a stone's throw from the highway big box stores. Turn left and you will go through the poorest area of town, where the only businesses that survive are the convenience store and the spare parts garage.



BASEMENTS

I've lived in three different houses in two subdivision blocks in the same town. They were all within a fifteen minute walk of each other, and, each time we moved, the house was larger.

The first house was brand-new; there wasn't even any grass when we moved in. Not that I remember that far back, but I've seen the pictures. The house had three bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor, and the kitchen, living and dining rooms on the main floor. The basement was unfinished. The concrete floors were exposed and painted a dusty blue; you could see the fluffy pink fibre-glass insulation straining against the plastic barrier on all of the walls. Only the furnace and the washer/dryer were down there.

We lived in that house for the first six years of my life. When I was five, my father 'finished' the basement. He put up drywall and doors, put in a second bathroom and a fireplace. He laid carpet and installed lights. The basement became liveable, if not preferable to the upper floors. The TV moved from the upstairs living room to the basement 'family' room, along with all of the toys and older furniture. For my sister and I, the bathroom in the basement was a last resort; there were spiders there.

Less than a year after the basement was finished, my parents sold the house and we moved into a larger home, with four bedrooms and two bathrooms on the second floor, the kitchen, living, dining and family rooms on the main floor along with a powder room – a bathroom without a bath tub. The basement in this house was also unfinished. The washer and dryer were located in the back, behind the furnace. There was no real need to finish this basement to provide more liveable space; we had plenty of rooms on the upper floors of the house. But when we changed the carpet upstairs, some of the old carpet was laid out in two areas of

the basement: one for a play area, with all of the toys stacked neatly along the wall, and one for a work space with a desk set up for the two computers, printer and filing cabinets. The carpet didn't completely mask the hardness of the concrete floor beneath. I discovered this when I threw a Ken doll down during a tantrum and broke off his legs. Around the staircase, there was a path of exposed concrete floor that ran in a circle. That loop was great for rollerblading when the weather was bad. I once tried to ride my bicycle around it, but that experiment ended in a pile of boxes and broken decorations, when I learned that the turning radius needed to be larger than the bike.

We moved into the last of my childhood homes when I was fourteen; again the basement was unfinished. And for a long time, it was simply ignored. The washer and dryer were now on the ground floor, in a vestibule from the garage, and the office now has an actual room with a door, also on the ground floor. We were no longer in need of a playroom, though if necessary, one of the five bedrooms on the second floor would have done.

Over the years, the basement has filled with old furniture, toys, luggage, decorations and junk that we were not ready to get rid of. When we purchased a pool table eight years ago, a space was cleared, some of that old carpet was laid and there it sits, waiting for the couple times a year when someone remembers that it's there and goes down to play. Another section of the basement has been walled off, and gradually fills with my father's tools. Despite this, the best reason to go into the basement is to get something out of the chest freezer or from the cold room.

As houses get bigger and bigger, there is less need for a basement level. People don't really need the extra space. In fact, they might actually be better off without it; there wouldn't be space to store all those old hockey trophies or half-finished craft projects. Old couches would have to be donated or disposed of, and old fridges wouldn't hang around for years with two cans of coke in them.



NOTICE

The sun spoke of spring, but the nip in the wind said that winter still hung on. That didn't stop everyone who was able from finding any excuse to be outside. An elderly man in a brown plaid coat walked his beagle, who hobbled along as if he was getting on in years as well. A young couple watched their little girl on the swing in the park, and two teenagers shot baskets on their driveway.

The houses in the neighbourhood had been built after the war, and commercial construction continued steadily thereafter. Concrete-and-glass condo towers now cast long shadows over the older bungalows, with their tidy porches and lace-curtained bay windows. The winding, tree-lined streets where children used to play street hockey are now only steps away from mass public transit, a multi-movieplex and the river of the 401 super highway. Motorists avoiding the traffic lights on the main street have made the neighbourhood too dangerous for road games.

Where the end of a street retreats to the grassy slopes of a park, there is a six foot by six foot white sign with bold black lettering standing in front of a single-storey home.

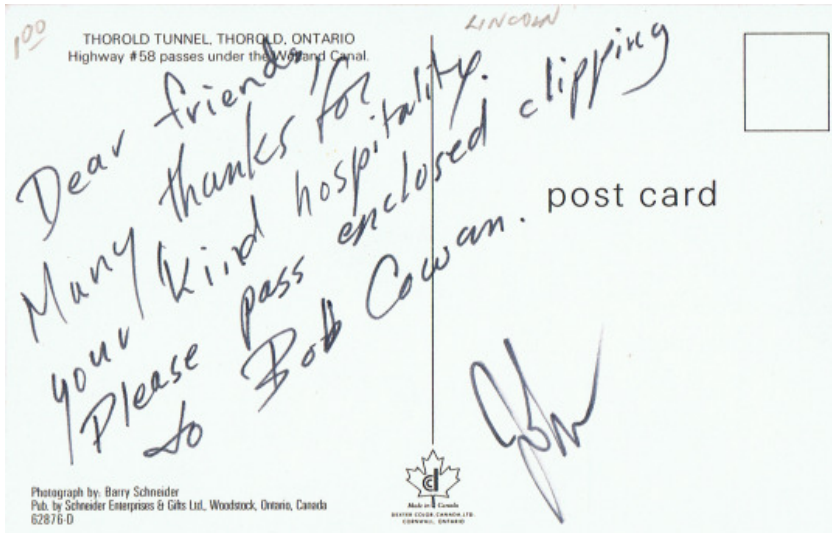
“NOTICE,” it proclaims. “An application to amend the Official Plan and zoning by-law has been made by Welleby and BBT DevGroup Inc. To permit a transfer of density from 44 Avondale Ave. to 9 & 15 Bales Ave. and 34 Avondale Ave. to construct a 9 storey residential building on that site. For further information contact the planner Ms. Catherine Cieply at 416-395-7109. File Number(s): 06 108827 NNY 23 OZ.”

The little brick houses with the white trim and wooden mailboxes are to

be demolished, and in their place will be built two nine-storey residential developments. Stucco will replace brick, aluminum will replace wood, and two hundred people will replace twenty.

The sign is not alone in this neighbourhood; it's companions are posted one street over and two streets down. They reside on corners in front of boarded up windows, and next to 'For Sale' signs on front lawns.

A little boy runs past the sign, arms outstretched to either side, humming like an airplane. His mother follows more slowly, shouting out a warning to stay away from the street, eyes constantly on the alert for anything that could pose a threat. A thirty-something man jogs by in a Nike tracksuit, an iPod strapped to his wrist. The sun is shining, but the air is still cold.



SUBURBAN DRIVER

Seven-thirty in the morning, and the sun is not yet over the roof lines of the houses on the street. Getting into the car, you juggle the shoulder bag containing a laptop and the work you brought home last night but never got around to doing because there was a home renovation special on television. You almost drop your purse and your lunch bag as you manoeuvre the door open, and stow everything in the back seat. It's a mess, you should really try to make time to clean out the whole car this weekend. Starting the engine, you wave to Dave down the street as he comes out of his house. He smiles back – his hands are full – as you back out of your driveway.

There are not many cars on the road yet; you pass only four before you turn onto the main street. Two lights before the 401 interchange, cars start to back up in the right lane. You want to switch to the left and go faster, but that would mean cutting back in before the last stoplight, and you really hate it when others cut in front of you, so you follow along in the line, slowly, until finally it's your turn to cross the intersection. A car stopped at the red light decides there is enough room between you and the car ahead of you for him to turn right in front of you, forcing you to break as you're signalling to get on the westbound ramp. This causes a truck two cars behind you to honk his horn; the light has changed and he didn't have time to get across.

Seven forty-six am: you've made it onto the ramp, and you're accelerating up to speed, but slow down again as you merge into traffic that is suddenly backed up. Pulling in front of an SUV, you wave a thank-you, and promptly get cut off by a Mercedes who has sped to the end of the merge lane and must get out of it before it ends. You hit the brakes and curse drivers who

make the commute more stressful for everyone. Traffic flows steadily for awhile and you turn on the radio for the ten-minute update. There is a truck blocking one lane in the express, two exits ahead. You see three cars simultaneously signal to get out of the lane heading into the express route. They heard the same update.

Seven fifty-eight am: you pass the truck, broken down, at a slightly faster pace than those being forced around by the flashing lights of a tow truck and a police car. Why must everyone slow down to take a look at another's misfortune?

Eight oh six am: you've finally reached your exit and you steer into the right turn lane; there is a road works truck blocking the lane you want to turn into. Along with all the other drivers who didn't look far enough ahead, you must merge back into the centre lane. Except that no one wants to let you. By inching forward and to the side, you manage to squeeze in front of a Prius driver who honks at you and throws up his arms.

Eight twelve am: you're at the last stop light before the office. There is a Tim Horton's with a drive-thru on the other side. You see a poster advertising the new breakfast sandwich. Your stomach rumbles. The light turns green, and half-way across you decide, "what the heck, I've got time," and turn into the driveway. Coming around the side of the building, you reach the drive-thru lane with two cars behind you. The line is longer than you expected, but you can't get out now. Curbs block you on both sides, and there are now three cars in line behind you.

Eight twenty-one am: you pull out of the Tim's parking lot with your breakfast sandwich, coffee, and a donut – the extra wait made you just annoyed enough not to care about the extra calories – and drive the last three hundred yards to your office.

Eight twenty-seven am: you sit down at your desk, turn on your computer

and sip your coffee. Your forty minute drive took almost an hour this morning. You're feeling stressed and on edge before you've even opened your email.


Maybe it's time to move closer to the city.



The Station Mall - Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario


"Remember Your Friends - Send Post Cards"

1008 .50¢



A view of the Station Mall showing its pleasant location beside the St. Mary's River. Many stores and boutiques offer a wide variety of merchandise to its selective shoppers.

Pub. by Canadian Postcard Products Inc., Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.
74155-D



MEET ME AT TIM'S

There is no corner coffee shop, or mom and pop cafe, in the town I grew up in. I don't know if there ever was. But there has always been a Tim Horton's.

The small store on the north-west corner of Whites and Kingston Road was apparently one of the oldest in Ontario. That is, until it was torn down and a drive-thru put in its place. Around the same time, on the north-east corner, a plaza was built with a large Tim Horton's and Wendy's combination restaurant and drive-thru. You might think that two of the same fast food chain at one intersection would be excessive, but not if the store is a Tim Horton's. Both locations do a booming business. Every morning there is a line at each drive-thru, and there are always people sitting with friends, or alone with the paper, at the tables of the larger store.

The Tim Horton's/Wendy's restaurant is only a short walk from my former high school. It was built after I graduated and left for university, so I never had the option of going there for lunch. Despite this, somehow it became the meeting place to catch up and hang out when my friends and I were home from our respective colleges for the weekend. We would call around on Saturday afternoon or shout across the table/bar/dance floor on Saturday night: "coffee at Tim's tomorrow?" And we would all meet up around eleven on Sunday mornings, grab our double-doubles and timbits before sitting at a table, sometimes for hours, catching up on local gossip and telling stories of our exploits at school. There was a sign, posted on every column in the store that read: *'ENJOY YOUR STAY WITH US BUT NO LOITERING PLEASE 20 MINUTE TIME LIMIT THANK YOU.'* The rule was never enforced unless patrons were disruptive or hadn't made a purchase. Sometimes we would stay long enough that a late lunch from Wendy's would be in order.



Map of Kingston Road and Whites Road, Tim Horton's

I would always try to sit facing the rest of the room so that I could watch the people who came in. There were several clearly recognizable types. The after-church crowd: they were usually dressed very nicely, sometimes with children, typically in groups of three or four. There were the singles, doing the hangover coffee run, who had either walked over, or decided the drive-thru line-up was too long. And there were the people who would come in for a visiting box, a box of cookies, muffins, or donuts to take with them to a friend or relative's house, in order to avoid showing up empty-handed.

When I was younger, and Sunday was considered a family day, we would sometimes stop at Tim Horton's or Coffee Time after church on our way to visit my grandparents. On these trips we would pick up a box of donuts to share with whoever else was visiting that day. My grandparents lived north of us, just outside of Port Perry. There used to be a Coffee Time donut shop along the 7/12 highway at the turn-off to go into town. (Town being Port Perry, also known as Port). I used to love stopping there, and choosing which donuts went into the box. The Coffee Time closed down before I started high school and a burger diner opened up. It lasted just over a year before going out of business. The building was empty for awhile before a cafe and deli opened up. It lasted eight months.

We don't drive up there very often anymore, but the last time I did, the building had been bulldozed and the empty lot had a for sale sign on the corner. I wonder if a Tim Horton's with a drive-thru would have been able to survive there. The highway is a well-travelled route, especially in the summertime with people from the cities heading north to their cottages.



CHURCH BASEMENTS

As a child, I never made the connection between the basement of a church and the sanctuary above. To me they were mutually exclusive spaces that never came together.

I started attending Brownie meetings when I was seven years old. A branch of the Girl Guides of Canada, the local Brownie group met in the basement of St. Paul's on the Hill Anglican Church. The re-assembled Church of the Ascension from Toronto was dedicated in its current location in 1934.⁵ The exterior of the church is clad in stone and has a tall, square tower in one corner. With its crenellated parapet and stained glass windows, I thought the church was a castle. And since I knew that weddings took place in churches, this made perfect sense to me. Brides wore princess dresses when they got married. And the place where they had the ceremony, with the long aisle, the rows of people, the candles and the flowers at the front, was a magical place. I had never attended a wedding.

The basement of St. Paul's was not magical. It had fluorescent lights, linoleum floors and dark beige painted walls. The central space was large, with four columns evenly spaced to support the ceiling. Along one wall was a closed pass-through window to the kitchen. Most nights the kitchen was locked. Our group had to get special permission to use it. The walls opposite the kitchen and the entrance had doors that led to Sunday school classrooms. We weren't allowed in those either.

The space was perfect for a Brownie group. There was lots of room to run around and play games. There were also a few fold-up wooden tables and stackable chairs that could be brought out for doing crafts or the rare



Map of Amberlea Presbyterian Church



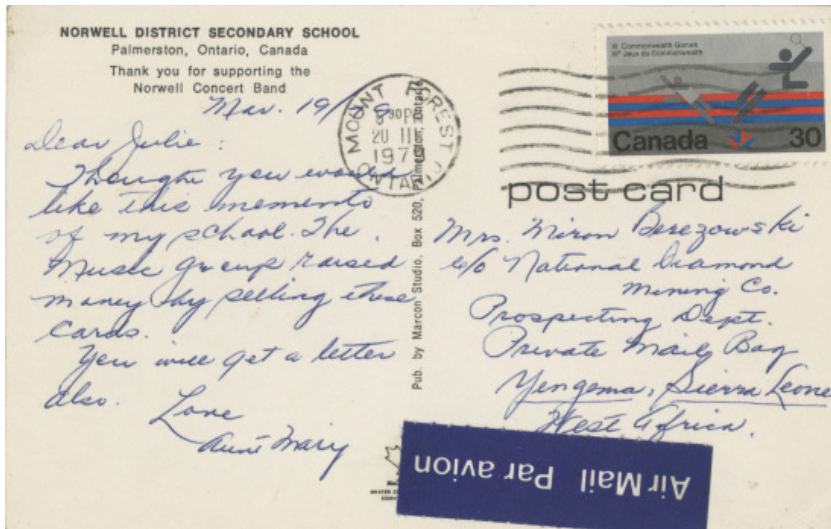
Map of St. Paul's Anglican Church

lesson. We used the four columns as meeting spots when we split into Sixes to take attendance and collect dues. I was a member of the Sprites. There were also Elves, Pixies and Fairies.

Around that time in my childhood, my parents decided that it would be good for our family to attend church on a regular basis. Since they had no previous religious affiliations, we visited the two churches that were located closest to where we lived. St. Paul's was one of them. I don't remember much about the service we went to. There was a procession of which one of my Brownie leaders was part, and they sang, lit candles and spoke a haunting chant before taking communion. Which we did not participate in.

The other church we visited was Amberlea Presbyterian. Built in 1986, it was a brown brick building with a white steeple that you could see from miles away. Inside, the gypsum walls were painted pale pink and off-white, and the pews were wood with rose cushions. At the front was a huge wooded cross with fluorescent lights behind it. Compared to St. Paul's, the service was very informal: there were no processions or chants, and the windows along the north wall made the whole space seem brighter. After the service, we all went to the basement for coffee and snacks. It was smaller than St. Paul's, but the layout was similar: open space leading to a kitchen, washrooms and Sunday school classes. The floor was carpeted and there were no columns.

The week after attending service upstairs, when I went to Brownies, I was unable to connect the two spaces in my mind. The sanctuary of St. Paul's still held a mysterious magical quality that I couldn't relate to. Maybe if we had visited the sanctuary and the basement on the same day, I would have been able to associate them to one another. As it was, I was still desperately curious about what the upstairs of the castle looked like.



SCIENCE FAIR

The eighth grade science fair was one of the shining moments in my young life. I won third place for my research and analysis of the disease alcoholism. I read books and looked at pictures. I made graphs and charts and took a survey of my classmates. I put all of this information together and mounted it very neatly and creatively on the three foot by eight foot piece of fold-out cardboard, provided by my teacher.

The day of the fair, everyone's boards were set up on tables placed in rows running the width of the school's gymnasium. Standing on the tables, the boards – impossible to see over – made a high trench when you walked between them. You could only see the projects, rising up on both sides, and the burgundy colour of the gym mats stuck to the wall at the end of the row. Experiments involving fungi and mould, electricity, and solar power sat adjacent to studies on the inner workings of the computer, and the anatomy of a cat. High above, on the walls, were the pennants won by the school's various sports teams, a reminder to everyone that, though science ruled the gym today, tomorrow it would be returned to its rightful constituents.

For someone who did very poorly in gym class and usually not much better in science, the day was intimidating. At least that year I had the opportunity to do a research project, instead of the mandatory experiment like the year before. That hadn't gone well at all. At the end of the day, when I found the white ribbon attached to my presentation board, I was on top of the world. I couldn't wait to bring my parents back after dinner that night and show off my success. After the evening show, students were encouraged to take their projects home with them. I set it up in my room in front of the closet where I could see it when I woke up each morning.

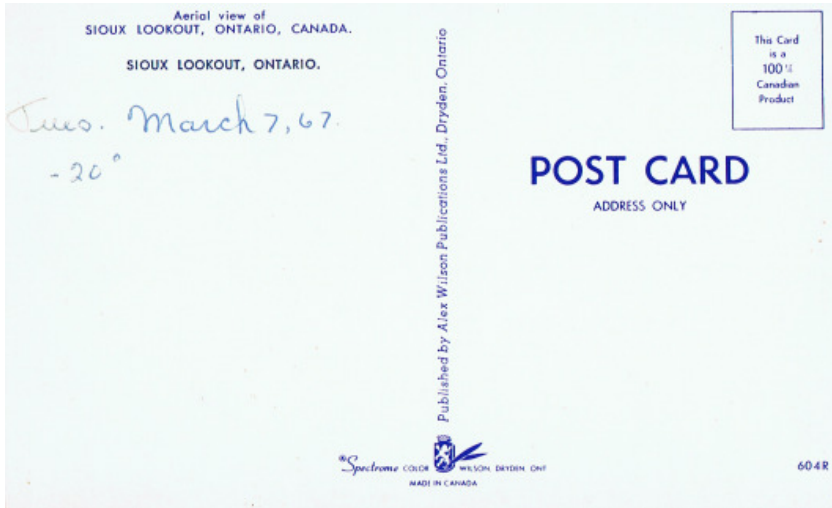
After a week of manoeuvring around the board to get to my closet, I folded it up and placed it against the back wall, inside the closet, where it wouldn't be in the way.

The science fair takes place at the end of May every year, right before the rush of exams that precipitates summer vacation. Two weeks after my graduation from public school to high school in June, my family moved into a new house. It wasn't very far from our old home, but it was quite a bit larger. My mother likes to purge, and packing all our things to be moved provided her with the perfect excuse to get rid of "stuff we didn't need." While packing the contents of my closet into a box, I learned that my prize-winning science fair project fell into that category. Not willing to part so soon with the proof of my academic genius, I managed, covertly, to transport the three-by-eight foot piece of folded cardboard from one wood veneer paneled closet to another (slightly larger) one, in my new room.

There it stayed, propped up against the wall, behind my ever-changing wardrobe until two months ago, when in an effort to get the sliding panel door of my closet to close again, I was emptying it of anything that wasn't completely necessary for my current and future happiness. Folded up the way it was, all that could be seen were the two champagne bottles that I had drawn and cut out, foam bursting, arching together, with the word 'ALCOHOLISM' held between them. I stood it up and opened the side panels. There it was; a thirteen-year-old's masterpiece. Four different fonts, word-art titles and multi-coloured graphs, all laid out on squares of construction paper, the whole thing bordered by marching pink elephants.

More than ten years had passed since I had looked at it, and I was curious why I felt the need to keep it this long. The first thing that caught my attention was the class survey. Out of thirty-two preteen students from a middle class suburban neighbourhood, eighty-four percent had admitted to having tried an alcoholic beverage. Of that eighty-four percent, ninety percent claimed the drink had been offered to them by a parent or guardian.

As I folded up the presentation board and took it outside to the blue recycling bin, I wondered how different the responses would be if I asked an eighth grade class from the same school those questions today.



THE HOUSE WITH NO DOOR

I first noticed the house in grade nine, when I started walking with a group of my friends to and from the high school on the other side of the railway tracks. It was a fifteen-minute walk each way, depending on the route we took and how slow we walked. At first the house looked just like all the other houses on the street. It was the same colour of brick, and it had the same style of windows, and even the same colour on the garage door, as the first house beyond the walkway from Whites Road.

But this house didn't have a front door. At least not from the front. From there it was one more two storey box with a garage. If you walked towards it from the right, and you were paying attention, you might catch a glimpse of the front door behind the juniper tree growing next to the front porch.

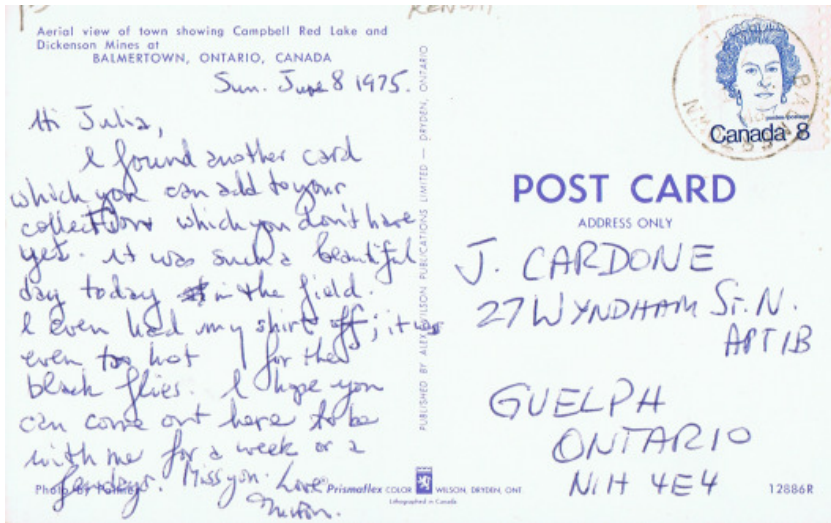
The door did not face the street like the doors of the other houses on the block. It is on the garage wall, perpendicular to the street, facing the small concrete stoop and the driveway next door. The windows that did face the street had the shades drawn, blanking the windows as we passed.

Of course we didn't dwell on the design of the house. We were much too busy discussing the events in the cafeteria at lunch that day, and deciding who had the best locker location to meet at before class in the mornings. It was the end of our first day of high school and we had survived. Actually we might have enjoyed it. The strange house didn't rate more than a passing glance before we moved on.

For the next five years we walked past that house twice a day. Well, four and a half years; I got a car in the second semester of our last year to drive to my co-op job in the afternoons. We no longer walked past the

house with no door every day, or even drove past it, because the only exit onto the school's street was pedestrian only; I hadn't given it a thought in a long time.

That April, the police raided three houses in Pickering suspected of growing marijuana. Two of them were in the subdivisions north of Finch, near the Ajax town line. The third one was on a street we used to walk down every day. Though they don't release the addresses of grow operations, the street name was mentioned on the news. I still wonder if it was the house that looks like it has no door.



FORECLOSURE

Buddy lives two houses behind me. I can see part of his backyard standing on the deck in mine. Buddy spends most of his time in the backyard but not because he likes it. He voices his displeasure at being forced to stay outside everyday so that the entire neighbourhood can hear him. It got to the point that whenever we heard a dog bark, someone would comment, "Buddy's out again."

Buddy isn't a large dog, he's a Beagle mix; mixed with what, I don't know. His owners got him when he was a puppy, and I'd see the kids out walking him before school in the mornings. It was usually the two boys who took him out, but occasionally I'd see one of the girls out with them. I don't know how many children the family had, though my dad thinks that there is more than one family living in the house. That's possible, because there always seems to be a lot of people coming and going, I can't keep track of who lives there and who is just visiting.

When Buddy started out in the backyard he looked fully grown. Buddy's people built a small shed for him against the side fence, out of old sheets of plywood. Since there were no trees or overhangs in the backyard, that was his only shelter. I didn't see the children out walking him as often anymore, and it was rare anyone would be in the backyard. Buddy started out whining, with the occasional bark, as he stood at the sliding glass door to the house. But with less and less attention, the barking increased. Occasionally, someone would come to the door and yell at him to shut up, but as soon as they went back into the house, Buddy would start barking again.

Buddy was allowed inside at night and during the winter months, which probably confused him; he couldn't come in at other times. The family, or families, who lived in the house, had Buddy for almost three

years, and most of the neighbours stopped noticing the barking. It only came up when visitors were around and asked whose dog was barking. “Oh, that’s just Buddy.”

When more than a week went by and there had been no noise from the backyard behind our house, I wondered about Buddy. I asked around; the family had moved out. The bank had foreclosed on their mortgage, and they had to leave. The next day, walking past their house on my way to school, I noticed the yellow sheet of paper posted on the front door. I couldn’t read what it said from the street, but I assumed it was the bank that put it there.

Once everyone in the neighbourhood knew, speculation ran rampant: what would be done with the house. The bank would have to sell it, and if the asking price was low; it would bring down the value of the houses around it. When the house went on the market; a full two months after the foreclosure; the listing price *was* low in comparison to other houses in the neighbourhood. On the day of the open house, we went to look at it.

Buddy’s people had not looked after the house. They had trampled dirt into the carpet, and the vinyl sheet floor in the kitchen and bathrooms was peeling. The tiles in the main bathroom were chipped and there were mouse droppings in an open cupboard in the kitchen. The bedrooms were in decent shape, except for the windows, which were builder originals, and would need to be changed throughout the house. The exterior cladding was holding up, but the roof shingles were lifting and the next owner would need to replace them. Buddy’s people had neglected the front and back yards for years; most of the grass was dead, except where it was growing up between the cracks in the concrete pathway around the side of the house.

In the backyard, there was a patch of dirt by the fence next to the house, where Buddy’s dog house used to sit.



Map of Pickering GO Station

GO STORIES

In Pickering, the quickest and easiest way to get to Toronto without the hassle of driving and parking is to take the GO train. For years I travelled this way to visit friends, go to restaurants and museums and on co-op work terms, to get to work. Being in an enclosed space with that many people for at least forty minutes a day, you are witness to a lot of behaviour.

I do not catch the early train anymore, but on occasion, I used to. I would walk all the way to the end of the platform to get a seat at the front of the train. But if I didn't get there early enough I would have to get on somewhere in the middle. One time, I only made it halfway to the front and I had to get on the Happy Car.

The doors of the handicapped accessible car opened, and the noise hit me: laughter, horse play, high jinks, and the lighting in the car is dimmed. Everyone is talking at once, and there are bursts of outrageous laughter.

As more passengers get on the train behind me, there is a hush, while the Happy People check out the new arrivals. I look around for the waiter; I can swear that I hear the clinking of glasses and the popping of champagne bubbles. It is a bit uncomfortable. I don't see anyone that I know. The Happy People call out to the passengers they recognize and look expectantly at the ones they don't. The doors close and the party picks up again. People are flirting. They are making dates. It's like an episode of "Commuters Gone Wild." But no one is drunk.

The conductor is in the center of the pack, and those closest hover around him. They are all standing, and mingling, moving about the car. I am still half asleep on my way to work and not very happy about it, and I'm surrounded by all these Happy People. I want some of whatever they are on.

The newcomers all keep their eyes down. If you make eye contact with anyone, they will start talking to you, ask your life story, or ask you out for drinks. Once I've found a safe corner, they are entertaining to watch, like some new undiscovered species. I don't know how it is possible to be so happy while going to work. I haven't slept well, I haven't eaten yet, and I would prefer to be sitting. But neither I, nor any of the other outsiders, dare to push through the throng to get to the empty seats that are covered by the coats and bags belonging to the Happy People.

A small clutch of non-Happy People are surrounded by the Happy People, and are slowly being picked off. One by one we succumb and start talking to them, some get right into it and others refuse to be Happy and manage to get by with monosyllabic answers and the occasional polite smile. Most people learn to avoid that car.¹

I get annoyed by simple things on a train. Like tapping feet, or clicking pens. The guy next to me last week was breathing too loudly. And not just loudly, heavily. So that whenever he breathed out, the rush of air would move my hair. It was all I could do not to smack him.²

There are people on the rush hour trains to get home who get up out of their seats before their stop. If it's an all-stops train, they usually get up as the train pulls out of the station before their stop, so that they are the first ones standing at the door when it opens at the next station. If it's an express train, it is not unusual to see people get up two or three stations before their stop to go stand in the line of people at the door waiting to get off. When the doors open, they all rush out onto the platform and hurry to their cars. Many of them do this in a funny half-run, where they are moving too fast to be walking but are still a little too awkward and slow to be running flat out. Besides, it's not polite or professional to run in a parking lot. The lucky few who got to their cars first, and were parked to exit quickly will miss the gridlock that is a train of people in individual cars attempting to exit a parking lot in one lane of traffic. Others will wait up to half an hour in a line that doesn't move quickly; there is an unspoken rule that every car must let one other in at each intersection in the parking

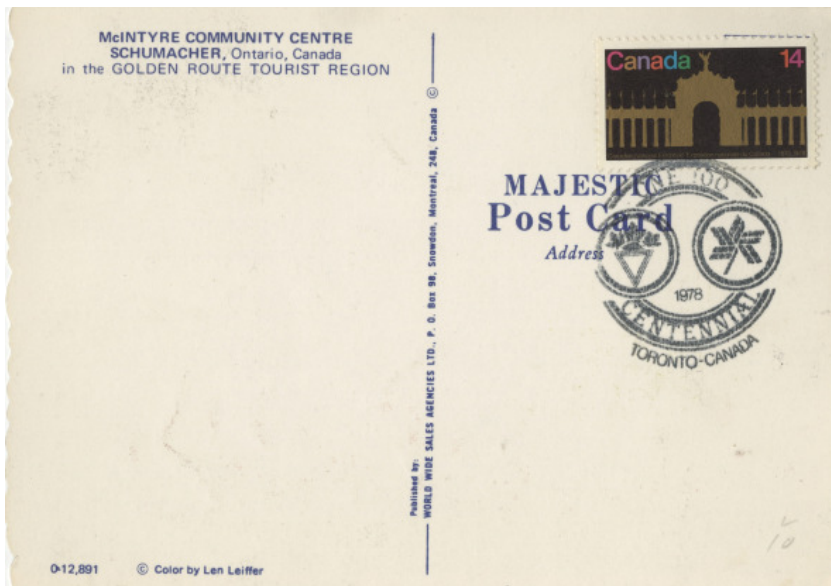
lot. Those who remained in their seats until the train stopped at their station and walked calmly to their cars obviously have the patience of saints.

Commuting home one night on the Lakeshore East GO train, the man sitting across the aisle from me was dozing. His head was down on his chest, occasionally snapping up as the train rocked from side to side, keeping him just on the edge of a deep sleep. He was sitting in an aisle seat and I know from experience that it's really hard to sleep there; your head just doesn't want to stay propped on the headrest. Suddenly his whole body jerked in one of those "startle reflex" actions, launching him off of his seat so that he landed on his bottom in the centre of the aisle. He made a brief apology to the crowd – who were staring or hiding their smiles behind books and newspapers – and resumed his seat, careful not to drift off again.³

It's Wednesday, around lunchtime, on the westbound Lakeshore GO train. I'm in an empty car, sitting in one of the end sections halfway between the upper and lower seating areas. A young man, maybe early twenties, came through the access doors from another car, and went down the steps to the lower level. A few minutes later, I heard someone singing an operatic aria. I got up and glanced down the stairs to see who it was. It was the guy who passed me a minute ago. He was standing in the middle of the empty aisle, with his back to me, singing his heart out. I went back to my seat to enjoy the performance.⁴



McINTYRE COMMUNITY CENTRE ... SCHUMACHER, Ont.



PLAZA BAR

Tinted windows in dark brown brick, surrounded on three sides by fading grey asphalt. Maroon carpet that matches the papered walls behind the dark wood paneled chair rail. Two pool tables against the far wall, a small bar to the right, near the back. No booths. Square tables sit against the wall, running from the door to the bar. Round tables between the wall and the bar-height counter that bisects the room. At the front, near the windows is a linoleum floor, for nightly dancing.

This pub is an afterthought. Shoved to the end of the plaza, for years there was no reason to even walk past it unless it was your destination. With the addition of another strip of shops and fast food outlets perpendicular to the original mall, there is more traffic walking by, but inside the bar remains, for the most part, unchanged.

I have lived within a five-minute walk of this bar in the plaza for my entire life. As a child, it was the place only grownups were allowed to go. As a teenager, it was the place we avoided walking past, because of the groups of men smoking on the sidewalk outside, and the smell from the dumpsters around the corner. In the summer, the stink could follow you three stores away. When I was finally old enough to legally go out to a bar, I didn't even consider going for a pint at the plaza. That just wasn't done. I made the trek, with a group of friends, to Toronto and The Docks, staying overnight in a hotel to avoid the need for a designated driver. For the couple of alcoholic drinks we managed to consume and the short amount of time we spent dancing, after finally working up the (liquid) courage to join the revellers on the floor, we could have saved the price of the hotel and parking, and just walked to the pub at the plaza. At the time, that wasn't even an option on our radar. It was a place where men our fathers'

age hung out. We wouldn't have been caught dead there. Looking at the occupants now, at three o'clock on a Friday afternoon, we were right, estimating the average age of the patrons. Five men drink beer at the bar and watch a golf tournament on the big flat screens arranged around the room. They are all over forty, pushing fifty. But they're not at all intimidating.

There are now seven men and a woman in the bar; a few of them look like regulars, chatting with each other and the bartender like old friends. One man waves to the waitress as she comes out of the kitchen and gives her a wink. She just laughs and says, "In your dreams Carl." Two new arrivals look like they have just arrived from the golf course; they order pints at the bar and head in the direction of the men playing pool.

None of the tables are used by the current patrons, who prefer to sit at one of the counters or the bar. This could be because it is still too early to order food, or because a table is an intimate setting and these men resist intimacy.



Map of Altona Forest

WILEY COYOTE

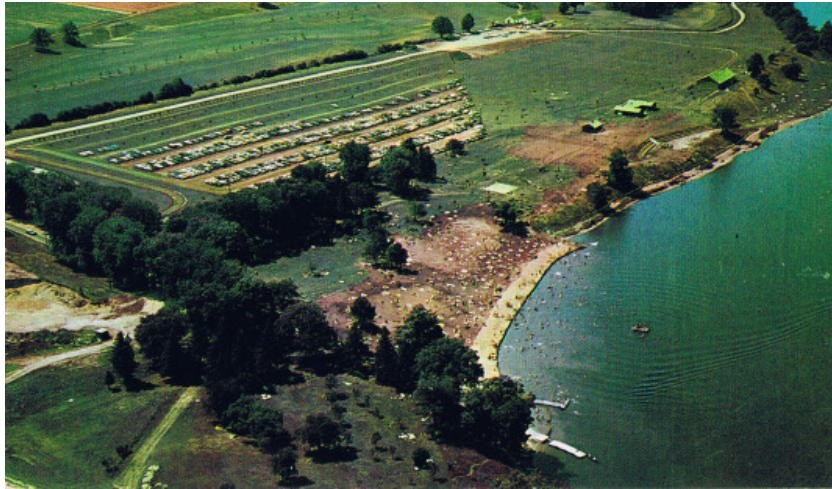
When we moved into our second house in Pickering, just south of Finch Avenue, Altona Forest reached to the eastern edge of Rosebank Road. As a family, we used to hike in those woods. We would take our dog, slightly smaller than a housecat, and walk a big loop from Finch, south to Strouds Lane. Mickey, our Poodle-Chihuahua, loved it. So did my sister, who would pick up rocks and flowers and point out birds and bugs. I wasn't all that interested in nature, and was reaching the stage when it wasn't cool to be seen out with your parents; I managed to find excuses not to go.

Since 1972, the landowners of Altona Forest have been selling their properties to development corporations like Bramalea Limited, but it wasn't until the early 'nineties that the city approved a subdivision in the forest. Since then, a thousand homes and two elementary schools have been built in the former woodland.⁶ They are mostly on the eastern edge of the forest, snaking off of Rosebank Road, but one street runs all the way through to Altona Road on the western edge.

What's left of Altona Forest backs onto the school yards, a chain link fence marking the boundary. Wooden fences stand along the tree line, separating nature from backyards. On the other side of the forest sits one of the newest Pickering developments. Flanked by the hydro corridor to the north, and the Rouge Valley to the south and west, it is crowded with detached and semi-detached homes on twenty and thirty foot lots.

The Rouge Valley and Altona Forest are home to over 300 varieties of wildlife, including deer, beavers and coyotes.⁷ Though the forests have been pushed back, wildlife sightings in the residential neighbourhoods bordering them are not unusual.

On Monday night, around ten o'clock, a woman was out walking her two Pomeranians along Pine Grove Avenue, one street over from the Rouge River ravine, when a coyote came up behind her, snatched the smaller of the two dogs, and ran off with it into the forest. My family now lives off of Strouds Lane, just east of Rosebank Road. My parents own a Shih-Poo, a dog which is only slightly larger than a Pomeranian. The police are warning pet owners in the area to walk their dogs on leashes and keep cats inside the house.



FANSHAWE LAKE
London, Ontario, Canada
London's newest playground, a short drive north-east of London, completed in 1953 for flood control and water supply at a cost of \$5,000,000. Picnicking, swimming, boating, fishing, camping and golfing are enjoyed around a 640 acre lake.

P30595

Published by Victor Aziz, London, Ontario, Canada

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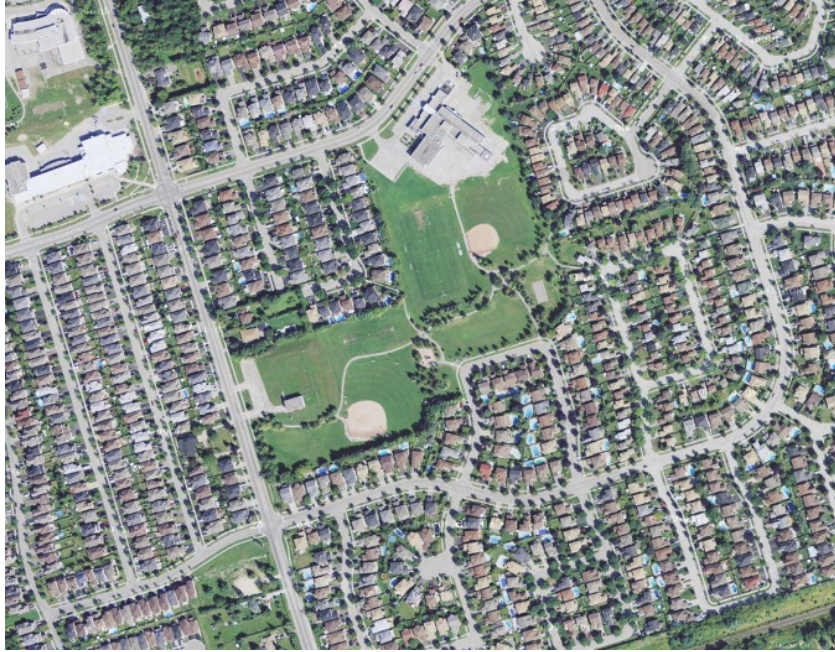
AMBERLEA PARK

Welcome to the city of Amberlea Park. At the intersection of two paths, you can see it from the crest of the hill, nestled among the trees, halfway into the valley. The people of Amberlea Park are small, maybe half the size of a typical adult, and they live to play make believe. Their games involve all parts of their city, and all inhabitants, local and foreign. A ladder leads to a pirate captain's lookout, and a rope bridge is a perilous crossing of a sea of lava to save a princess trapped by a troll who lives in the tunnel on the other side.

Upon arrival, visitors to Amberlea Park are inserted into the make-believe world. They become travelling princes or wandering gypsies with dragons to slay and fortunes to tell. Not all of the inhabitants occupy the same make-believe world all the time. Sometimes an escape from the police will, in the next instant, become a fall down into a cavern and a mysterious new world. A warrior swinging over a battle to reach the evil king will be followed by a troupe of monkeys searching for food to take home for supper.

This is the daylight city of Amberlea Park, full of laughter and energy.

At night, the inhabitants are taller, larger and more sombre. They don't swing, slide or climb; they simply sit in the shadows and speak of movies, sports and the tragedies of their lives. Almost always when the night inhabitants are present, there is a sweet, pungent smell coming from the mouth of the tunnel or from under the wooden platform. These inhabitants dress to blend in with their dark city, and they do not welcome visitors. If you happen to come across Amberlea Park at night, you might hear the murmur of voices or smell the cloying scent of their smoke, but these citizens will not acknowledge you if you continue on your way. If



Map of Amberlea Park

you choose to engage them, no good will come of it. You will be insulted and threatened until you back down and leave them to their shadowy home. They are not a violent people, but they value their privacy and they will protect it with any means available.

Come morning, the daylight inhabitants are back, running and laughing and as welcoming as they were the day before. If there is, in the sand, evidence of the night dwellers, that evidence is trampled under the feet of elves and elephants, and forgotten.



AERIAL VIEW OF GENERAL MOTORS' SOUTH PLANT
Oshawa, Ontario, Canada

Distributed by Hayden Macdonald (Oshawa) Ltd., Oshawa, Ont., Canada



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NICK

Nick was our next door neighbour for the six years we lived on Foxwood Trail. Our houses were similar in size and style: a two storey box with windows and a single storey peaked box with a large door stuck in front. All the houses on the street followed more-or-less the same pattern. Our neighbours across the street had a large evergreen tree in their front yard that had somehow escaped the bulldozers when the subdivision was built, and the house beside them had a huge granite boulder on their lawn. Our house had no distinguishing characteristics until my father built the wooden deck to act as a front porch a few years after we moved in. He had already built one in the backyard for practice.

Nick loved to socialize. He was just a friendly guy, big and burly with dark hair, a full beard and moustache. His voice would carry all the way to the end of the street. There were always people at Nick's house, sitting around in the garage, looking out for the kids playing on the driveway and sidewalk, working on one of the trucks that belonged to his haulage business, or just stopping by to chat. Any gathering with Nick was sure to involve a few beers, maybe a drink or three.

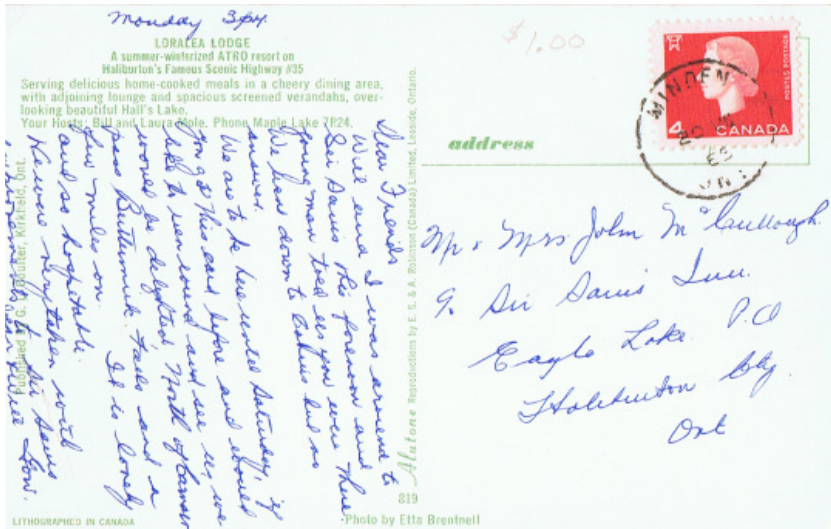
Nick and his wife had a daughter, three years younger than I was. Every year, my sister and I were invited to her birthday party. One year it was on a sunny Saturday in May. We dressed up in our best party dresses, and carried the brightly-wrapped present next door. Since all the children were still so young, (ages ranged from two to six) parents were also invited. Our mothers gathered on the main floor, in the kitchen and living room while we played with the birthday girl's toys and ate cake. The fathers were invited down to the basement with Nick.

The party lasted three hours, plenty of time for children that young. At the end, we all got a grab bag and headed home with our mothers.

My mom took my sister and I next door where we waited about an hour for my dad before ordering pizza for dinner. We were watching a Disney movie on TV when he got home later that evening. I don't remember him getting home; I was too absorbed in the wonderful world of Sleeping Beauty to notice. From a re-telling years later, I learned that my father had stumbled in the door, mumbled something about not having anything to mix with before making his way up the stairs, using his hands for balance. We didn't see him again until Sunday afternoon. My mother thought the situation was funny because it was so unlike my father to get that inebriated. But apparently one of the other mothers on the street never spoke to Nick again, after he sent her husband home in a similar state.

When we moved out of that house, we sold it to a retired couple whose children had moved away. We still had friends on the street we got together with regularly. On one occasion, our old neighbour from across the street – the one with the granite boulder in the front yard – told us about Nick and the man who had bought our house. He had been invited over to Nick's house one evening to help with a woodworking project, and stayed later than he planned. Nick helped him home around eleven that night, and according to his wife's account, Nick got her husband onto the front porch – the deck that my father had built – rang the doorbell, and left.

Foxwood has changed since I lived there. It now extends around and west past Rosebank, two more subdivisions beyond mine. If you look on Google Map, you can see that about thirty percent of the original houses have additions built onto the backs. I don't keep in touch with anyone who still lives on the street, most of the people I knew have moved on. The colours on the houses have changed, so have the cars in the driveways. But that big granite boulder still sits in front of the house across the street, and my father's deck still stands in front of the house we lived in. As far as I know, Nick still lives next door.



K E V I N

Kevin lives in a two storey, five bedroom house with his mother, father, older sister and his dog, Bailey, a Labradoodle. If you look closely, the house is not exactly the same as the others on the street, though the only difference between it and the one on the corner is the colour Kevin's parents chose to paint the garage door. That, and the big maple tree that the inhabitants of the corner house planted when they moved in fourteen years ago. Kevin's family moved into their house when he was seven, and his sister was eight. They both attend the public elementary school that can be seen from the end of the street, two blocks away.

From the time the moving truck pulled away from the grey brick house, everyone within earshot knew Kevin's name. It wasn't that he was social, or a friendly child who couldn't resist talking to anyone and everyone he saw; it was that, no matter what he was doing, he couldn't seem to stay out of trouble. Every time his parents came out of the house after carrying in a box or a piece of furniture, they would shout Kevin's name, tell him to stop doing something, tell him to help his sister or tell him to stay out of the way.

That same year I got my driver's licence and finally was allowed to drive my mother's car. One day, I opened the garage door, and then went back into the house to get my purse. Which I couldn't find. Ten minutes later I was back in the garage. The driver's side door and the passenger door behind it were standing open. The box of Kleenex in the backseat was empty, tissues scattered on the cushion and the garage floor. The CDs that we stored in the armrest between the driver and passenger seats were on the seat and dash, opened but not out of the plastic. I panicked. Someone

had stolen something, or was lurking in the garage behind one of the cars. As I went back into the house to get my father, I heard Kevin's mother shout his name.

Over the course of the summer, Kevin's presence was noted in many small ways. I found golf balls on the lawn when I cut the grass, and Nerf balls in the garden. Mrs. Cater across the street found a skipping rope tied around one of her rosebushes, and our next door neighbour found a baseball in the backyard. The ball had to have come from the street; none of the neighbours behind had children. And if that was the case, whoever threw it had missed our living room bay window by three feet.



Shouldice Hospital

The new 88-bed Shouldice Hospital is located one mile north of Metropolitan Toronto on Bayview Avenue. Residence-like in design, the hospital has carpeted floors and a central operating room suite with five operating rooms.

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Shouldice Hospital North elevation Printed in Canada

BEATERS AND GYM SHORTS

There are sixteen houses on the court. They are all two storeys, with two car garages, on fifty foot lots. To create an aesthetically pleasing and uniform facade, the garage doors are all painted a few shades lighter or darker than the brick. The DeLucas live in the fifth house on the north side of the court, right before the street opens into the circle. Their garage has two doors with a brick clad divider between them. The drive and walkway up to the front door are paved with interlocking stones that were installed by Mr. DeLuca two summers ago. Well, not by him personally, he's been on disability for the last six years. A work-related back injury. He supervised while a few of his friends and relatives laid the stones.

Mrs. DeLuca goes to work every day. She must have atypical hours; she is hardly ever seen coming or going from the house. When she is seen, it is usually while chauffeuring her teenage children to or from a sports game or another after school activity. And once a week, almost always on a Saturday morning, she goes grocery shopping.

The DeLuca children, Matty and Caroline, are in their early teens, and attend the local high school. They walk to and from school with their respective friends. Never together. When they were younger, they played with the other children who lived on the street, in large group games that would occupy the space in the centre of the court. There weren't enough children their age to break off into cliques.

In the summer there are always kids playing in the court – riding bicycles, or scooters, playing street hockey or basketball. Most days Mr. DeLuca can also be seen out on the court, talking to neighbours, or hanging out with his buddies in the garage. His uniform on these days is typically a white sleeveless undershirt and black gym shorts. Last weekend he and three other middle-aged men from the neighbourhood sat in white

plastic lawn chairs in the shade of the garage drinking Canadians from cans stored in a cooler beside Mr. DeLuca's seat. Every twenty minutes or so, his voice could be heard shouting over the others as he argued a point or shouted at his son who was performing tricks on a skateboard off of a homemade plywood ramp in the middle of the court. Mrs. DeLuca and Caroline were absent that day.

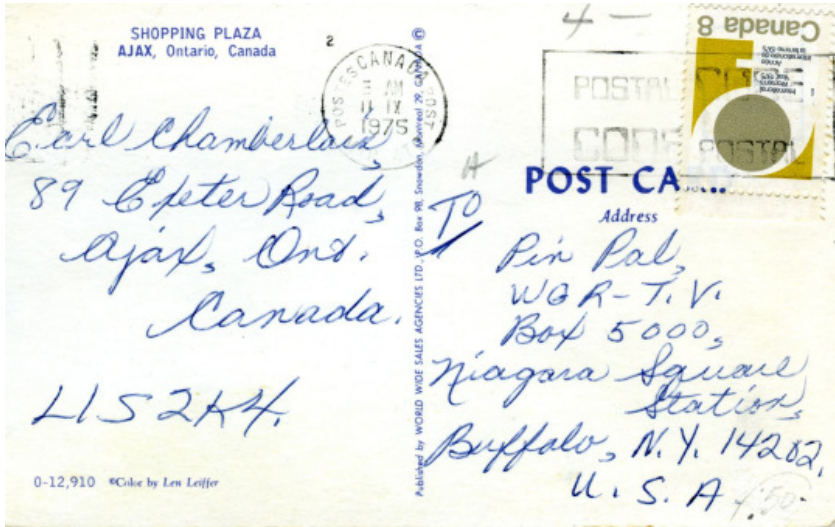
The house in the centre of the court belongs to a man in his early sixties, with a wife and three grown children. He retired from his job with Ontario Hydro last year, and since then, has made it his business to know everything that happens on the street. He is the head of the Neighbourhood Watch, and takes his job a little too seriously, at least according to some of his neighbours.

It was from him that I first heard about *The Incident*, of last Saturday night. At around four-thirty in the morning the police had been called to the DeLuca's home for a domestic disturbance. Despite the late hour, there was shouting and lights on all over the house. A police cruiser had entered the court with lights flashing, but no siren.

After the police arrived, the entire episode lasted less than twenty minutes. The cruiser sat outside the house with red and blue lights reflecting in the windows of the houses on either side of the DeLucas. When officers finally emerged from the house, Mrs. DeLuca followed them carrying a bag over her shoulder. They watched while she got into her car – a domestic, dark grey Sport Utility Vehicle – before they got back into their car and cut the lights. The cruiser stayed parked in front of the house for another two hours after she left. My Neighbourhood Watch informant believed that they were waiting to see if she was going to return. Apparently Mrs. DeLuca was the one accused of abusing her husband. The police were there to evict her from the house. It sounded as if he had been the victim of verbal and physical abuse for years, until something happened and he finally reported it. I asked about Matty and Caroline, but they were not at home that night.

The DeLucas are getting divorced. They've both moved out of the house, and a For Sale sign appeared this afternoon. Occasionally Mr. or Mrs.

DeLuca will be seen at the house, usually carrying boxes or bags of belongings to their respective cars. Once, Mr. DeLuca was seen talking to two of his neighbours in front of the garage. Dressed in his sleeveless white undershirt and black gym shorts.



LIVERPOOL AND FINCH

The Maple Ridge Shopping Centre is eight houses north of the intersection where the Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall rests on a slight rise above the sidewalk. The 'strip mall' is home to some of the typical suburban amenities: a pizza parlour, tanning salon, dry cleaners, a variety store and a barber shop. The Pizza Shack is right beside the Custom Cutz barber shop, so anyone ordering or picking up a pizza has to walk right by the shop's entrance. Usually, it looks deserted; the blinds are always pulled down, blocking any view of the interior.

Most days, a group of young men can be found loitering in front of the shop. They lean against the dull brown brick or stand around in the parking space directly opposite the entrance. These young men are probably in their late teens or early twenties, many of them smoke, and cigarette butts litter the ground around them. They wear big jackets and baggy jeans. One has a Toronto Blue Jays ball cap on, turned slightly to the side, while the others all sport the black and white NYY.

From inside the pizza parlour, it is possible to watch them joke around with each other and text on their cell phones. Once in a while, a car pulls into the space in front of the barber shop. A silver Explorer is pulling out now, and one of the men in the Yankees caps is walking back to the curb. No one got in to or out of the SUV.

A row of houses back onto the plaza's parking lot: two-storey detached homes with brick cladding on the ground floor and horizontal siding above. These houses have shallow back yards with a run-down wooden fence that runs the width of the plaza's parking lot and the service road. The brown paint on the fence is peeling. If the homes were built before the plaza, would the developer have had to disclose the fact that the adjacent land was to be commercial? It's possible that the buyers were able to



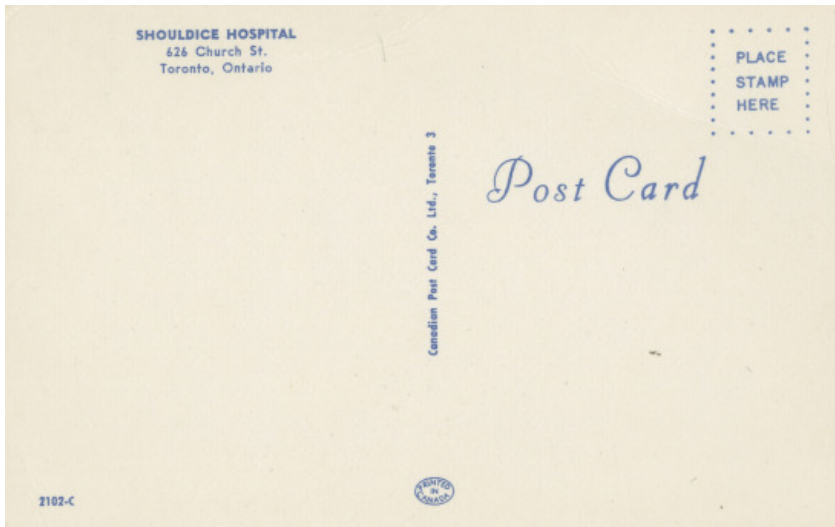
Map of Liverpool Road and Finch Avenue

purchase the homes for a lower price than one block over, all because of the noise, the fumes and the garbage that the residents would have to eventually endure.

Another car is parked in front of the barber shop now: a new black Malibu with a baby-on-board sign in the back window. The driver doesn't get out of the car, but waits as the man in the Jays cap approaches his window. Their conversation is brief. The driver of the car reaches out and shakes the other man's hand before he starts his car and the man in the ball cap turns away to rejoin his companions on the walkway. The Malibu is gone. The parking space is empty. A woman gets out of a sports car three spaces away and goes into the tanning salon. Judging by the tone of her skin, she is a regular customer. There are shouts from the opposite end of the plaza, near the convenience store. The local public school just around the corner has let out and students arrive for their afternoon snacks. Two boys split off from the crowd and head for the group of guys still lingering at the end of the building. They're laughing and showing off for the girls watching from behind. As they near the end of the walkway, they grow quiet. By the time they reach the door of the Pizza Shack, they are completely silent as they hustle inside, all the while glancing furtively at the group of smokers.

The brown-painted vertical aluminum siding above the shop signs no longer makes the strip of stores look uniform and structured, but grim and out-dated. The rock bed in front of the two centre stores only serves to highlight the fact that there are no trees or flower beds.

From the street, driving by on the way to work, or the gym, or the grocery store, no one would ever notice the cars that pull in and out of the lot without anyone entering a store. It is not evident to passing motorists who live two blocks down or one block over, that the plaza containing their dentist's office and dry cleaners is also the site of daily drug deals. Perhaps the houses backing onto the parking lot put up with too much.



C H E C K M A T E

The garage door was painted like a checkerboard, black and white squares alternating across and down the face of the door. The white squares had thin black lines snaking through them, to make them look like blocks of marble. The family that lives in the house do not socialize with the other people on the street. They come and go regularly, and have parties where the street becomes congested, with cars parked against the curbs on both sides. Their children, if they had any, have grown up and moved away.

The garage wasn't always painted like a checkerboard. Up until a few years ago, it was a bright cherry red. The brick on the house is a rust-brown colour; the checkerboard made it stand out on the street.

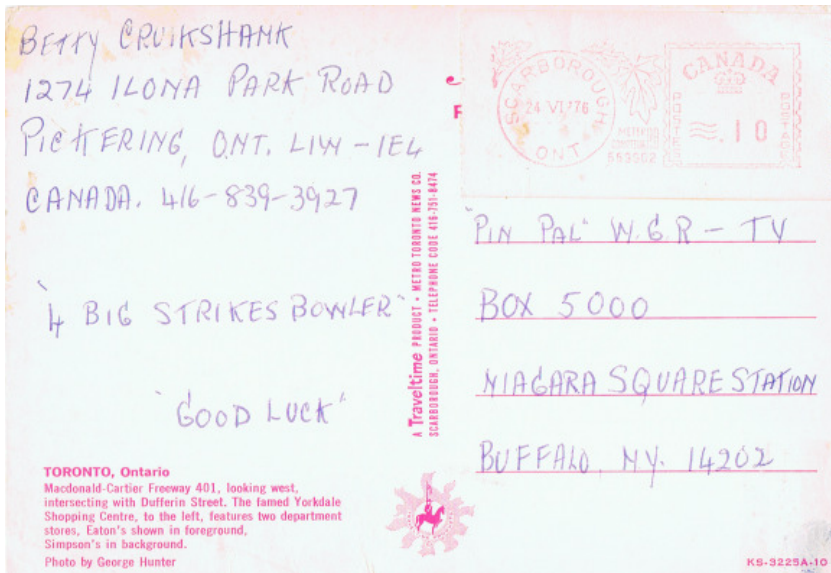
There is another house, three doors away from the checkerboard that stands out because of its colour. Everything is painted mauve. The garage door, the front door, the window trim, even the rain gutters are painted mauve. And for those of you who do not know, mauve is a very pale shade of purple, sometimes called lilac, or mallow. On a house with yellow bricks, this colour does not contrast in a good way.

According to *Style at Home* magazine, the colour of a garage door, rather than stand out, should complement the home and blend in with the overall structure. A colour close to that of the brick or siding is recommended. For contrast, choose a shade that will blend in with the mortar or window trim. Neither of these homes conformed to the rules. One stood out like a sore thumb, and the other clashed.

The neighbours of both houses spoke to each other about the travesty of these colour choices, and the terrible shame associated with them, by proximity. When the houses sold, and new residents moved in, they

changed the colours. The black and white checkerboard became a neutral chestnut brown, and the mauve was gradually replaced, by changing all of the windows, and gutters, and painting the doors and trim.

The neighbours made a point of expressing their delight. The houses had devalued the entire block. There should be laws about the colours that can be painted on a house in a neighbourhood like this. Did you hear about the house on Eramosa where they painted their garage turquoise, with rose trim?



VEHICLE DEPENDENCE

When is it reasonable to drive, when is it reasonable to walk? It all depends on where you are. In a metropolitan city, a few blocks, or a half hour's walk, might be completely reasonable walking distance. In the suburbs that distance shrinks considerably, until you have to ask, where would I walk to?

Take Pickering as an example.

Would it be reasonable to walk to the mall if you lived in the Amberlea neighbourhoods? Probably not. It's possible; you could do it in about an hour, but most of that time would be spent walking along the side of a highway, two lanes in each direction, a seventy kilometre per hour speed limit and no sidewalks. Most people drive to the mall.

What about the coffee shop? Tim Horton's or Second Cup. It would take around half an hour to walk to either of them, something a city dweller would think nothing of. But what if it rains, or you're in a hurry. You don't have half an hour to spend walking there and another half hour walking back. It's better to drive to the coffee shop, go through the drive-thru lane, and continue on your way.

What about the grocery store? Most people, even in the suburbs, live within fifteen minute's walk to a grocery store. But, going to the grocery store, one expects to pick up groceries, and we usually need to get enough at one time to last at least a week, making the bags many and quite heavy, especially if you happen to purchase a case of pop or cat litter. It's just easier to take the car.

How about Church? Whether or not you attend regularly, it's right there, across the street from the grocery store; you pass it every time you got to work, the mall or the coffee shop. If you were going to church, would you walk? It would take ten minutes or less, and you could use the time

to contemplate your faith, or lack thereof. But very few people walk to church, even when the weather is fine. It could be because church usually involves dressing up, and fancy shoes are not comfortable to walk in. Or it could be embarrassment: seen walking through the neighbourhood wearing your Sunday best, people would know that you were going to church.

How about your friends' house? They live just down the street and around the corner, or through the pathway and on the other side of the court. But you're going to watch movies and hang out with people that you haven't seen in a long time, the evening might end really late and you don't want to walk home alone in the dark, even if it would only take five minutes. So you drive.

Or the mailbox? Most subdivisions in Pickering built after 1990 don't have door-to-door mail delivery, but a box, one of a rank of boxes, located centrally to a couple of streets, where everyone's mail is delivered into cubby lockers, like an apartment building. It's very convenient, just at the end of the street. It would take less than five minutes to walk there and back. The reason you don't walk to the mailbox is simple. You pick up your mail on your way home or on your way out in the car. If there was one time when it was raining, and you had a cold already, so you stayed home from work, but really needed to see if your insurance cheque had come in the mail, and you drove the eighty-five meters to the mailbox and back, no one needs to know about that. It was a onetime thing. Under normal circumstances, of course you would have walked.



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 To get there, travel highway #21 between Kincardine and Port Elgin and follow the signs marked "Visitors Centre"

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Photo of Bruce "A" Nuclear Generating Station, Looking South.

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Photo Credit: TOM BOCHSLER

HYDRO FIELD

For nine years, starting when I was eight years old, I played in the recreational softball leagues in my hometown of Pickering, Ontario. The younger leagues start playing on dirt or gravel diamonds with three pieces of fencing erected directly behind home plate. These diamonds were usually located in community parks, named after people whose contributions to the neighbourhood were long forgotten. The fence was too small to keep foul balls in the boundaries of the playing field, and since there were no bleachers for spectators to sit on, parents brought aluminum and plastic folding chairs, and crowded together behind home plate.

As I got older and moved up in the levels, the parks that we played at changed. The rough dirt and gravel became soft red sliding dirt; the chain link backstop behind the plate became dugouts with fencing running all the way out and around centre field. The “look out!” zone, where parents had been too wary to sit was filled with aluminum stadium benches, and field lights came on automatically when it got dark. These larger, improved diamonds were usually attached to a school playground in a middle-class suburb. There were signs screwed into the dugout posts that prohibited superfluous yelling.

When I was fifteen or sixteen, in the last league level before adult leagues started, we were assigned to play at Hydro Field. This was not the field beside the looming power line towers that characterize North Pickering; this park was located next to the Pickering Nuclear Power Plant, off of Sandy Beach Road. It was so close that the parking lot for the ball diamond was actually one of the Power Plant’s employee parking lots, not required in the evenings. The sign for the building whose parking lot we appropriated two evenings per week read: Ontario Power

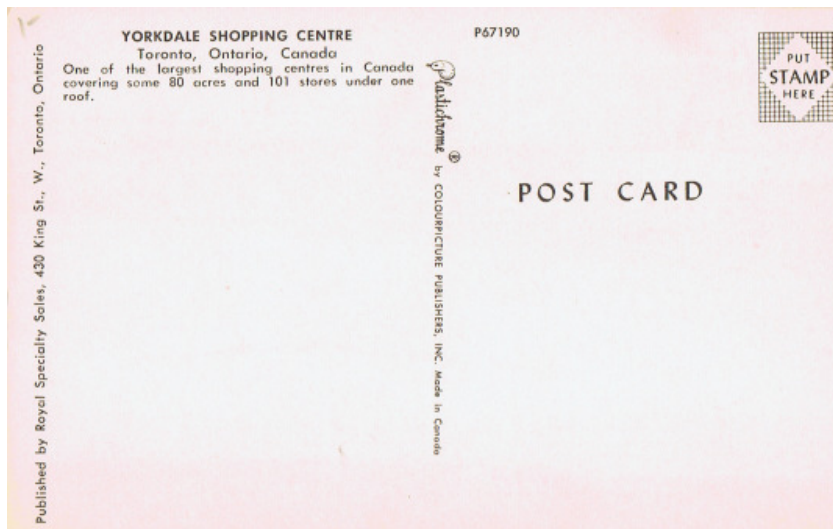


Map of Hydro Field

Generation Pickering Learning Centre. It stood at the entrance to the lot and was the first of many signs we passed going from the car to the field. The brown signs with stark white lettering telling everyone that smoking was not permitted were the most common. They were stuck on every side of the building and posted at intervals on the light posts and fencing. Besides the usual handicapped parking signs, this building also had, directly in front of the entrance doors, two spaces were allotted for "Medical approved parking only." About fifty feet past the dugout on the right field side, was one of those green boxes, like the ones that sit next to the street in residential neighbourhoods, except this one was attached to a large tower with wires coming out of the top. It was fenced off with warning signs posted on each side: "Danger Hazardous Voltage."

One night, at the bottom of the fourth inning, we were up by two runs, and I was in the on-deck circle. Suddenly a siren filled the air, with a horn blasting every two seconds or so. For a moment no one moved. All we could hear was the shriek of the siren. The grey miniature poodle had stopped barking at the younger siblings of the players, and the younger siblings no longer ran amongst the trees at the edge of the parking lot. All heads turned in the direction of the Nuclear Plant, but when no sign of the apocalypse appeared, the umpire shouted "PLAY BALL!" and the game resumed.

My turn at bat, I hit a double out into left centre field that scored another run, and by the time the fifth inning began, we were up by four and the siren had stopped howling.



CHRISTMAS LIGHTS

It starts after Halloween. There's no specific moment. It's a gradual building throughout the month of November, and then *Wham!* Its full-blown presence hits on December first: Christmas lights, on houses, around windows, wrapping around trees, and lining driveways; blow-up Santas and snowmen frolic on front lawns and on roofs; Rudolph leads the other eight reindeer across neighbourhoods, and candy canes and cedar wreaths adorn doors and windows.

On some streets it's a matter of pride: every house puts up lights so that the entire row of houses gleam in the darkness, like a runway leading everyone home. But most streets have a few dark houses, either because the occupants don't celebrate Christmas, they go away for the holiday, or they simply can't be bothered to participate in the tradition.

The most common decorations are lights lining the eave of the roof. They run across garages and up peaks and around dormers. Others surround doorways and windows, enhancing the geometry of house and making it shine. Some houses use chains of lights that hang down in vertical strings from the roof line, like icicles.

When manufacturers introduced the new LED lights, it was easy to tell which houses had embraced the new technology. The colours were more subdued than the traditional incandescent bulbs, darker and just a little cold. The biggest difference was with the whites. Incandescent whites shone with a clear warm glow, while the LEDs were an icy blue. In the last couple of years, the manufacturers of LED Christmas lights have managed to adjust the colour so that it is closer to the cosy, more inviting incandescent white. Along with energy savings, this redesign has made them much more popular.

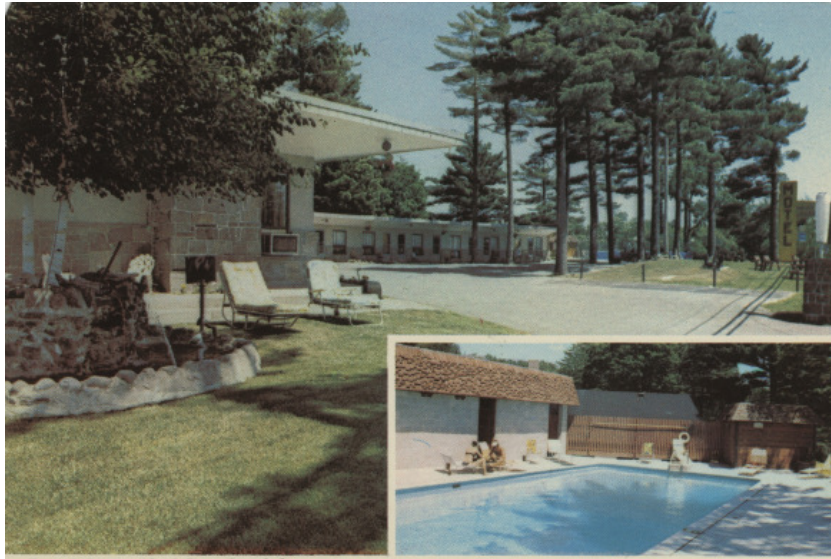
In every neighbourhood, just like there are dark houses, there are a

few homes that take decorating with lights to the extreme. These houses don't just put lights on the eave of the roof or on a couple of trees. In some cases every corner, every edge of a house, will be outlined in lights, showcasing the elevation lines at night. The roof ridge can be an anchor for cords of lights to run down to the rain gutter, and chimneys can be wrapped in red and white strings like a peppermint stick.

There is one house in a subdivision just north of the 401 highway that puts on a spectacular light display every Christmas. The owners have covered every edge and opening with strings of lights in different colours, not multi-coloured strings, but different colours for each area. The eaves are lined in green, the corners in red, and the windows in white. The three trees are covered in blue, purple, and yellow lights respectively. The tree nearest to the street is the one planted by the city. It's a Norway Maple and bare of leaves for the winter. Yellow lights wrap around the trunk, starting just below the pile of snow on the curb and extending to all of the branches capable of holding them. It is a glowing column, with arms reaching into the sky.

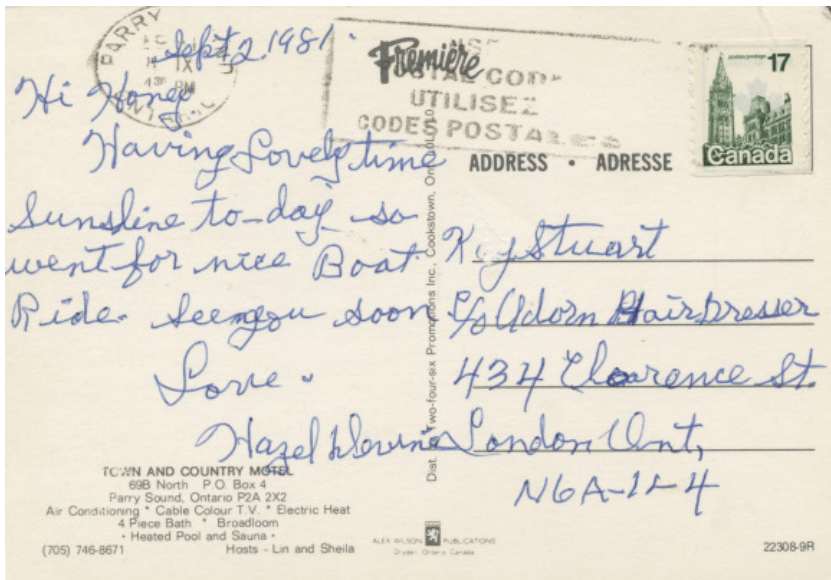
The driveway is lined on both sides with LED-lit, plastic candy canes, and stars shine from the centre of each street-facing window. A Santa figure – lit up from inside – occupies the roof, along with his sleigh and nine reindeer. Rudolph stands right at the edge of the roof, red nose gleaming, ready for flight. On the lawn below, illuminated elves are scattered about, with glowing boxes topped with brightly lit up ribbons. Some elves seem to be placing them under trees, while others are creating an elf-ladder up to the roof, stretching to return a package to Santa's sleigh. If that was not enough, there was one more lawn ornament: the six-foot tall illuminated snowman, wearing a black top hat and holding a broom. He appeared in mid-November and will stay in residence until the first spring thaw.

There is a television show on in December called *Invasion of the Christmas Lights*. It showcases homeowners who go to extreme lengths decorating their houses for Christmas. Some of them incorporate moving characters, flashing lights, and music. Most end up with hydro bills for the month of December, in the tens of thousands of dollars.



Town & Country Motel, Parry Sound, Ont.

Photo: Hal Whaley



ATTACK ON THE LAWN

Eight years ago, the biggest problem on our street was the crabgrass. It had spread to our little court via the adjacent street, the one that runs off a secondary arterial road, one of the dividers between neighbourhoods and subdivisions. The two corner houses were the first to notice it. I guess it had spread the previous summer, and only when spring came around again was it evident. We noticed an increase in lawn maintenance trucks on the street that year, as everyone frantically tried to stop the growth and spread of this lawn-disfiguring plague.

That same summer, I worked at a golf course north of Markham, doing course maintenance. I got to be outside all day, and the people I worked with were a lot of fun. I also learned about different species' of grass, the different heights they are cut to for different purposes, and how to control the spread of crabgrass.

While herbicides are the best way to kill crabgrass, they are not all that environmentally friendly, and what you really need to do is discourage it from growing in the first place. Since crabgrass is a warm-season grass, unlike our cool-season bluegrass lawns, the first frost in the fall will kill the crabgrass. It is not gone – as it has already seeded – but this is the time to fertilize, so that only the bluegrass will reap the benefits. At the same time, fill any bare spots with new seeds. Mowing grass at a higher height – two and a half to three inches tall – will reinforce the bluegrass, and deprive any crabgrass seeds of the sunlight they need to grow.

It was two summers before we got rid of the most obvious patches of crabgrass in our front yard. A few blades still pop up every now and then, but they are no longer noticeable.

Everything done to lawns in suburbia, from pesticides, aeration, cutting, and watering, is done to keep them looking green and well-

groomed. Homeowners spend thousands of dollars a year watering, trimming and planting, trying to make the front of their house look better than their neighbour's. There is an ideal home in the suburbs, and any diversion from that ideal is seen as wrong, unkempt, a sign of neglect or laziness, or of non-conformity.

There was an article in the *Los Angeles Times* on March 2, 2010 about a couple who live in the city of Orange in California, who removed the sod from their property. They laid wood chips in its place, built a fence, and planted drought-resistant plants. They saved hundreds of dollars on their water bill and over two hundred thousand gallons of water in a year. The city prosecuted them for failing to meet the live ground cover requirements in their front yard. In a state that suffers, every year, from water shortages.



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Will find your letter when I get home. Great night in Sept. esp. Sadie's Memorial Service. Orillia. Love, Tom

June 1, 1976

Mrs. H. H. Salloway
 Okanada Blvd 13
 Saskatchewan
 Canada

STEPHEN LEACOCK MUSEUM
 Orillia, Ontario

The summer home and library of Stephen Leacock, located in Brewery Bay on Lake Couchiching, near Orillia, was converted into a museum in 1957. Known as "Canada's Mark Twain", Leacock became a world famous humorist, lecturer and author of 56 fascinating books. His greatest achievement is said to have been his interest in and devotion to his McGill University political science students; however, to the world he remains "The Man of Laughter".

BIG DOGS

St. John's Ambulance gave me my babysitting licence after I took their half-day course when I was thirteen. I don't remember what was taught, but I got a certificate out of it, and it made my parents more comfortable with me staying home alone with my younger sister. Soon after that, I got a regular job, staying with my neighbour's children every day after school. They were three and six years younger than I was, and I would wait for them after school so that we could all walk home together. I stayed with them at their house until one of their parents got home from work, and then I would go home.

My only other babysitting position was for friends of my parents, who lived one street over from ours. The Sullivans had four kids. Two each from their previous marriages. They also had two Newfoundland dogs, Ben and Rudy.

Sam was the oldest of their children and she was only three years younger than I was when Mrs. Sullivan asked me to stay with them the first time. Matt, Leah and Kelley were all younger and I guess they weren't yet ready to make Sam responsible for the other three. So I went over on the evenings when their parents went out, and we hung out, played games and watched movies. I would make them a snack and get them to go to bed by ten, or sometimes ten thirty.

The dogs were a little more difficult. They were both huge, about three feet tall and over a hundred pounds; at the time, they outweighed me. The kids fed the dogs, but after bedtime, it was up to me to let them out into the backyard. Fortunately for the dogs, the backyard was larger than most in the neighbourhood. The house was on a court, just to the left of the middle, giving the lot a pie shape that went back twice as far as the

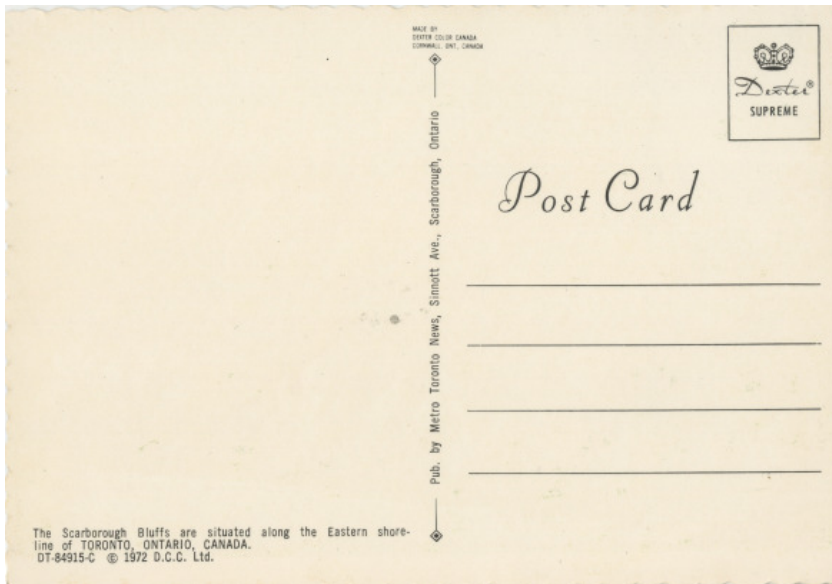
one next door. If the dogs had felt like running – they were actually quite lazy – they could have gone more than three strides before running into the fence.

There was a deck in the backyard, which you stepped out onto from the sliding glass door in the kitchen. The deck sprawled off to the left up two steps to the Jacuzzi tub, to the pool deck on the right, and straight down to the grass. The rest of the yard was empty except for a few tall pine trees that the builder hadn't cut down when the subdivision was built in the late 'eighties.

In the summer, Ben and Rudy mostly hung out in the basement of the house. It was the coolest area of the house. They could lie all day on the exposed concrete floors. In the winter they were more active. With their thick black fur coats, the cold didn't bother them at all, and they would run around in the snow together before coming back inside. I always tried to stand out of the way when they came in. First thing, they would shake off the melting snow and water, before going to lie down on their rug in the family room. There would be drops of water, globs of slushy snow, and strings of drool splattered all over the tile floor, the cabinets near the door, on the backs of the kitchen chairs and sometimes on the table and counter. I would wipe up.

When the Sullivans returned, usually around one in the morning, Mr. Sullivan would put the dogs' leashes on and the three of them would walk me home. I only lived a block away, so he would usually take the dogs home by a longer route for some exercise.

One Saturday in late May, I arrived at their house and Mr. Sullivan had a bandage on his elbow and a scrape on his chin. He told me that he had taken Ben and Rudy for a walk the day before, on his new roller blades. They saw a squirrel.



SUBWAY

If you can't drive, or don't want to, getting to Toronto from the suburbs involves public transit. A cab costs you eighty dollars, one way. In the face of that kind of cost, the fastest and simplest transportation is the GO Train.

On a sunny Friday morning in October, Clare, Davina and I decided to spend our Professional Activity Day shopping downtown. We arrived at the Pickering GO Station in time to see the 11:03am train pull away from the platform. The next train was an hour away, so we reviewed our options. After failing to find a westbound bus on any of the numbered posts in the lot, we learned from a ticket agent that the buses travelling to Scarborough Town Centre and the LRT only stop along Kingston Road. We would have to catch one of them in order to take the Light Rail system to the Kennedy subway stop.

The walk along the bridge over the 401 and the railway tracks was really windy. After reaching the stop in front of Mary Brown's Chicken and Tim Horton's, we waited ten minutes for the bus. By the time we pulled in at the mall and the LRT station, it was almost noon. No mention is made of the 12:03 train from Pickering.

After purchasing TTC tokens, we proceeded up the escalator to the track to board the train. The LRT has five stops before the train arrives at Kennedy station, where the subway runs west to Bloor-Yonge and then south on the Yonge line to Dundas and the Eaton Centre.

We followed the crowd down the first escalator and across an expanse of tiled floor to the subway entrance. We must go down again. The mass of people are taking the escalator and Davina and I continue with the flow, stepping onto the moving staircase. Clare chooses the less travelled stairs to the left of the escalator, assuming that they eventually arrive at the

same place, the platform. The two descents were separated by a plexiglass wall, so partway down we could all see that the stairs were descending farther and to a different place than the escalator. Clare had to return to the top of the stairs and come down the escalator behind.

When we reached the bottom, there was already a train waiting at the platform. Davina and I got on and stood by the door waiting for Clare to reach us. The PA system chimed the three note chord that indicates the doors will close momentarily. I stepped out of the car, back onto the platform to wait for Clare. Davina was stranded on the train when the doors closed. When Clare finally reached the platform, all we could do was wave to her as the subway left the station.

We assumed Davina would get off at the next stop and wait, so we were going to take the next train, until it pulled in on the opposite track. Not at all subway savvy, and a little unsettled to be separated from our friend, Clare and I didn't know if that train would go to the same place as the one that just left. We waited a few more minutes for another train to come in on that track before we boarded.

When we reached the next station, we got off the train, expecting Davina to be waiting on the platform for us. We were very confused and a little worried when she wasn't there. We stood on the concrete platform between the tracks as two more trains pulled in and out, one in each direction. Still no sign of Davina. That particular station was above ground level; we tried calling her cell phone, and got bumped straight to voicemail. We left a message and waited through two more trains. Clare and I were getting ready to go back to the first station when Davina finally got off of a train coming from the direction of Kennedy station.

When Davina got off at the second stop to wait for us and we didn't come on the very next train (the one that had pulled in on the opposite track, the one that we didn't take) she took the next eastbound train back to Kennedy. We probably passed each other in the tunnel. After that we waited at our respective stations, unwilling to go anywhere in case we missed each other. Finally, the stalemate was broken and we continued downtown to the Eaton Centre.

If we hadn't missed the GO train, or if the stairs had gone to the same place as the escalator, or if we had known that all trains leaving Kennedy station had to go west, then we might have made it to Toronto before three in the afternoon.



Map of Liverpool Road, Massey's Restaurant

DATE NIGHT

My first date, the first that could officially be called a date and not 'going out with a friend,' was on a Friday evening in May. My date and I attended the same high school, and we lived seven houses apart. He picked me up in his mother's white Grand Am at six-thirty. We were both a little nervous, and talked of things like the weather, (isn't it warm for early May?) and how the guidance councillor at school came in that day to talk to our co-operative education class.

There aren't many places to eat out in Pickering, unless you go to a chain like Swiss Chalet or East Side Mario's. There is usually a pub, a pizza parlour, or some other fast food eatery in any one of the neighbourhood strip malls, but independent restaurants are rare. Groups of chain eateries like Boston Pizza, McDonalds and Subway crowd into the Big Box parking lots and movie theatres. The only places that could be considered unique and close to fine dining are at the south end of Liverpool Road, overlooking Lake Ontario.

My date took me to one of those restaurants at the south end of Liverpool. Massey's it was called. While it wasn't right on the water, it was a nice place, and I had never eaten there before. We were seated on the upper level, about three feet higher than the main dining room, with a railing along the edge and a set of stairs at either end of the platform.

Once seated, with our menus, the conversation got easier. I ordered spaghetti and he chose lasagne. We discussed the upcoming carnival fundraiser at school. A fire alarm interrupted the bank of floor-to-ceiling windows. The flames leapt merrily, inside, even though the sun was still up and the flowers were blooming, outside.

It was a great first date. We walked along the marina at Frenchman's Bay

after dinner, with ice cream cones purchased from the truck playing 'It's a Small World' in the parking lot. The only thing I would have changed would have been my dinner order. Spaghetti is not a meal that can be eaten gracefully or entirely spot-free. Especially if you are wearing white.

“...the suburb presents what memoirist D.J. Waldie has termed ‘the anxiety of the grid’: the sense that the suburban subdivision lacks its own, self-contained sense of place identity and instead ‘opens outward without limits’ to a landscape composed of like grids. And yet, despite these alienating features of the suburban landscape, for the characters in the works I will examine – and, indeed, for ever increasing numbers of Americans – the suburb remains ‘home,’ the most important and profound of places, in Gaston Bachelard’s terms ‘our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.’”

- Beuka, Robert. *SuburbiaNation*. P.20

ENDNOTES

1. Suzanne Smith, interview by author, Toronto, ON, March 24, 2010.
2. Lexi Young, interview by author, Toronto, ON, March 21, 2010
3. David Black, interview by author, Toronto, ON, March 25, 2010
4. Holland Young, interview by author, Toronto, ON, March 21, 2010
5. St. Paul's on-the-Hill Anglican Church. "History of St. Paul's – A place of prayer since 1925," http://www.stpaulsonthehill.com/who_we_are_history.html (accessed March 18, 2010)
6. Noonan, Larry. *A Natural and Human History of Altona Forest*. 2008 <http://www.pada.ca/books/details/?id=2421> (accessed April 14, 2010)
7. Friends of the Rouge Watershed. "Ecology," <http://www.frw.ca/rouge.php?ID=103> (accessed April 14, 2010)

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