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From the Publisher

Publisher

Inspiration can originate from many diverse roots. For me, a lot of those roots lie in my upbringing. As a Lebanese Catholic born in Muslim Kuwait, I have always been able to appreciate the value of cultural diversity. In fact, during my youth I could have been a poster-child for it. My Mediterranean parents raised me as part of the Catholic Church, where I studied the Bible. This experience encouraged me to study other religious texts, such as the Quran and the Torah, and broaden my understanding of spirituality. Most of my childhood friends were Muslims and I spent the summers traveling to Lebanon, Greece, England and Turkey. I was submerged from an early age in cultures outside of my own, and have benefited quite a bit from it since.

Back when I was a youngster in Kuwait they showed a film every Saturday afternoon on television. Every other week they showed a big-number Bollywood movie, marketed to the large Indian population who lived and worked in the country. If you've read previous issues of *PinkPlayMags*, you probably know that I have a passion for cinema and those early Indian features were part of what ignited it. My taste for food was also impacted by diversity. Every culture has its own unique style of cooking and, happily, I have been exposed to my fair share of them. From spice-rich Indian curry to subtle and delicate Japanese sushi I remain a devoted disciple to the culinary arts. Fortunately for me, I live in a city with a broad range of ethnic restaurants to appease my appetite.

My life's journey led me to Toronto when my family immigrated to Canada 23 years ago. My father would prefer that I identify myself as Lebanese, and of course I will always keep a part of my culture with me. However, when it comes down to it, I am a true Canadian. This country is an unmatched mosaic of race, culture, faith, belief and sexual

orientation. Where else in the world can so many factions co-exist harmoniously, and work together for the benefit of the whole? I mean, sure, it's not a perfect system, but with such a wide variety of people, navigating Canadian life can get confusing and even frustrating. Having citizens with different backgrounds means having citizens with ideas and needs that sometimes conflict, but would I have it any other way? Hell no! That would be boring.

The age of technology has introduced the unprecedented unity of Globalization. I feel lucky to be a part of a place that embraces these relatively new connections with forward thinking. It has never been more important to move past the attitude of merely tolerating diversity towards accepting and embracing it. The marginalization of a people because they are different deprives them of the benefits and protection offered by society. However, it also deprives society of the things that those marginalized individuals could have contributed. As Virginia Woolf once said: "I thought how unpleasant it is to be locked out; and I thought how it is worse, perhaps, to be locked in."

I couldn't be more grateful for the freedoms that the Canadian attitude towards diversity have afforded me. The opportunities for cultures to co-exist in Canada, and the variety of life in Toronto are a big source of inspiration for me, and certainly in this issue. It seemed fitting to celebrate the many aspects of our country with "The Diversity Issue" of *summerplay!* 2011

Antoine Elhashem



summerplay!

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From the Editor

When I first moved to Toronto, I couldn't leave my small town of 500 fast enough. I'd already been accepted to college and come fall I was out of there and I was never looking back! I'd had enough of being in the closet and the endless bullying and ridicule for my forward thinking and independent ways. Toronto was everything I could have dreamed of and more.

I am white, male and middle class and while I share the queer feelings of my brothers and sisters from around the world, I can only imagine coming from a social setting where the slurs against me are a precursor to actual violence and death threats are a reality. Canada—Toronto in particular—has come a long way even in the two decades I have lived here and I'm proud of the open-mindedness and inclusivity of our city.

But as we face a new mayor and a surprising majority Conservative government, I'm reminded after reading Scott's article (Page 27) that we aren't perfect. We still have a ways to go for equality and inclusivity, even in our own community. However, community is the key here. Toronto has established itself as the most culturally diverse city in the world. With our legal right to marry whomever we love, we are also well known as a safe haven for queers seeking asylum and a place to live and love freely.

With so many global flavours to sample it's no wonder that our city is a foodie's paradise and Karen does us the pleasure of playing tour guide through some of Toronto's ethnic neighbourhoods, giving us a slice of the international that's but a \$3 ride away on the TTC (Page 12). Expanding on that idea, Melissa shares how food and family are intricately intertwined (Page 19) and whether you are with your family by blood, or the family you've created to support you in life, community starts with those you feel safe around and who love you no matter what.

Much debate has sprung up over the last handful of years around what's next for the Gaybourhood. Is it fading away? Becoming too commercial? Or do we have less need of it now that so much of the city is considered welcoming of queers holding hands and living their everyday lives? Most cities don't have a central spot where gay life is concentrated, where the shops and community centre are expressly our space, where we can completely let down our guard with no worry in the back of our minds of what others will think of us. You're going to call me crazy, but I think Rob Ford and Stephen Harper can teach us a valuable lesson: Never forget what we have so fiercely fought for and won. You only need to stand on the corner of Church and Wellesley to be reminded that this is one place in the big world out there—no matter who we love, no matter what colour our skin, no matter where we have come from—that we are free to be who we are. I'm proud of our city for that.

I'm also proud of our first annual Inspire Awards. I'm thrilled anytime I can be involved in something that supports and honours the people in our community—despite our varied differences—who never lose sight and who continue to work very hard to change the perceptions and prejudices we face around the world, starting in our own backyard. My gratitude runs deep that we live in a place where we are free to celebrate that.

Happy Pride!

Jeffrey Harrison



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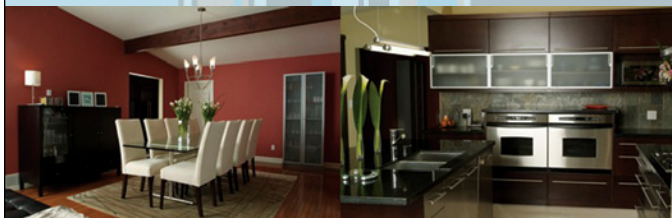


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LITTLE ADVENTURER

by Karen Fulcher

I moved to Toronto because the queer scene, so to speak, was limited in the northern Ontario town I migrated from. People told me that Toronto was a cold place to live and although it does have its big city challenges, it is actually many eclectic neighbourhoods cobbled together. These diverse communities are what make Toronto fabulous.

I remember my first visits to see my girlfriend before I moved here. The breeze from the streetcar windows and her arm around me, the sounds of languages I'd never heard before rolling with the swing of the car and the passengers, so many people in the streets. My heart swelled and nearly

burst with the thrill of holding my girl's hand and nobody giving it a sideways glance. I ate my first curry in Toronto and braved my first bento box here, too.

My girlfriend encouraged me to buy clothing from trendy little shops with Raver outfits swinging from the hangers and curtains for change rooms. She gently pulled my hand from experience to experience and while she was at work I tucked my ankles under me in an overstuffed chair in the corner of a café with a frothy latte on the table and I wrote about what I saw. Toronto thrilled me.

I've moved a number of times since arriving here and each time, I chose a different community to live in and learn about. I've also travelled the world somewhat since those first forays into the big city, but occasionally I feel that thrill, that tug of joy that you get when you are discovering something for the first time.

The following is my little adventurer's guide to eat, pray/play and love (to borrow the title from Elizabeth Gilbert's book) with a little list of ideas for dates, if you will, that might help you feel like a tourist again.

A WEST-END MORNING REFRESH IN LITTLE POLAND

Brought to Canada from Lodz, Poland in 1948, Granowska's is a bakery located at 175



The Diversity Issue

RES

INTORONTO

Roncesvalles Avenue (open 9am, closed Mondays). Go early. Pack a blanket in your bag and meet your sweetie on Granowksa's patio to soak up some morning sun with your choice of a savoury (perogies or a sandwich made with homemade bread and fresh deli cheese and meats) or sweet (European style baked treats) to start your day and wash it all down with an unpretentious cup of coffee.

If you are a bit of a coffee snob, head up the street to 333 Roncesvalles where you'll find Toronto's first fair trade coffee shop, Alternative Grounds, and grab one to go.

After filling your bellies and strolling along, turn along any one of the streets running parallel to Bloor and you will find one of three entrances off Parkside Drive into High Park. It is a mere three blocks away from Roncesvalles. Trees have an amazing effect of cooling the air a few degrees and I'm convinced it isn't just about the shade. The green infuses and oxygenates the air: a perfect rejuvenating plan.

Soak up the morning under the leafy canopies near the numerous waterways. The park is so big that other visitors rarely infringe upon your space (unless you have found yourself at an event). Find a spot on the grass and lay down with your love or friend, to read, nap, chat...

High Park was originally a sheep farm and was sold to the city with the stipulation that alcohol

never be sold there and that it be expressly used for the enjoyment of the people. Abide by the enjoyment and if you chose to bring a libation, be discreet.

Alternatively, eat a light breakfast (tip: the Polish fare in Roncesvalles may not be what you'll want before sitting in meditation) and wearing comfy clothing head over to the Toronto Zen Centre (www.torontozen.org) at 33 High Park Gardens located on the edge of the park. Register in advance to take the introductory workshop on Zen Buddhism offered throughout the summer or join a regular sitting on Sunday



mornings. You'll leave refreshed and calm, ready to top off your spiritual practice with a walk afterwards.

If Zen Buddhism (or early morning) isn't your thing and you prefer a quiet evening,

Toronto's Shambhala Centre offers a more accessible

Buddhism. Shambhala

Buddhism is meant for us Westerners

who aren't likely to submit to a monk's

life of abstinence and worship but

for those who want to learn how

to live consciously in our side of the

world. On Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, you

can sit in meditation with a group and participate in a talk if you choose. Toronto's Shambhala Centre is located just minutes east of Christie subway station at 670 Bloor Street West, Suite 300.

The main meditation room's floor is polished and wooden, and

red *zabutons* (flat square pillows) and *zafu* (thicker,

smaller stuffed pillows) are arranged in rows facing the main shrine.

The shrine is framed with pictures of *Rinpoches*,

(master teachers) and incense, candles, silk and art. The

room is a colourful feast and Shambhala

meditation is done with the

eyes open and with

a soft focus. There is something wonderfully intimate about sitting side by side in meditation.

After the hour long sitting (which goes surprisingly fast!) you get to meet the others you've shared that quiet space with. Tea and snacks are served in the next room and you can leave a monetary contribution to the sitting, if it is within your means to do so.

AN EAST END AFTERNOON SPICE AND DELIGHT DATE IN LITTLE INDIA

My first neighbourhood was Leslieville (also known as Lezzie-ville because it has a high concentration of dual-income female homeowners). Leslieville is in the east end of Toronto and claims Little India which, I recently discovered, is now called Gerrard India Bazaar (www.gerrardindiabazaar.com), the area along the street of the same name from Greenwood to Coxwell.

You can easily escape Pride revelers by hopping on the College streetcar going east. Or on the July 16th weekend celebrate The TD Festival of South Asia—or Eid—at the end of August (the festival that marks the end of Muslim fasting of Ramadan) and in October—Diwali (the Hindu and Sikh festival of light).

Plan to wander for at least a few hours. Check out the little grocers with bins full of imported fruit and veggies, spices, and other shops that specialize in kitchen utensils, pots and pans interspersed with deity paintings, incense burners and tiffin lunch pails (stackable stainless steel takeout containers). Amble past window displays featuring model manikins draped in silk sari with decorative bindis and jewels. And once you've worked up an appetite, which isn't hard to do as you smell the spices and barbeques, it's time to choose a place to nosh with your friend.

No matter on which subcontinent's food



(Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Afghan and Sri Lankan) you want to sample, you'll find delicious offerings here—just bring a healthy appetite. Bar-Be-Que Hut located at 1455 Gerrard St. East is the first place I was brought to, so I recommend you try it. Inside, after the hot afternoon sun, it's dark and cozy. The furniture is kitschy without trying to be, the bathrooms questionable, but the staff are friendly and welcoming and the food is delicious. If you'd rather be out in the sunshine, pick one of the numerous restaurants with patios and get a little adventurous with the menus. Chose something you've never tried before!

A walk along Gerrard at dusk is especially enjoyable in the summer. Colourful lights twinkle in the breeze, Bollywood music dances over you and your date, incense wafts from the ornate silk sari shops, smoke puffs out from corn roasting on barbeques and to cool you down you can opt for a frozen kulfi treat (an Indian/Pakistani ice cream on a stick offered in flavours like rose, cardamon, mango and more) for dessert and join the crowds as they stroll arm in arm along the street.

A CENTRAL KIND OF DAY WITH CANADA'S FIRST NATIONS

The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto at 16 Spadina Road (www.ncct.on.ca) is located in the middle of the Annex neighbourhood. Check out the events page for a large selection of workshops, classes and ceremonies that offer opportunities to meet members of the community.

Aboriginal History Month is all of June and there will be a celebration at Dundas Square on Tuesday, June 21 from 10 am to 9 pm featuring performer Crystal Shawanda, Elders' teaching tent, Inuit throat singers, Metis fiddlers, Indigenous martial arts demo, hand drum singing (you can participate!), storytelling, arts and crafts. After this you will want to try the first Aboriginal restaurant in



Toronto that, at the time of writing, forecasted opening in May. The restaurant is called Keriwa Café (keriwacafe.ca) and located at 1690 Queen West. I'm looking forward to trying the menu!

A TIME TO SING IN LITTLE KOREA

Traditionally, karaoke is not hosted in a public bar with a dimly lit crowd of strangers listening. Typically, you rent a private room with an intimate group of friends to belt out and perform for each other into the wee hours of the morning. Beginning at Christie Station on Bloor and extending almost to Bathurst Street, Koreatown offers this non-embarrassing and bonding version. You'll find the best karaoke bars open late, late, late.

Start with dinner at one of the many restaurants in the neighbourhood. Most have pictures of the menu items stuck to the entrances so you can window shop before settling on a place that looks appetizing.





As
for
suggestions,
my favourite
Korean dish
is Bibimbap: fresh

julienned veggies arranged in colourful little hills on top of sticky white rice and beneath a sunny-side-up egg served in a hot stone bowl. It is also one of the few dishes that can be made vegetarian. Mix in a little Gochujang (hot sauce) and let the rice get crispy on the bottom of the bowl—a nice crunch to finish your dish. Pair it with a thirst-quenching beer or iced tea.

After dinner, take a walk along Bloor and find a Korean bakery. I recommend you pick up walnut cakes for dessert. These little desserts are shaped like walnuts and filled with a choice of flavours. Bring your bags of snacks to the karaoke room and drink and sing the night away!

SET THE NIGHT ON FIRE IN GREEKTOWN

The east end, along Danforth Avenue from Chester Station to Jones Avenue is called Greektown. Here you have your choice of restaurants that cater to any budget and most offer the especially dramatic flaming cheese called *saganaki*. This salty goodness is set afire with Tsipouri or Ouzo to the chant “OPA!” before extinguished and placed before you with bread. Yes, it’s completely



decadent so plan your meal accordingly. Top it off with a walk along the Danforth and a visit to Athens Pastries at 509 Danforth Avenue for a traditional treat of honey soaked, fried dough balls (get your mind of the gutter!) or custard cradled in flakey pastry. Balance the sweetness with a strong cup of espresso that will inspire you and your date to search out a place to dance off the richness of dinner.

IN MY CURRENT ‘HOOD—LITTLE PORTUGAL

If you like meat...the eating kind...the Portuguese restaurant, Bairrada Churrasqueira (www.bairrada.ca) at 1000 College Street is a boisterous and family-style experience to be had. Gather a group of friends and sit at a patio picnic table set on clay tile, under the ceiling of trees. The fire pit is roasting up a storm. There are grilled meats, seafood and fish on the menu and don’t forget to order some cold and crisp Vinho Verde wine to balance the salty delicacies you might choose to eat.

MOODY DRINKS WITH WEST-END HIPSTERS?

There are a few such locations in Toronto—and I know—hipsters have a bad reputation for making places so ironic they aren’t enjoyable, but The Henhouse at 1532 Dundas Street West is the place to go for a good stiff drink, some

80s rock on the juke box and a good splash of eye candy. After all, it’s owned by members of The Organ, a band featured in The L-word, so what can go wrong?

Begin the evening there and head over to one of the many

queer-run and/or friendly joints in the west end like The Wrongbar (1279 Queen Street West, www.wrongbar.com), The Beaver (1192 Queen Street West, www.beavertoronto.ca), or The Gladstone (1214 Queen Street West, www.gladstonehotel.com), which hosts Granny Boots—early evening queer-themed events on Wednesday night.

Culturally, they are ours and we do our own part creating this mosaic of difference that makes Toronto such a great town to live in.

LAZY SUMMER PATIO DAYZ ON INTERNATIONAL BALDWIN

Rounding out your options for adventures, jump on your bicycles and if you don't have one, grab one of the new Bixi bikes (toronto.bixi.com), only \$5 for a whole day. Tour through Kensington Market and make sure you stop at Orbital Arts (275 Augusta Avenue, www.orbitalarts.ca), a fabulous little art shop that refashions and recycles to create ethereal pieces with lotuses and Madonna divinities! Of course, there are so many great little places to explore in Kensington, but I'm staying with my theme of cultural adventures.

After that, head over to Baldwin Street—one of my favourite streets in Toronto. It is flanked from Beverly to McCaul with no less than 10 restaurants most with patios. The street travels under an archway of trees, you can hear the birds and the soft roll of conversation on the varied terraces and the selection boasts of Italian, French, Malaysian, Chinese, Indian, Middle Eastern, Japanese, Vegetarian (I know, not a culture), Mexican, Korean and Thai restaurants.

In keeping with your theme for the day (are you wearing French cufflinks, or Italian leather shoes?) I suggest you select a place that compliments bicycling and art.

The French restaurant Bodega, at 30 Baldwin Street, is best if you make a reservation. When you arrive, tuck into a chair at a table draped with a starched white tablecloth or choose the elegant plant-lined patio to share a meal at. The menu is full of gastronomic treats and you'll find it a perfect little romantic date place, albeit a little pricy depending on your budget (mains range from \$19 and up).

If you are feeling more "amore," then John's Restaurant, or Bocca, steps away are the places to eat. Both have fabulous patios so you will have the outdoor café experience.

Baldwin is the perfect example of what makes Toronto, Toronto—a beautiful mosaic of different people, places and cultures. I've barely scratched the surface, but I hope I've inspired a tourist view of our town. You don't have to leave to discover your favourite international getaway right here in your own backyard!

You can find Karen Fulcher touring around in the summer on her bicycle, hanging out on patios and on a perpetual quest for the perfect brunch spot – perhaps for another article?

Photography by Carly Blackwood



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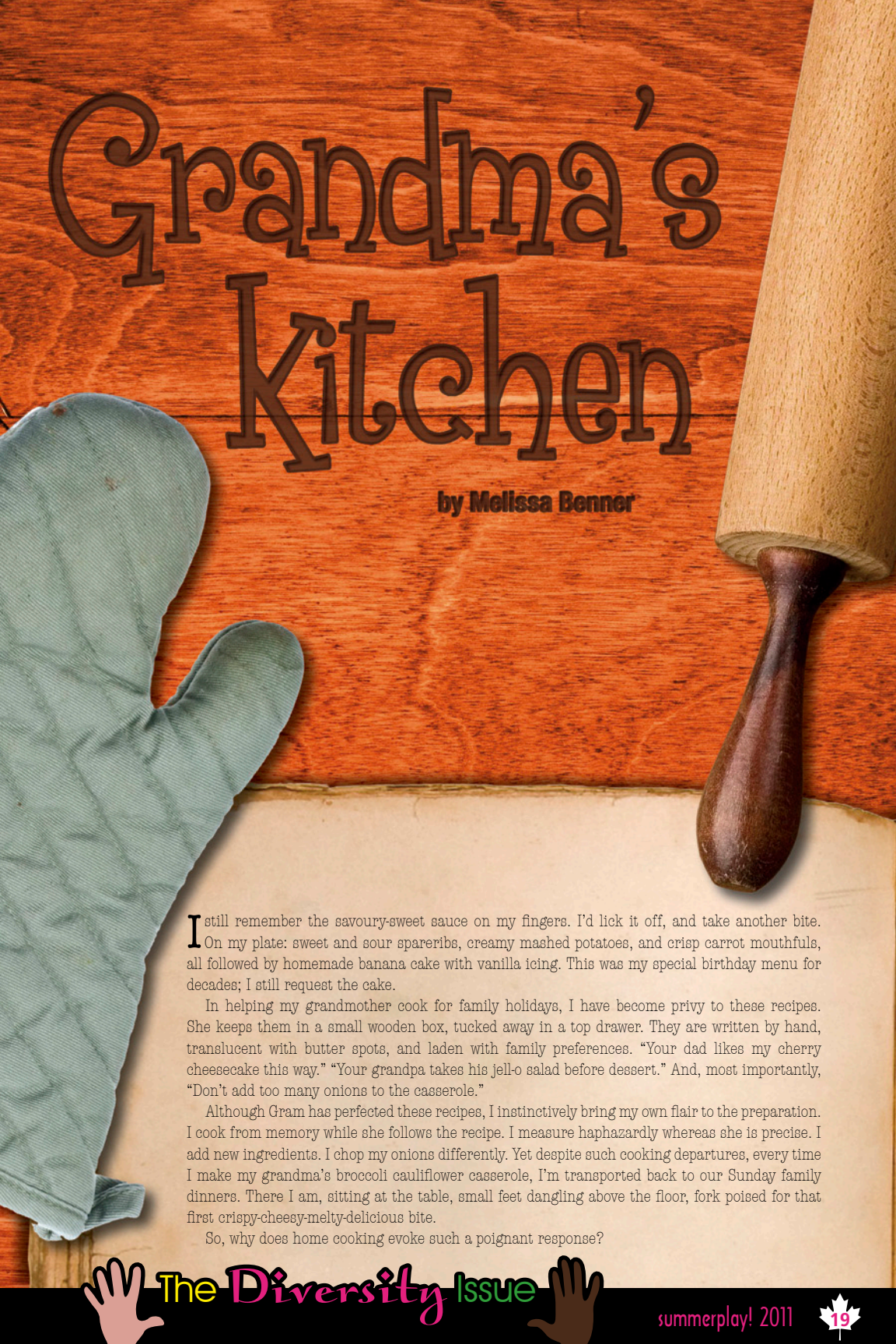
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Grandma's Kitchen

by Melissa Benner



I still remember the savoury-sweet sauce on my fingers. I'd lick it off, and take another bite. On my plate: sweet and sour spareribs, creamy mashed potatoes, and crisp carrot mouthfuls, all followed by homemade banana cake with vanilla icing. This was my special birthday menu for decades; I still request the cake.

In helping my grandmother cook for family holidays, I have become privy to these recipes. She keeps them in a small wooden box, tucked away in a top drawer. They are written by hand, translucent with butter spots, and laden with family preferences. "Your dad likes my cherry cheesecake this way." "Your grandpa takes his jell-o salad before dessert." And, most importantly, "Don't add too many onions to the casserole."

Although Gram has perfected these recipes, I instinctively bring my own flair to the preparation. I cook from memory while she follows the recipe. I measure haphazardly whereas she is precise. I add new ingredients. I chop my onions differently. Yet despite such cooking departures, every time I make my grandma's broccoli cauliflower casserole, I'm transported back to our Sunday family dinners. There I am, sitting at the table, small feet dangling above the floor, fork poised for that first crispy-cheesy-melty-delicious bite.

So, why does home cooking evoke such a poignant response?

For one, food is connected to the intimate and memory-rich senses of scent and taste. Seeing old photos or hearing childhood music can be powerful—but the nostalgic smell of home cooking goes straight to the heart. There are terms in the culinary world to help explain this subtle alchemy. In agricultural production, *terroir*, as coined by the French, refers to how soil and climate give distinctive flavours to food grown in a region. Originally used to describe differences in wine grapes and coffee beans, the term pays homage to land—*terre*—and heritage.

A chef's signature dish is the cooking side of the equation. The 'signature' refers to the singular layers of taste, preparation and presentation in a dish. It marks the career of a chef and can be equated to an artist finding their style, or an author finding their voice.

Home cooking has similar depths. Certain recipes invoke memories of places and the people who made them, mapping out a unique version of family history. The following three stories tell of this connection between family and food. Celebrating rich memories, heritage, and culture, these delicious musings speak for themselves.

Mataji's Dahl

"At my grandparent's house, they kept the water in a huge clay calabash on a stand as high as me. The water was cool and tasted of earth. I don't know if it was because of that water's earthy scent, but my Mataji made the most delicious dahl."

As we sit in Nidhi Tandon's Toronto home, she reminisces. "As a young child, I went to my grandparents often, and developed a love for Indian cooking. Spinach and potatoes, cauliflower ghoji, paratha: all these foods have poignant memories for me."

Located in a small town in Northern Uganda, the courtyard of her grandparent's house was the cooking epicentre, with vats of oil to fry Indian sweets, and regular gatherings for family feasts. Nidhi and her cousins would help husk rice and prepare lentils, and then eat the finished product with their hands, sitting on the hard ground of the courtyard.

When Nidhi was 8 years old, Ugandan politics forever changed her family food traditions. A military coup led by Idi Amin Dada seized control of the country, and forced many Ugandans of Indian origin to flee. Nidhi's grandparents and extended family took refuge in England, while her parents

moved to Tanzania.

"My mom did make dahl sometimes, because my dad loved it," Nidhi recalls, "but it was Chinese dahl, not Indian dahl. She didn't use ghee [clarified butter], which is the core of Indian cooking, and was minimalist with ingredients because she was born during the war. Her dahl was good—but something was missing."

Now, Nidhi recreates the dahl from her childhood: a rich stew that uses plenty of ghee, flavourful onions, and ample cumin. She makes large quantities at a time, and brings her own signature to the dish through experimenting with a range of fresh ingredients.

"For me, cooking is very fulfilling. Dahl is both comfort food and a hosting dish. Subconsciously, I carry the message that my grandma used to cook for a whole group of us, which comes out in my own cooking."

Because of her experiences, Nidhi sees food as a "powerful and profound medium" for sharing culture and a meal amongst friends.



Yellow Lentil Dahl

Preparation & Ingredients

- chop 1 generous onion—big and chunky, or fine and small—depending on how you prefer
- chop a few cloves of garlic; add some slivers of ginger if you want that flavour
- fresh tomatoes a must—two to five—depending on how tomatoey you want the dahl
- an absolute must is fresh coriander, chopped finely, again depending on your taste, a little or a lot

Other options include:

- vegetables you might have in the fridge that could go into a stew: red peppers, carrots, parsnips; remember that each veg has its particular flavour and will impart this to the dahl
- a couple of small Thai chillies always good for added zip
- something to bring a 'sour' element could be a squeeze of lemon, lime, or plain yoghurt (which brings in a creamier texture), or a dash of vinegar

Recipe

1. Boil three cups of lentils. My favourite are split yellow lentils. You can choose to soak it overnight or not; boil till lentils are part cooked.

2. In another pot heat a tablespoon of ghee or clarified butter, throw in a generous teaspoon of cumin seeds with the onion, garlic and ginger, and bring to a simmer until onions soften.

3. Add tomatoes and spices: salt, pepper, chilli powder, curry powder, cloves if you like, saffron, haldi.

4. Add your par-boiled lentils with three cups of water; bring to boil and simmer until dahl is soft. You may have to add water and add spices (as above) to taste, which is the joy of making a soup.

5. Coriander goes in last, as well as lemon or yoghurt just before serving.

Quick tip: You can cheat and cook the dahl with one of the Patak curry sauces too

Carole's Mom & Dad's Lasagne

Arriving to market in a fully stocked 'Bus Kitchen', complete with stainless steel countertops, Carole Ferrari can be found serving delectable vegetarian fare made from local and organic ingredients.

She comes by this vocation naturally. "My parents are both chefs. They met in my father's restaurant in South Africa, and fell in love. My mother was actually on a date at the time!" Carole explains with a laugh.

The family moved from South Africa to Monaco, living above their restaurant. After a short return to South Africa, and then America, they finally settled in Canada, bringing their culinary talents with them. And all before Carole turned 10 years old.

Cooking remained a constant throughout the

many moves. Some of Carole's earliest memories are about the everyday ritual of kitchen prep. "The restaurant kitchen was my playroom. I would be given a chair to reach the counter to roll meatballs. I peeled a lot of garlic. As I grew older, I washed parsley and basil and took the leaves off the stems. Then I started chopping, and so on."

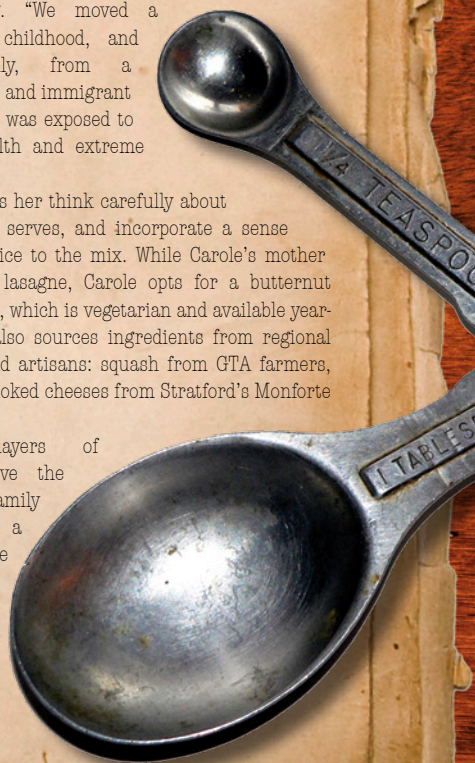
When asked to pick her favourite recipe, Carole chose one that honours the influence of both parents, while being a signature dish of her own: butternut squash lasagne. Or, in Carole's words: "Orange, crispy, golden, soft, warm, melty, sweet and smoky, roasted" lasagne.

The recipe originated in Bologna, Italy, the birthplace of Carole's father. However, she learned to make the dish from her mother. "We'd talk, and I'd pass her a measuring cup or get her the cheese from the fridge. This kind of learning is natural when you grow up in a restaurant because it's in the context of daily life." She refers to this knowledge as 'body memory', which helps explain how certain tastes and cooking rituals become so deeply engrained.

Despite honouring what she's learned, Carole admits that politics influence her cooking. "We moved a lot in my childhood, and unintentionally, from a working class and immigrant perspective, I was exposed to extreme wealth and extreme poverty."

This makes her think carefully about the food she serves, and incorporate a sense of social justice to the mix. While Carole's mother serves meat lasagne, Carole opts for a butternut squash filling, which is vegetarian and available year-round. She also sources ingredients from regional producers and artisans: squash from GTA farmers, and lovely smoked cheeses from Stratford's Monforte Dairy.

These layers of influence give the Ferrari family lasagne a distinctive twist, still reminiscent of home-style Italian cooking.





Butternut Squash Lasagne

Makes one large tray, 12 to 15 servings

Butternut Squash Filling:

- 1-2 large butternut squash, cubed (the more you have of this the better, as it can be used for other things later.)
- 3 onions, roughly chopped
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup
- salt and pepper

Béchamel:

- 1 litre milk or soy milk or almond milk
- 3 tablespoons of butter or olive oil or vegan butter
- 3 tablespoons of flour
- 1 whole nutmeg ground fresh
- freshly ground pepper
- salt to taste

Cheese:

- 1/2 lb of applewood smoked cheddar (or less as it's quite expensive), grated
- 1 lb of mozzarella, grated
- 1 lb of another kind of cheese: cheddar, monteray jack, or more mozzarella, grated. You can add a little grated parmesan cheese to this if you like, or 2 boxes of silken tofu mixed with 1 teaspoon smoked paprika and 5 tablespoons of nutritional yeast. This is vegan cheese replacement.
- 2 boxes of lasagne noodles, prepared according to the package, or use no-cook lasagne noodles. If you are boiling them, be sure to salt the pasta water. The water should taste salty like the sea. Wash the noodles with

cold water when finished boiling to stop the cooking process.

Order of Cooking:

Prep and cook your squash mixture first. Once the squash mixture is on, if you are cooking the lasagne noodles, put the water on to boil next and cook the pasta. Do the béchamel last.

To Make the Butternut Squash Filling:

1. In a large pot with a fitted lid put all the ingredients for the squash filling except for the maple syrup. Cook on high heat until everything is sizzling. Stir often with a wooden spoon so that nothing burns at the bottom of the pot. This should take about 5 minutes.

2. When the ingredients start caramelizing, turn the heat to medium low (closer to medium heat than low heat), cover with the lid and let the ingredients sweat for about 20 minutes.

3. Take off the lid and check if the squash is cooked. It's ready when the squash has "melted": when you press a piece of squash with the back of the wooden spoon and it gives way, or melts, like a piece of soft butter. The squash and onion will release some juice so the filling will be wet, which is good. It shouldn't be dry.

4. Add about 2 tablespoons of maple syrup and stir in. Taste for salt and pepper. Let cool to room temperature.

To Make the Béchamel:

1. Put the butter (or oil), salt, pepper and grated nutmeg in a heavy bottomed pot that can hold a litre of milk. Bring it to high heat and let the butter melt.

2. Take it off the heat and add the flour and stir with a whisk. The flour and fat will come together quickly and get thick. This is a roux. Return the pot to the heat and add about a cup of milk and whisk briskly.

3. Be sure to catch the roux in the bottom edges of the pot where it can collect and burn if it is not incorporated into the milk. When the roux is thoroughly mixed into the milk add the rest of the milk and keep whisking. Don't stop whisking as the milk can burn.

4. The béchamel is finished cooking when it comes

to a boil. It will rise somewhat in the pot as it reaches the boiling point so keep whisking as this will stop it from boiling over. At this point take it off the heat and let it cool. Season with more salt and pepper if needed.

To Assemble:

1. Pre-heat the oven to 375.
2. Spread a small amount of the squash mixture on the bottom of the lasagne pan to prevent sticking. Cover the bottom with one layer of noodles. Now a layer of squash mixture, spread to cover evenly. Next a layer of noodles. Now a layer of béchamel, and cheese. Repeat until you reach the top of the pan.
3. After the final layer of noodles mix the last of the béchamel and squash mixture together and cover the top, and sprinkle the last of the cheese over that.
4. Bake for about 30 minutes. Check at the 20 minute mark so that the cheese on top doesn't burn. If you're using no-cook noodles, tent with tinfoil and bake for 20 minutes. Uncover and bake for another 20 minutes.

Bergman Family's Potato Kugel

Best known for writings on gender, sexuality, and trans identity, S. Bear Bergman shares a tasty family food secret passed down through the generations.

Growing up in New England, food was the centrepiece for boisterous and jovial gatherings in Bear's big Jewish family. Despite now living in various corners of Canada and the US, the Bergman family continue to convene at least three times a year to celebrate holidays together. Given this strong connection to food, it's surprising that one of the key recipes for family feasts is an out-of-family import.

"Potato kugel is a very popular dish for Passover because you can't eat anything leavened," Bear says. In the Hebrew Bible, when Pharaoh freed the Israelite slaves, they fled Egypt so quickly that there was no time for bread dough to rise (leaven); hence Passover being known as *Hag Hamatzot*, 'The Festival of Unleavened Bread'.

"In a Jewish household, it's very important to make holiday dishes how your parents or mother made it—which is partly influenced by the Jewish diaspora and oral tradition," Bear explains. "That's why it's so funny that both sides of my family now make Esther Temloch's potato kugel!"

Esther Temloch was Bear's paternal grandmother's best friend. For fifty years, the families were close neighbours. Bear's father and uncle played with the Temloch boys, and the families shared many meals. At some point in their long friendship, Bear's grandmother decided Esther's potato kugel recipe was better than her own, and adopted it. However, there are some unanswered questions about the authenticity of the original recipe. According to family members, there is a definite difference in taste, despite the recipe originally being shared 'line for line'. When Bear first made the dish, after taking notes from Esther directly, his father stated: "This tastes just like how Esther Temloch used to make it!"

So what was the difference between the two recipes? Did Esther hide a part of the recipe to keep it original? Or did Bear's grandma change an important ingredient?

Bear has some theories. "Well, Esther Temloch's recipe specifies Yukon gold potatoes, which could make a difference. Also, putting peanut oil in the pan first and then adding the batter makes it fry all crispy, and this changes the consistency of the dish significantly."

Regardless of the taste mystery, Esther Temloch's potato kugel continues to feature at family meals, and it's a recipe that Bear holds dear, knowing that not all recipes can be handed down. His other favourite dish, stuffed cabbage rolls, or *holishkes*, is an example.

"I loved it—my grandmother would make so much, I could eat it for breakfast, which, I assure you, I did. Recently, she told my husband and I how to make the recipe, but it was a disaster. We asked if she'd left anything out, and she said no, but then we watched her make it."

That is when they realized what was missing. When Bear's grandfather passed away four years ago, it was after 63 years of marriage, family life, and cooking routines. "Making stuffed cabbage was a joint process; Grandma and Grandpa did it together. When she gave us the recipe, grandma had left his part out in the telling, for she thought of him as 'helping'. When he died, they were so interdependent that she couldn't figure out how to reverse engineer the process, and tease out what needed to happen without his bit."

There is bitter-sweetness in such lost culinary traditions, so Bear is pleased to share Esther Temloch's potato kugel recipe, and reminds everyone to 'heat the oil in the pan first'.



Esther Temloch's Potato Kugel

Ingredients

- 5 lbs Idaho Potatoes
- 2 medium yellow onions
- 5 eggs
- salt
- pepper
- garlic powder
- matzoh meal (1 cup + more)
- peanut oil (3/4 cup)

Preparation

1. Grate potatoes and onions—don't drain liquid.
2. Beat eggs 'til fluffy, add to potato/onion mixture.
3. Add salt, pepper and garlic powder to taste.
4. Add the cup of matzoh meal and stir the mix with your hands—if there's too much liquid, add a little more matzoh meal at a time until there's the right amount.
5. Heat peanut oil in glass dish in the oven—add potato mixture when hot.
6. Bake at 350 until brown—about an hour.

To complete this culinary journey of the heart, I'd like to share my grandmother's chocolate chip cookie recipe. Alongside her sugar cookies, these are the most requested dessert in my family. The recipe has been my longstanding companion. I've copied it by hand, had it recited over the phone, and emailed to me when living far from home. It's the first recipe I made on my own (circa grade five), and it's still an old standby.

To add a touch of flair, the recipe has been altered to include freshly chopped mint—a favourite from my family's organic herb farm. The refreshing hint of mint paired with warm melty chocolate makes these

cookies especially addictive.

An important caveat: my mother, sister and I all bake from this recipe but, as with most cherished family favourites, our cookies never taste quite as good as grandma's.



Mint Chocolate Chip Cookies

Makes 6 dozen

Ingredients

- 2/3 cup shortening
- 2/3 cup margarine or unsalted butter
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 tsp vanilla
- 3 cups flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 cup chocolate mint herb, fresh and finely chopped, or 1/4 c. dried (can also use peppermint herb)
- 1-2+ c. chocolate chips and/or chunks

Preparation

1. Heat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Thoroughly mix first six ingredients.
3. Stir in remaining ingredients.
4. Drop by rounded spoonful on an ungreased cookie sheet and bake for 10 minutes.

Melissa Benner is a writer, educator and community organizer. Her interest in cooking took root on her family farm, grew while experiencing different cuisines around the world, and continues to flourish in Toronto's diverse food scene. As a big fan of culinary traditions and grandmothers, she hopes you enjoy these recipes.



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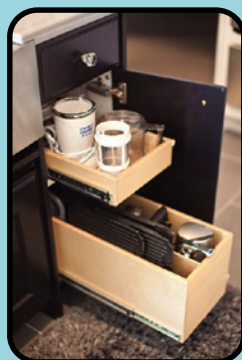
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With Open Arms

by Scott Dagostino

Last year, I travelled a bit in the southern United States, including Louisiana and South Carolina. The hot sunshine was gorgeous, the locals were friendly and the tiny gay bars were lively. Yet something felt off, something that was never apparent at first and took my partner and I a while to recognize.

The towns and cities we were visiting were just too white. Nearly everyone we encountered was Caucasian. There was precious little mixing amongst the various racial groups we saw and some groups (like South Asians, to pick one example) were hardly visible at all. Even for a pair of Wonderbread travellers like us, it was jarring and we were fascinated how these smaller southern American cities, with their tattered history of racial prejudice, felt so bland compared to the eclectic, multicultural Toronto we call home.

As Canada's largest city, Toronto has always been a main entry point for new immigrants and nearly every region on earth is now represented by someone living in this city. It's a foodie's paradise, for starters, and in 1998, the municipal government adopted the motto, "Diversity Our Strength." It's especially impressive

considering it wasn't quite so long ago that Toronto was the opposite—one of the most White Anglo-Saxon Protestant of cities, its British founding and Presbyterian faith still the most powerful influences on "Toronto the Good." As author and historian Peter C. Newman wrote in *Macleans* in 2005: "When I was growing up in Toronto in the 1950s, it was bicultural: English and Irish, except for the bankers, who were Scottish. That hegemony has vanished, with WASPs now the city's most visible minority, and roast beef rapidly becoming an ethnic dish."

In his book, *Toronto in Transition: Demographic Change in the Late Twentieth Century*, Ryerson geography professor Michael Doucet writes, "the velocity of demographic change in Toronto has been striking... According to a report prepared for the then-Metropolitan Toronto government in 1990, the



proportion of racial minorities within Metropolitan Toronto stood at less than 3 per cent in 1961. By 1986 it had risen to 20.7 per cent," and the most recent census in 2006 put the number at roughly 47 percent.

And all during that same period, of course, Toronto came out of the closet, with our ever-growing community of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people now holding a Pride parade that attracts about a million attendees. At this point, there may be no better city for a queer person of colour to emigrate to and feel welcome within. But is it really so simple to adapt to a new language, a new culture? A group of people from South America, the Middle East and Europe have had wildly different experiences settling into gay life in Toronto.

Mohammad Najafpour, a 22-year-old graphic designer and "Mo" to his friends, agrees that settling in after his move to Toronto from Dubai in January 2006 has gone smoothly. "The gay community has been great," he says, "I love the friends I've made over the years here." Najafpour credits the student residence at Ryerson he lived in for his first year as being "extremely helpful" in his acclimatization to Toronto. "It created an environment where students were there for one another," he says, giving him a home base from which he could explore his new city.

That sense of place is important, says 46-year-old physiotherapist Damian Wyard, even for a British white guy like him. When he moved to Toronto in 2003, he lived at Yonge and Eglinton but soon, he says, "It was obvious I had to move to the village. I found it an easy way to make friends. Generally, I found people open to visitors and genuinely interested to know where I was from."

Toronto's Church and Wellesley village has long been a well-known destination for new arrivals, akin to New York's Chelsea district or San Francisco's Castro. While the LGBT community has in recent years begun creating new enclaves throughout the city (slowly making most of Toronto very queer-friendly), the decline of the village is still a worrisome trend. "Toronto's village is more of a community than London UK's gay scene," Wyard says, "I've met a few other British guys who have visited or are living here. Most of them love it here because there a gay community like this doesn't really exist in the UK, even in London."

Wyard says that for him, like with Najafpour at Ryerson, the stability of having that sort of 'home

"One of the big problems in Toronto is that most of the support groups that I see are led by English-speaking Caucasian people. There's nobody to identify yourself with."

turf' allowed him to meet people and later discover the "very welcoming" Out and Out club and the Metropolitan Community Church. "I really can't say I had any problems integrating here," he says, "Being British, without language and cultural differences, it was easy."

Sure, says Nedal Sulaiman, but that's the case when you come from London instead of Riyadh. Having also come here to study at Ryerson in 2006, the video producer says, "I have a love-hate relationship with Toronto...The city prides itself on being 'multicultural' and 'gay-friendly' but, like any city, it contains the same prejudices towards those who do not fit the privileged status quo. The general gay community actually shocked me with its racism and conservatism when it comes to sexuality, gender and politics. I, along with friends, experience all sorts of ongoing racism and queerphobia."

"I had tremendous racist situations in Toronto," agrees Julian A. Daniel Perez, a 25-year-old from Venezuela, "They're invisible but they exist." While many gay men speak glowingly of the village, Perez says there just isn't enough support there for youth and women, who have become increasingly better served by the growing and "more inclusive" Queer West village, but does cite volunteering at the 519 Community Centre as a huge help with the frustrations of adapting to Toronto. "Newcomers are really taken aback by the majority of Caucasian individuals here and they're intimidated by trying to speak English and being judged for their accent. As soon as we speak, a stereotype is put on us."

Perez's parents both have degrees but have been unable to find work in their respective fields. "You can't find a job and even if you do, it's not in your field because you don't have that 'Canadian experience,' Perez says. "Some newcomers are poor and can't get help with their resumes so they do it themselves and get rejected for not meeting a Canadian standard that everyone else is used to."

That 'everyone' includes other queer people, says



Sulaiman, who declares, “the liberationist framework of the historic queer movement is being largely overshadowed by the assimilationist view, which is more interested in satisfying the heteronormative mainstream.” Fed up trying to mainstream himself, he says he now limits himself to “sub-communities (the political queer community, queer communities of colour) and eventually identified better within those circles.”

So is Toronto’s multicultural friendliness a grand PR scheme? A shiny wrapping on a box full of ignorance and indifference? It’s a little more complicated than that, says Miguel Cubillos, a job developer working to solve the issues Perez is talking about. He came to Toronto from Bogotá, Colombia in June of 2006 and, like Najafpour, he says, “I didn’t experience any type of discrimination. I found good people in the LGBTQ community who gave me a hand in terms of where to go, where to socialize, where to party, where to have sex and where to find adequate support depending on my necessities at that time.”

“At the beginning, everything is new and kind of exiting,” Cubillos says, “but after some time, you identify that the people who gave you their hand are people not originally from Ontario or Toronto. These people were also newcomers—not coming from other countries but from other provinces.” Over time, Cubillos says, it became more and more apparent that a great many gay men born and raised in Toronto really were indifferent to newcomers: “You really have to fight for their attention, friendship and hearts.” He credits “angels” like U of T’s Denise Gastaldo and Doctors Without Border’s Kenneth Tong with helping him assimilate.

Cubillos says that the toughest thing for new arrivals in Toronto, after finding work or a career, is dating. While he credits his friend Andrew Brett

with helping him understand queer Canadian issues and politics these past six years, “the most important thing is trying to understand gay Torontonians men, especially the do’s and don’ts with them!” Cubillos says, “Most of the Canadian guys I have dated wanted me to change some of my nature and essence and I can’t...Being Latin is in my blood and is part of my culture and who I am. That’s why, now, I’m over with dating Canadians/Torontonians and I hope I can meet a Latin guy with a similar background. I had a Brazilian partner for almost six years here in Toronto and now that I’m back on the market, the difference is humongous.”

Cubillos is quick to point out, however, that it’s not exactly racism at work here per se, but issues of identity, cultural barriers and cultural competency from others. He calls them, “gray areas in which I’ve had to learn how to fall-down and stand up.” After years in Toronto, he says, “I know to take short cuts and I can identify easily red flags in some people, but there are some people who really know how to hide them pretty well.”

“I didn’t choose to come here,” says Perez, having been dragged to Canada at 19 with his parents, “It was a horrible process but because I came here, I was able to discover that I am queer.” Born a girl, dressing as a boy, Perez now identifies as genderqueer but says, “One of the big problems in Toronto is that most of the support groups that I see are led by English-speaking Caucasian people. There’s nobody to identify yourself with.”

Scott Clarke, Volunteer Development Officer at the 519 Community Centre, is one such Caucasian who completely agrees with Perez. It’s why, he says, the 519 sat down with a group of newcomer volunteers a year-and-a-half ago and asked, “What would you want to work on?” The result was Breakthrough,



"a network for LGBTQ newcomers to Toronto," Clarke explains. "They hold monthly events and run a Facebook group and an e-newsletter and what's unique about this program is that it's completely volunteer-driven. A team of ten volunteers come up with ideas of what events they want to do, they find people to put the events on, they emcee the events, they do all the promotion, they create the posters, they do the outreach...I just support them with training and the space here."

Clarke agrees that it's important for a more grassroots approach to helping people adapt to a new culture. "For many people, the process of migrating and settling in Toronto is their biggest asset," he says, "By bringing people together to share their stories, we're creating informal support networks of people with similar cultural backgrounds dealing with similar issues. That's far more important than having one staff person with one particular experience try to assist an array of different people with different experiences and it's the goal of a lot of our volunteer programs."

Cubillos credits the 519 with providing him a lot

of resources and, three years ago, he turned his dating experiences into a relationship workshop for gay Latino men at the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples, as part of the "Mano en Mano" research project with the University of Windsor. "I help the participants to navigate in the turbulent ocean of dating," he says, "Understanding what makes a 'date, the differences in dating a Canadian guy and some basic tips of how not to lose him after the first date and possibly get a second date." He laughs that one day he'll completely adapt to Toronto: "I'm still trying but my clock is ticking!"

For his part, Nedal Sulaiman turned his political dissatisfaction with gay life in the city into founding an alternative media collective with some friends. "Deviant Productions," he plugs, "advances social justice through its video reportage. We felt that many important events and stories are overlooked by the media (both mainstream and queer) so we decided to point a lens at them. Because really, once you scratch the glittered surface, Toronto is full of areas that desperately need reconstruction." All criticism aside, Sulaiman is delighted to give back, "by volunteering, organizing and celebrating the city. Regardless of the many issues in the gay community, Toronto has become home for me and that means treating it like one."

"Racism exists everywhere," says Ann Marie Peart, a 28-year-old who came here from Jamaica and found support through the Supporting Our Youth (SOY) program Express, which meets Tuesday nights at the Sherbourne Health Centre. "You can't get away from racist attitudes," she says, "but here, you belong, you have rights. Where I'm from, you don't have any rights." Growing up in Jamaica, Peart says, "I felt like I was the only lesbian on the island, isolated." When she came to Toronto in October 2009, some friends took her down to Church Street on Halloween. She saw wild costumes and glittering drag queens but what really stopped her in her tracks was the sight of two men making out in the street.

"It was the first time I'd seen two men kissing. Like, live, not on TV, and I lost it, I was in tears. That doesn't happen where I'm from. Not in public anyway and never so open and never so free."

Scott Dagostino is a Toronto-based freelance writer, still discovering new things about this city and its culture and he only moved here from Hamilton!

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Canuck Pride

by Bryen Dunn



From a small gathering of 100, to a city-wide street party of up to a million, queers gather annually across the nation to celebrate and demonstrate. When the weather heats up we know we are heading into Pride season all across Canada, with celebrations that began in May and won't end until September. This year PinkPlayMags reached out to organizations across the country to find out what's new and worth checking out in some of the lesser known Pride celebrations.

A few noticeable similarities were the importance of the flag-raising ceremony in smaller locales, the inclusion of families and youth and the opportunity to be out and visible in the community. The one constant parallel with each and every one is the enthusiasm and dedication of the numerous volunteers who make these events happen year after year. From new beginnings to grand finales, we provide you with a Pride Guide to plan your summer travels.

East

Corner Brook – July 15th to 17th www.cornerbrookpride.com

Corner Brook held their first Pride celebrations two years ago with 50 attendees. Last year there were nearly 200 and Christian Corbett has aspirations of increasing numbers year after year. He's pleased to have the dates changed from September to the middle of July, and he's also excited to announce the parade route will now begin at the recently completed new City Hall. He proudly proclaims, "We are the first Pride organization in Newfoundland and Labrador to receive a legal incorporated business designation, and we were also the first City to receive an official Pride Week Proclamation signed by the Mayor."



St. John's – July 18th to 24th www.stjohnspride.org

St. John's, Newfoundland has had some rough stretches over the past several years organizing Pride related events, however Jennifer McCreath is confident that is all about to change starting this year. "There have been informal Pride Week events in the City for the past 19 years, but 2011 is the first year that Pride will be legitimized under the banner of a legally registered non-profit company," she explains.

From the flag-raising on July 18th to the Pride Parade on July 24th, there's a full week of activities to partake in, including bowling, a

nature walk, coffee social, pub night and a panel discussion. "The flag-raising event always seems to generate the most media attention, and the speeches are highly important as it is often the best opportunity for the LGBTQ community to get their issues aired in mainstream media," McCreath states. She also points out that this year will be doubly special as St. John's Pride will happen immediately following Corner Brook Pride, making Newfoundland the perfect vacation destination.

Cape Breton – August 5th to 14th www.pridecapebreton.com

Pride Cape Breton is held annually in August during the height of the summer tourist season in Sydney, Nova Scotia. It attracts people from across Canada, the United States, and beyond who plan their vacation for this time of year. Highlights are the Pride Parade, Wednesday Night Musicfest, PFLAG's Family Day, Pride Dance, Diva Delights, Gay Bingo, Masquerade Dance and a Dry Pub. "I'm so proud to say that our community has always received great support, even in the very beginning. I've been told by the community how thankful they are that we have a safe and welcoming environment with events and socials they can enjoy and call their own," divulges Peter Steele.

West

Edmonton – June 10th – 19th, 2011 www.edmontonpride.ca

Edmonton Pride has seen their celebrations rise from less than 100 attendees in 1990 to nearly 20,000 expected this year. Besides the Parade and 'Celebration on the Square' events, there are plenty of smaller affairs taking place such as discussion groups, an awards ceremony, a queer history bus tour and the 6th annual Mayor's Brunch. "In 1994 Mayor Jan Reimer, amid much criticism, angry letters and phone calls, declared Gay and Lesbian Awareness Day for the following eight years. In



2004, then Mayor Bill Smith refused to give his declaration, but now things are back in order under the direction of Mayor Stephen Mandel," explains Terry Harris.

Prince George – July 6th to 10th www.pgpride.com

Prince George in northern British Columbia only has a population of around 80,000, however their celebrations are now attracting up to 500 individuals, up more than double from the first one held back in 1997. "This year we are introducing the first 'Pride Week Pass,' which will include some incredible deals and free stuff for ticket holders, all contained on a Pride Prince George Card," explains Valentine Crawford.

Beyond the support of several unions in town, they have recently secured two local radio stations and KPMG as proud sponsors. Despite this current support, the group has not gone without any controversy. "We were the only group forced to present in front of City Council to ask for a Proclamation, while others were just given one by the Mayor upon request. Around 2004, City Council was taken to court and a settlement was reached before it made its way through the legal system," Crawford indicates. He since recalls the 2009 Pride Parade when for the first time in history, the Mayor of Prince George cut short his summer holiday to come into town and march in the Parade. "So many people were moved and shaken by this that I believe it changed Prince George for the better," he says with a smile.

Calgary – September 1st to 11th www.pridecalgary.ca

In Calgary, attendance at all pride events is estimated at over 25,000, much grander than the original procession that began as a short march with a few people in disguises, according to Sam Casselman. Today he says, "Our parade is now a fabulous event lasting nearly an hour, and our street festival location has changed to the more central Shaw Millennium Park this year."

Central

Peel Region – July 15th to 23rd www.prideeventspeel.com www.prideweekinpeel.blogspot.com

Peel Region, just west of Toronto, actually has two separate organizing committees, one that continues the tradition of the Pride Picnic on July 17th, and a new group that have helped to expand the offerings to a full week of activities. Greg Roach is one of the original founding members of the Peel Pride Committee and cites his highlight as the annual 'gays vs. lesbians' tug of war at the end of the picnic. "Also exciting is that the City of Brampton proclaims Pride Week and flies the flag at City Hall," he happily announces.

Qxposure sprang up three years ago with their signature event 'Queer It Up!', Peel's annual Pride March happening on Saturday July 23rd, which they are hoping will attract over 300 individuals. The group was able to grow their celebrations over a week thanks to a grant from Community One Foundation. Ashley Lake is excited to have the opportunity to expand on their operations. "I've heard LGBTTIQQ2S folks in Peel saying we don't want to have to go to Toronto to find community, we want to build our strong, vibrant and diverse community right here. Now we are able to do it," she rejoices.

Muskoka – July 24th www.muskokapride.com www.clubchillevents.com

"After a young gay teen was kicked out of his home I felt the need to do something in Muskoka to raise awareness of LGBT issues, so we started Muskoka Pride in 2009 with a small picnic in Gravenhurst," recalls Matt Commandant. The event was held in Bracebridge in 2010, and will take place in Huntsville this year. Commandant and business partner Jason Jones also run 'Club Chill Events' that organizes year round activities for the community. "We have made a point of having some games and activities as well as



feeding the participants. The chance to 'break bread' together is a real bonding experience," remarks Commandant.

Cornwall – September 3rd and 4th www.pridecornwall.webs.com

Pride Cornwall expects approximately 600 attendees to experience their many vendors, exhibitors, and wonderful performances. "When we first started our festival we had some problems with church groups and a few city councilors, but the City decided to support us in the end," recalls Paul Leger. "My most memorable moment was in 2008 when we did our annual candlelight vigil for friends and loved ones that have passed away. When I went out on stage and saw that the whole park was lit up, it brought tears to my eyes. It was something that I had never seen or experienced there before," confides Leger.



Special Recognition

Winnipeg – May 27th to June 5th www.pridewinnipeg.com

Although Winnipeg Pride has already happened this year, I think they deserve a nod of acknowledgement. Self dubbed as the 'Pride of the Prairies', the largest Pride celebrations between Toronto and Vancouver, they may also soon be known as the purveyors of fine beer. "One thing that's new for us this year, and quite significant, is the partnership we have developed with local microbrewery Half Pints Brewing. Together we have developed a unique formula for 'Queer Beer,' which we have patented and trademarked. As the owners of this brand, Pride Winnipeg stands to collect royalties on an ongoing basis from sales in Winnipeg, and even other parts of the country as we negotiate the sale to other Prides," cites Scott Carman.

Maynooth – July 31st www.wildewood.net

Finally, the most charming Pride celebrations I was able to find will be hoisting one last toast this year. After 22 years of hosting Pride celebrations at their Wildewood Guest House in tiny Maynooth, Ontario, partners Joey Shulman and Barry Siegrist, are calling it quits. "We are

celebrating 30 years together on June 30th, and recently turned 60, so we want to go out with a bang," the couple explains. This year the festivities take place on July 31st, and will include the usual potluck dinner, parade around the pond, choreographed fireworks, and dancing under the stars. Participants are asked for a contribution to the local food bank, as well as their pot luck dish and a firework or two for the show. The first event had a dozen friends attend, and this year they are expecting over 200 attendees, many of whom will pitch tents and stay the night.

The proprietors are proud of their accomplishments and are confident others will pick up where they leave off. "There's a younger crowd that hosts a big weekend music event nearby that will likely replace our Pride. It's called KisFest and isn't a Pride event yet, but may take on that role when we've ceased having ours," admits Shulman. "As out gay men, arriving here in 1988, we seemed to be the only ones, until we took a closer look at the trees in the woods. There has been a large lesbian community here since the 1980's and a gay community that was born here and stayed, or moved here like we did. We have also welcomed a transgendered community in the past three years as well," he confirms.

Here's hoping these final festivities will include plenty of Queer Beer!

Bryen Dunn is a freelance journalist based in Toronto with a focus on tourism, lifestyle, entertainment and community issues. He has written several travel articles and has an extensive portfolio of celebrity interviews with musicians, actors and other public personalities. He's willing to take on any assignments of interest, attend parties with free booze, listen to rants, and travel the world in search of the great unknown. He's eager to discover the new, remember the past, and look into the future.



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Our Opinion... and we have one!

by Steven Bereznai and Mary-Margaret Jones

Steven Bereznai: I have been a die hard gay village fag for more than ten years, but more and more I feel like I'm turning into one of those aging gays who's drifting away from his village ways. I honestly never thought I'd see the day. My first year in Toronto I felt so isolated living out at Bloor and Christie, where getting to Church and Wellesley was such a trek.

I didn't have a single date that year. As soon as my lease was up I moved blocks away from gay central. Yet now I find myself cringing when I'm in the 'hood and I hear some young queen cackling away with his friends.

It made me wonder how the heck I became a stuck-in-the-mud gay, but it also started a debate with my friends on what role the village now plays. Some of us still like checking out Woody's on occasion, but then others, especially those newer to Toronto, put it way high as a go-to place.

Mary-Margaret Jones: I hear you, Steven. As the Village where the *Kids in the Hall* once sat on the front steps at the Second Cup changed, our

needs morphed as well. But I have two words for you, young man. Two words: Come home. More than ever, we need to preserve a space that is uniquely queer in this city.

SB: I agree with you (and huge bonus points for calling me young!), but what we have as queer spaces has changed so much over the last several decades. In Toronto I find myself turning to my gay water polo team as my primary gay social outlet, and even when I do hang in the village it's usually with members of said team. So yes, we still want places to go, but for instance while living in Buenos Aires for two months I was surprised to find myself not really pining for a gay hood (they don't have one). There are bars, and the gay Axel Hotel with great pool parties once a week, but no concentration of gay venues in one area. I was surprised at how ok I was with





This issue's topic: *Is the Gay Village Still Vital?*



that, especially as someone who barely spoke the language and was in danger of social isolation.

MMJ: Queer spaces are being defined

increasingly by opportunity though and less by the people who can occupy them. Businesses move in and hope to cash in on the gay demographic. My fear is that their interest is taking over and we are not being cognizant of the roots of the Village. It was more than a party place—although the bars helped. It was a place where we could go and feel community regardless of our socioethnic backgrounds.

SB: For sure, and I do still feel a sense of that, though my need for the village itself is greatly diminished, it's only because there are more options for me after having lived in Toronto for more than 10 years. Which raises the question: Does the village have a greater significance for queers who are

new to Toronto? I know when I first moved here it sure did.

MMJ: It did for me. I came out in Montréal, and I know the Village meant a safer place for me.

SB: Which brings us back to the point that the importance of the Village is way bigger for newbies. As of print time I'm in Vancouver working on a film for OUTtv and I specifically rented a short term place in that city's gay hood. I've hardly gone to any of the bars, I'm living my boring go-to-bed-early-and-wake-up-early life secure in the knowledge that I can soak up some gay energy just by walking down the street to and from my various destinations, and can easily walk to where my gay friends live for nights of *Millionaire Match Maker* and *Celebrity Apprentice*. Actually, when I put it like that, maybe I do still need my Village, I'm just using it differently.

Mary-Margaret Jones is a long-time PR princess who lives in downtown Toronto. Her taste includes both snails and oysters.

Steven Bereznai is the author of the super hero novel *Queeroes*, and the dating bible *Gay and Single...Forever?*. His anthology contributions include *Second Person Queer*, *I Like It Like That*, and *Best Gay Love Stories 2010*. He can be reached online through his website www.stevenbereznai.com.

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Charlie Hill, then president of Gays of Ottawa, speaking at the We Demand protest, August 28, 1971.

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Hot Artist: *Puja Amin*



W.H. Auden once wrote “Dance till the stars come down from the rafters. Dance, dance, dance till you drop.” Excellent advice, but like most advice it didn’t just fall on deaf ears in the case of Puja Amin, it is how she lives her life. Born in Mumbai, India, she suspects her abundance of energy and need for motion was the catalyst for her parents to sign her up for dance lessons at the age of 4.

Amin also concedes that her parents wanted to give her all the opportunities they hadn’t had as children. “My parents were always very supportive,” she says. “Mom wanted me to learn regardless of where it went and my Dad always wanted me to do something of my own with what I learnt.”

As a student Puja mastered every style of dance that came her way: classical, folk and then Bollywood. “There’s no escaping Bollywood growing up in Bombay,” she says. For their part, her parents danced at family gatherings but were too shy to seek the spotlight. Amin admits she was equally shy, but with the encouragement of her dance teachers she gained confidence and really came into her own when she started to teach. Little did she know that one day she’d be

the artistic director of her own studio.

Although she was always involved in dance she trained and worked as a physiotherapist where she subscribed to the philosophy “use your body to heal your body” and preferred the use of exercise with one’s own weight as resistance rather than doing reps using a machine.

At age 24 Amin was en-route to start her life in Canada when she made a detour to England to visit friends. Upon arrival a friend asked if she might choreograph some dances for a good friend of theirs who was keen to learn. All she knew about her new pupil was that he was a male model, so she prepared a few very masculine dances to show him, ones that were very popular with the male Bollywood stars.

Now, for those of us who don't know, Indian dance is rich in culture and steeped in history. Many dances have specific back-stories almost akin to an opera. Some dances are only danced by women (where women are meant to be the entertainers and men the viewers) and some dances are meant to only be performed by men. When she met up with her new pupil she was surprised to learn that all her planning had to go by the wayside as he was only interested in learning a Mujra, a traditionally female dance, so she quickly changed gears. The Mujra lesson turned out to be a blast. "When I started teaching him it was so fun and he was so good at it." She still remembers his name and he that he was not shy, reinforcing her belief that dance is a universal language. "That prepared me for anything when I came here."

Once she landed in Canada she had intended to continue her physiotherapy career but shortly after her arrival she was recruited to organize the entertainment at a friend's wedding and after that, requests for lessons poured in. "I found the possibilities infinite," she says and began to teach classes, later adding Bollywood-type fitness classes, rhythmic arts classes and yoga classes to her already wide repertoire.

When asked what part of dance she enjoys the most she says "I like to be physically dancing, as long as I'm physically working out, running, anything of that sort of thing, I'm just very happy to be giving myself that adrenaline rush. I could be happy just skipping on the spot or leading a boot camp class or dancing or choreographing as long as I'm just going all out." She admits her students (who range in age from 2 ½ to 72) have admonished her with "Puja, you have to stop eating chocolate!!!" when they feel they can't keep up with her.

Amin says she didn't feel any culture shock coming here. "Canada is not that much of a shock just because it is an immigrant's place—just as I see it. You see so many different faces, you don't feel like you're a foreigner in this country." But one difference she did notice was how open the

gay community could be. "In India it is still very discrete....still a long way to go." It's becoming more common to see Indian movies with gay characters and the popular reality TV shows have also included openly gay characters who speak of their struggle, but she says in most cases "it's very discrete and based on assumptions." As for her part, her dancing has provided her with lots of interaction with the gay community. "I didn't feel any different because we were all just dancers—it didn't matter if I came home to a husband or to a partner. It just didn't matter at all, it's just the common dance factor that binds us."



As long as she can move and celebrate dance Amin is in her element. She has participated in some post-Pride events with D.J. Zahra and has a regular engagement (every 3 to 4 months) at the Besaram event (Besaram means shameless) at Fly Night Club—a gig she clearly enjoys as she enthuses: "We get so many people to come dance with us!"

Summing up her experience of coming to Canada and being able to pursue her art, Amin says "I've been very lucky, I feel not many people get to do what they like to do and I'm really lucky. I didn't mean to do it that way—my husband always says you're not meant to do a 9 to 5 and I think I'm not. While I was very prepared to do it, I didn't have to. And it's perfect now that I have a baby I can set up my own schedule." Asked if she thinks her child is a dancer she beams, "Oh my God he's a total dancer—I'm telling you, he's going to rock the stage."

If the dancer in you wants to break out or you want to learn how to work out Bollywood style, grab a dupatta (colourful scarf) and perhaps eat some chocolate and check out Puja Amin's classes on her web sites www.sanskritiarts.ca and www.bollycore.com.

Janet Collins lives and writes (whenever she can) in Toronto. Her style of dance could be categorized as "Elaine Benes-esque." She should probably signed up for some lessons from Puja. Her pug, Chloe, is an excellent dancer.

Photo: Puja's dance crew: The Sanskriti Arts Ensemble

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Designing your home to celebrate a love of a culture can inspire you on a daily basis, taking you back to some fond memories of your homeland or to an unforgettable destination vacation. Perhaps you're a world traveler that has acquired a large number of artifacts and souvenirs, but because of limited living space many of the cherished trinkets sit wrapped up in boxes and inaccessible. Condos specifically, present a challenge to many homeowners, as the very nature of the environment is to pare down and live with only what is necessary, so how do you make room for your basic needs alongside those of your soul?

Making an investment in your home means taking the time to create a space that makes you feel special—that is the true meaning of comfort. Material possessions shouldn't be taken for granted, especially those that have deep sentimental value to you. Surround yourself with those objects that affect you on a personal level, use them so that

they are not only an integral part of your daily life, but can brighten your day when reality gets a little stressful. Your home will always evolve as you do, and introducing new elements into your décor is a constant process. In my professional opinion, start your design with something that makes you happy and don't worry about it matching with

anything you already have. A good design means YOU are the element that everything else goes with.



A professional design consultation that focuses on personal tastes while evaluating your home's function can save you a huge amount of time and money. In all cases, function has to come before form, as styling your home in your

desired theme has to go hand in hand with the practical elements, otherwise you'll end up with a disjointed look. If you are fortunate to be in on the selection process for the finishes in your new condo or development, then I suggest bringing inspiration pictures to aid in your choice of kitchen



Diversity

by Manny Machado

cabinetry, flooring and bathroom fixtures. If these items are already standardized and installed in your space then use a designer's knowledge on how to modify them to suit your tastes, allowing you to attain your culturally diverse space much sooner than you would imagine.

When I met Neda, I was presented with the challenge of incorporating the vibrancy of Turkey with its old world markets and modern architecture into her newly purchased 600 square foot condo at the VU complex in Toronto. The layout was fairly standard: a galley kitchen with a center island facing into the modest sized living area, which featured a small corner inlet that was labeled as "den" in the purchasing floor plan. Our first step was to evaluate how she wanted to live in her space and effectively utilize every square inch to support that vision. I drew inspiration for her color palette from the pictures she took on her vacation in Turkey, items like the wool rugs decorated in pomegranate red and royal blue. The richness of the raw textiles in contrast with the modern furnishings brought her design to life.

Staking her claim in the re-purposing of her condo for how she wanted to live made the process of creating her dream environment a

reality. The generic "den" became her proper dining area and one of my favorite areas to create, as it embodied the totality of what we were trying to accomplish. The focal point is the floral-paisley wallpaper with the red background, drawing you into the area that is furnished with a modern round dining set that includes four upholstered chairs in a tufted detail. The tension between old and new is amplified with the use of an antique wooden hutch that serves as the sideboard, anchoring the wallpaper with the furnishings. For the remainder of the living space, the main concern was comfort and usability. Having a spot to entertain her girlfriends was just as important as having an extra sleeping area for when her family comes to visit from the homeland. The dual-purpose sofa from Milano Bedding (www.milano bedding.it) was the perfect solution as it easily converts from sofa to an actual bed, putting traditional sofa/sleepers to shame. This allows Neda the flexibility to control how she wants to use the space and in fact it doubles the functionality of her environment without much effort on her part.

Much of today's trends in home décor are in fact a modern take on what has already been in existence for years. Every season, just like



in fashion, interior designers fall in love with a particular culture or a forgotten tradition and renew our interest in said concept. Some stick, some don't, but it's that constant rejuvenation of what elapsed that makes the industry exciting. My own sense of design blossomed as a child, growing up surrounded by Portuguese artifacts in my parent's shop, Flor Do Lar Importations in Montréal. As pioneers, my parents wanted to bring a little bit of their homeland to their new home and inspired my own fondness for beautiful things from the old world. To this day I still own some of those treasures and use them almost daily, like my pottery dishes and cookware and even my dear old departed grandma's hand knit lace tablecloth. Remembering where I've come from keeps me focused on where I am headed.

We are fortunate to live in one of the most diverse cities in the world, where you can discover a new culture without having to try too hard. The same is true for design. There are many levels of décor, accessories and furnishings that are globally inspired. You can find a little jewel offering up goods from a foreign country in almost every neighbourhood, from China to Italy and beyond. Local resources like these are what make our city unique and have changed the way many of us professional designers do our job. I would even

venture a guess that people have purchased items for their home from large retail chains like West Elm, Urban Outfitters or Home Sense not realizing that they are in fact acquiring something whose design origins stem from somewhere else besides North America.

Contrasting the differences of the cultures, or using something from your past in contrast with a modern item does create a visual tension—it draws your attention and therefore makes it memorable. It's a tried and true technique used by the professionals and it's something I encourage all my clients to try in their homes. In this big melting pot of a city we live in, we need to share what we know and what our individual culture has taught us, whether it be from personal experience or through our heritage. I'd like to think that the gay community has led the way for many others to learn how to accept and welcome diversity. Rather than hide what makes you unique, showcase your differences and celebrate what makes you the person you are.

Manny Machado has been working in the design industry since 2004. Renowned for his diversity and broad range of styles, he has transformed some of the most impossible spaces into inspiring and comfortable homes. For more information on how to revolutionize your interiors, visit him at www.mannymachado.com.

Photography by Manny Machado



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An excerpt from:

SIX METRES OF PAVEMENT

by Farzana Doctor

Ismail Boxwala made the worst mistake of his life twenty years ago: he forgot his baby daughter in the back seat of his car. After his daughter's tragic death, he struggles to continue living. A divorce, years of heavy drinking and sex with strangers only leave him more alone.

But Ismail's story begins to change after he reluctantly befriends two women. One of them is Fatima, a young queer activist, kicked out of her parents' home for being too publicly queer. She's asked him to intervene with her parents, but so far he's refused. However, Ismail does agree to attend her birthday fundraising party...

Ismail found the Polish Social and Recreation Centre after circling its industrial neighbourhood three times. His plan was to make an appearance at the party, offer Fatima some kind words, and make it back in time to watch the eleven o'clock news. He hefted open the steel door, and made his way over to a card table. A hand-written sign hung from it reading: *Fatima's birthday fundraiser, PWYC, suggested donation \$5*. A boy, a little younger-looking than Fatima, peered over the sign at Ismail and smiled when he dug a ten-dollar bill out of his wallet.

interrupted by two girls coming to the door. They flirted with Ashton, ignored Ismail, and unloaded pockets full of change on the table.

"Have a good time," Ashton said, waving Ismail in the door. "And thanks again." Ashton turned his attention to the girls and their quarters and loonies.

Ismail walked into the cavernous space, searching through the darkness to find Fatima. A sparkly disco ball, hung slightly askew on the ceiling, speckled his dark pullover. Only a couple dozen guests milled around, mostly

“She made her introduction again, this time touching his shoulder and shouting hot breath into his ear.”

"Do you need change?" An alto voice came from the boy's mouth. Ismail squinted at him in the darkness, but besides his short blond hair and metal-rimmed spectacles, he couldn't make out the boy's features.

"No, that's all right," he said, "it's for a good cause, right?"

"Definitely. Thanks. Here, let me stamp you." Ismail held out his left wrist and was branded with a red happy face. "In case you want to go out and come back in."

"I don't plan to stay too long. I just came to support Fatima."

"I'm guessing that you're Ismail, her friend from Creative Writing?"

"Yes." He felt an unexpected gush of gratification at being known as Fatima's friend. What else had she mentioned about him?

"Hi, I'm Ashton. Fatima told me about how you're helping her out. It's great that you're going to speak to her parents for her. Maybe you can convince them to stop being such jerks."

"Well, I —" Ismail began to protest, to tell Ashton that he hadn't agreed to be Fatima's advocate. Before he could explain, they were

young people who stood against the crepe-paper decorated walls. A few gyrated on the dance floor to a song with a thumping beat and lyrics Ismail couldn't make out. He didn't see Fatima anywhere, and was glad to spot a makeshift bar in the far corner, really just a set of three card tables that looked like they were normally used for the Polish seniors' bridge games. He ordered a beer from a girl slouching behind one of the tables. She narrowed her eyes, scrutinizing his face in a way he'd seen many people look at him in the past. He pulled off his coat, suddenly too warm.

"Hey, are you Ismail?" she asked, a wide smile spreading over her face, surprising him. She extended her hand, introducing herself as Sonia, Fatima's best friend.

Ismail couldn't hear her at first over the music, but since she was smiling, he leaned in. "Sorry, what?"

She made her introduction again, this time touching his shoulder and shouting hot breath into his ear. "It's so great that you're going to talk to her parents. When we had the brainstorming session, and your name came up, I knew she was

in good hands.”

Ismail had no idea what she was talking about. Brainstorming session? He scrounged in his pocket for a five-dollar bill for the beer. “Here, take this,” he said, handing her the money. “But listen, I haven’t decided yet about that.” She nodded and smiled, and swayed with the music.

“Don’t worry about it, it’s on the house,” she yelled, and turned her attention to the next person in line.

He walked farther into the hall, wondering who else at the party knew his name and would offer premature appreciation for the help he

Ismail rescued his drink just before a boy with multiple eyebrow piercings almost kicked it over. He touched the plastic cup to his forehead, hoping it would cool him a little. There didn’t seem to be a cloakroom anywhere, and so he held his coat and sweater to his chest like woollen armour. Still too warm, with heat rising to his flushed face, he decided it was time to exit the party. He took a few steps toward the entrance, and just then Fatima appeared wearing an electric-blue bow tie that matched her hair, a white shirt, and jeans. She grabbed his arm, jostling his beer, splashing a sip or two onto his

“One of the girls shoved the other against the wall, and kissed her, hot and heavy, as though he wasn’t there.”

hadn’t promised and didn’t plan to give. How had Fatima described him to her friends that made him so recognizable to them? Of course, he was the only fifty-four-year-old in the house, the lone old codger among all the youngsters.

He found a wall to lean against and scanned the room. More people had arrived in the previous minutes. He tried to look casual, stuffing one hand in his pocket while he drank his warming cup of beer. A couple of women in tight dresses walked in his direction, and he assumed they were more of Fatima’s friends, coming to thank him. He smiled at them, but they didn’t seem to notice him. One of the girls shoved the other against the wall, and kissed her, hot and heavy, as though he wasn’t there. He looked away, wanting to be invisible, but then remembered that, to them, he was. Feeling perspiration beading his forehead, he moved a few feet away from them, put his drink down on the sticky floor, and transferred his jacket to one arm so he could take off his pullover. His white shirt glowed bright in the black lights of the makeshift dancehall.

white shirt.

“You came,” she trilled, “I’m so glad you made it! Come meet some of my friends.” Ismail followed her, relieved to be in the company of someone he knew. He held the beer above his head as they snaked across the dance floor, bumping into Fatima’s guests, weaving deeper into the party hall. He felt cool beer trickle down his wrist and past his shirt cuff.

By the time Ismail got home, it was 4:00 a.m. By then, he’d provided a ride to the DJ, including transporting all of his equipment in the trunk of his car. Along for the ride were Ashton, the doorman, Fatima, and her best friend and bartender, Sonia. Sometime just before midnight, Ismail succumbed to Fatima’s friends’ cajoling and agreed to ask Fatima’s parents to reinstate their financial support of her.

This was all because he’d had another beer, danced lewdly with girls less than half his age, and then had two more beers after that. The surge of attention from Fatima’s friends played on his sense of vanity, and days later, he suspected that it was part of Fatima’s grand plan,

a subversive plot to recruit his support.

He'd managed to stop drinking around 1:00 a.m., realizing that he was far too intoxicated to drive. He switched to cola and waited to sober up for the ride home. Much to his surprise, it wasn't difficult to stay after his personal last call. Girls and boys, all part of Fatima's inner circle, continued to pull him onto the dance floor, including him in their fun. The DJ even played some bangra/hip-hop combination that Ismail quite enjoyed. The beer had loosened his joints and he danced like he'd never danced in his life, his body awakening as he swayed and swooshed to the music. He thought he must have looked absurd, but he couldn't care less.

The party began to empty out by 2:30 a.m., which was when Ismail first noticed that things were going awry. The DJ was going to be stranded because his ride hadn't shown up. The classmate who had offered Fatima his couch for the week got very drunk, tried to grope her on the dance floor, and was bounced out of the venue by Ashton at 2:40. And five minutes later, Sonia realized that she had lost her house keys.

The final catastrophe happened when the Polish Social and Recreation Centre manager appeared at 3:00 a.m. to lock up and collect his money. He informed Fatima that her parents had put a stop on their five-hundred-dollar cheque, and that she was financially responsible for the venue and sound system payment. Ashton and Sonia handed her the evening's take, a thick wad of bills and a tin pail overflowing with change. Fatima tearfully counted out the money she owed into the manager's beefy hand

while Ismail bargained, unsuccessfully, with him for a discount. She tallied the rest to find that what remained was just over four hundred dollars. Four hundred and seventeen dollars to be precise.

"We didn't make as much as we hoped we would," said Ashton apologetically. "I was sure we'd end up with way more. It's probably because there were other competing events happening tonight."

"Yeah, the *Rock Your Tits Off* party was tonight," mumbled Sonia, distractedly, while she rifled through her coat pockets, for the third time.

"And so was the benefit for *Homes Not Bombs*. But we still did pretty well, Fatima," Ashton consoled. "If your parents hadn't been such bastards, you would have had close to a thousand."

"At least you didn't lose any money. That's pretty good, isn't it?" Ismail offered weakly.

"Yeah, but what am I going to do?" she sniffed. "Where am I going to stay? How long can I survive on four hundred and seventeen dollars?"

Farzana Doctor's first novel, *Stealing Nasreen*, received critical acclaim and was nominated for Masala! Mehndi! Masti! People's Choice Award. She has also written on social work and diversity-related topics, and in her spare time she provides private practice consulting and psychotherapy services. She lives in Toronto.



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SUMMER IN THE CITY

by Ricky Boudreau

So here we are again, summer is finally here! I have to say that summer is my favourite season. I mean, what's not to love? Torontonians love patios, drinking with friends and eating tons. Well, maybe that's just me. Here in the T-dot, we are blessed with copious amounts of amazing restaurants, great nightlife and let's face it—we are a good looking city! I love getting over to the island for a picnic with my special man or group of friends, soaking up the sun and eating a delicious lunch that we prepared. Ahhh, this is the life. Sitting on the beach makes me feel like I'm on vacation. If only I could win the lottery and do that as a profession, I so would. Wouldn't that be great, traveling and staying in 5 star resorts, in every city you've ever wanted to visit? For those of you who can, please contact me if you ever need a travel companion!

Pride is here too—woo-hoo!—our high, holy holiday. Get out your heels, wigs, lipstick, faux beards, hot pants and Speedos, cause it's time to celebrate! Stuff is happening all over the city and it's a great time to make new friends. If you are visiting... welcome! Did you know that Toronto is the Huron Indian word that means "place of meeting?" The United Nations has also voted Toronto as the most cosmopolitan and most culturally diverse city in the world five times in a row! We welcome all here to

our fair city. With people from 169 different countries, speaking over 100 languages, it's no wonder our city really comes to life in the summer. We are so fortunate that we can visit so many different countries, through all of the wonderful festivals, without having to buy expensive plane tickets. So get out there kids, 'cause this summer there are lots of patios to hang out on, lots of drinks to consume, tons of good times to be had and even more to experience. Enjoy dolls, and see you in the fall.



PRIDE

Prism Festival

June 30 to July 3

Various venues

Tickets \$15 - \$150

www.prismtoronto.com

Here we are, the 8th annual Prism festival. There are all kinds of parties and music to get your groove on to and lots of places to look for Mr. or Ms. Right. You can buy tickets individually or splurge and get an all-access pass, depending on how crazy you want your four day weekend to be.

Prism College Night

Thursday, June 30

10pm

FLY nightclub – 8 Gloucester St.

Tickets \$15 + \$4.23 tax & service fee

DJ Sandy Duperval (Montréal) spins and Brent Everett performs.

Bootcamp

Friday, July 1

10pm

The Government – 132 Queens Quay East

Tickets \$50 before the event + \$7.48 tax and service fee

DJ's Hector Fonesca (NYC) and Manny Lehman (LA) and Marcus Mojo and Cody Cum—picking up on a hunk theme?

Aqua

Saturday, July 2

1pm

Wellesley Stage – across from Wellesley subway station

Tickets \$25 + \$5.53 tax & service fee

DJ's Dave and Gerardo (NYC) and Micky Friedmann (Berlin) and Kazaky performs.

Main Event: Casino

Saturday, July 2

10pm

Koolhaus – 132 Queens Quay East

Tickets \$70 before the event + \$10.57 tax and service fee

DJ's Hector Fonesca (NYC), Rosabel (Miami/Chicago), Honey Dijon (NYC) and Aron (NYC) will party with you all night long and Sofonda Cox is the jackpot surprise performance.

Revival

Sunday, July 3

10pm

The Government – 132 Queens Quay East

Tickets \$75 before the event + \$11.22 tax and service fee

DJ Peter Rauhofer returns for his annual blow-out party with Shawn Riker (TO), Leomeo (Paris), and Micke Hi helping him heat up the decks with a special performance by Shokra.

TIP: Tickets are not shipped out by mail, they must be picked up with photo ID at the Prism Welcome Centre (location to be announced) within the opening hours and there are NO refunds. If tickets are not picked up, they will be available for pick up at the venue. Tickets can also be purchased at www.priape.com

For Welcome Centre Hours, zip over to www.prismtoronto.com for location:

June 30 to July 2: 12 noon to 9:30pm

July 3: available at venue

Cultural Festivals

Festival of India

July 16 & 17

Centre Island

www.feedyoursoul.to

FREE

The 39th annual Festival of India kicks off on the 16th of July with a beautiful parade down Yonge St. beginning at 11am. It begins at Yonge and Bloor and works its way down to the lake. In this amazing spectacle there will be three 40 foot tall floats that are hand pulled by

participants. Hope they've been working out! Onlookers are encouraged to chant along to the world famous Hare Krishna mantra. There is something for everyone. The colourful festival continues for the weekend on Centre Island with much to do and see and eat. Each festival attendee will be treated to a delicious and FREE, vegetarian feast! YUM, sign me up!

TIP: Don't forget the camera and an extra battery; with a bustling South Asian Bazaar, live music and dance performances, traditional face painting, a massive outdoor tented pavilion and more, you will most definitely be wanting to capture moments. Did I mention admission is FREE?

8th Annual BrazilFestToronto

July 24

12pm – 10pm

Earlscourt Park Toronto

1369 St. Clair Avenue West

St. Clair Avenue West & Caledonia Road

www.brazilfest.ca

FREE

Who doesn't love those sexy Brazilians! Enjoy an afternoon and evening of food and a large variety of styles of music and live performances with sounds from all over the country.

TIP: Attracting over 20,000 guests, BrazilFest is the largest celebration of Brazilian heritage and culture in Canada.



Tigran Iranian Festival

July 21 to 24

Harbourfront Centre

235 Queens Quay West

FREE

Come check out Iranian arts and culture during a four day festival. Tigran 2011 will showcase both local and internationally acclaimed artists and performers of Iranian descent. With music, cinema, visual arts, dance and theatre, there will be much to see and enjoy.

TIP: There will be over 50 performances and over 100,000 people are expected to enjoy the four days.

The Beaches International Jazz Festival

July 15 to 24

Various venues:

Woodbine Park (Coxwell & Lake Shore)

StreetFest Queen St. E. (Woodbine to Beech)

Kew Gardens (Queen & Lee)

www.beachesjazz.com

FREE

Explore Canada's largest jazz festival, with over 75 selected Canadian and international artists performing. If you love jazz music, have never experienced it live or are at all curious, this event is a must.

TIP: This amazing festival offers many different styles of jazz which means there is something for everyone.

Oh So Gay...

Toronto Queer West Arts Festival

August 13 to 19

Various venues

www.queerwest.org

Let's face it—the arts are where it's at! When creativity is paired with imagination, the sky is the limit. This week long festival offers some of the best things we all like to do. Of course anyone can attend, we're great that way—



all are welcome, cause the more, the Mary-er. Grab your pals and explore your gayness here.

TIP: Bookmark www.queerwest.org and visit regularly because they have lots to offer all year long.

Jennifer Hudson with Special Guest Miguel

July 12

8pm

Sony Centre for the Performing Arts – 1 Front St. E.

Tickets \$42.60 - \$92.60

www.livenation.com

Are you kidding me? Jennifer Hudson is coming here to perform! I won't be missing this one—no way! She's simply amazing.

TIP: Get the group together, check out this amazing talent and then discuss after during cocktails and dinner.

TOTEM from Cirque du Soleil

August 11 to September 4

Under the blue-and-yellow Grand Chapiteau at Port Lands – 51 Commissioners Street

Tickets \$65 - \$235

www.cirquedusoleil.com/totem

If you've never been to see a Cirque show, you my dears are seriously missing out. The spectacles they put on are the most creative, entertaining and visually stunning pieces of performance art you will ever see. This story line traces the journey of the human species from its amphibian state to its ultimate desire to fly. GO SEE THIS!

TIP: Be prepared to be blown away. I would recommend that you bring someone with you, to share in this most amazing experience. It must be seen to be believed!

Carrie Fisher: Wishful Drinking

July 12 to August 21

The Royal Alexandra Theatre – 260 King Street West
King West and Simcoe

Tickets \$45 - \$89

www.mirvish.com

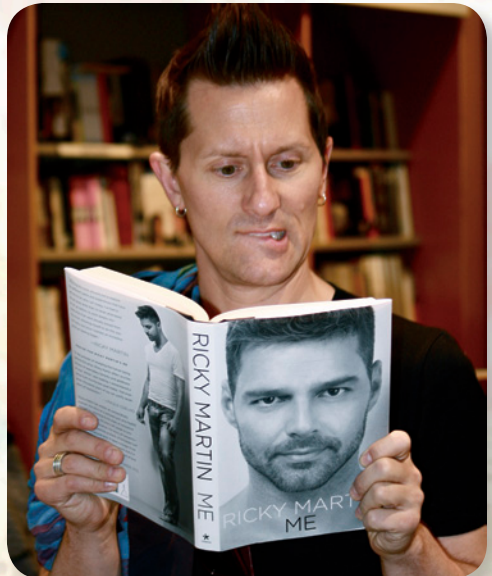
The daughter of Eddie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds and cultural icon, with her portrayal as Princess Leia in the Star Wars trilogy, brings her one woman show to Toronto for a limited engagement.

TIP: If time with Princess Leia isn't enough to get you out to see this, then get to know the brilliant writer and actor behind the icon.

So there we are. If you have any doubts as to how multi-cultural Toronto is, all you need to do is go for a really long walk on a gorgeous summer day, alone or with someone. Take in all the sights, eat lots of food and experience for yourself how diverse we are from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. If you are visiting, I hope you are enjoying yourself and our great city. Tell all your friends and come back to visit us soon. We love meeting new people!

Ricky Boudreau blossomed as a true social butterfly while traveling the world as a professional figure skater for 15 years. He loves the gift of the gab and discovering great events in the city. With an appreciation for culture, great food and beauty, Ricky spends his time very creatively as a professional make-up artist for MAC Pro cosmetics. He has helped artists like Deborah Cox and Dame Shirley Bassey look gorgeous. Hear of a new hot spot? Email him at inthechity@pinkplaymags.com

Photography by Carly Blackwood



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From the Heart

by Shelley A. Harrison



Seeing Heart-to-Heart No Matter the Language of Our Beliefs

When we initially contemplate diversity, the first thing that comes to mind is the colour of our skin. Toronto as a melting pot means seeing East Indian, First Nations, Asian, Black and all colours in between. On Church Street it means seeing men or women hand-in-hand, and transgendered people among us.

Yet there is a deeper difference besides skin and gender and sexuality—that of our spiritual orientation. Sixty years ago in Canada, you were Christian of some denomination or you were nothing, at least not publicly. And if you were gay, that usually meant you were ostracized, even by your own family. But as the decades have passed, spiritual diversity has changed the landscape of our connection to the Divine.

On a typical day in my healing practice, I find myself in many conversations about a client's connection to the Divine. I try to respect the language that works for them, while also sitting in my own personal relationship to Source. Most people who come to see me are what I would describe as “New Age” in their connection. They feel connected to energy, consciousness, maybe angels and guides.

Most have moved away from the traditional religion they grew up with. Fewer have prayer practices or a deep sense of surrender to a force greater than them which guides their life. Imagine my surprise when a young Muslim woman came through my door. She was wearing her black hijab, which framed her beautiful, intelligent face, complimenting black Lululemon Athletica sweat pants and hoodie.

Jessica teaches yoga and fitness at a gym. She was not born into Islam, but her heart has found its true home there, as well as true love in her Muslim husband, after a long spiritual search that began in her early teens. Imagine me, a recent initiate into the mysteries of the Christian path, laying hands on Jessica, and calling on the energy of the Holy Spirit where my heart connection lies. In our second healing I was profoundly moved by the strong field of energy I felt around her that I could tell was generated by her devout prayer practice. It had a quality I have never felt before, since I have not had the honour of working with someone Muslim. I could tell it was generated very specifically by the repeated prayers of her tradition, a field of grace and protection. We talk about our journeys to understand our deeper path within our faiths, even though she is speaking about Allah, and I am speaking about what I like to call the Holy One. Religious dogma wouldn't agree, but we

both know we are talking about the same All One.

Cultural diversity brings with it spiritual diversity. Becoming a local and a global community means being open to the Heart Path that others follow and embracing the unity of our humanity within the diversity of our expressions. It's not always easy to create dialogue unless our own heart is in the right place. How do we stay open to others without fear?

When engaging in dialogue with someone who has a different spiritual path than you, try this advice on the art of listening.

1. Realize you and the other person intrinsically have the same needs.
2. Invoke the presence of your own divine connection and take an intent to connect to the other person. The Divine brings grace, so you will have grace.
3. Keep looking at the other person's face and keep eye contact. Verbal communication is about 20% of our full expression. If you are really connected to your divine and your intent, you will hear more than just words.
4. Slow down your breathing and become conscious of what is happening within you. Every emotion has its distinctive breath pattern. Breathing and watching within allows you to clear inner space.
5. From this place of awareness, respond with a desire to help, or respond to the other person's need (which is the same as your need).

This is a much different dynamic than being right or getting our own point across. I really encourage you to try it. It will take you to a place of relating that all spiritual paths teach: humility, ego

subordination, compassion, love and unity within creating outward unity, or cessation of conflict. It will help you to see heart-to-heart, from one human being to another, rather than from head-to-head, with one belief system against another.

I would like to leave you with this quote:

"One incarnates for a life task that is best served by all one's physical parameters, including the body. Many individuals may choose a male or female body without the traditional sexual attraction toward the opposite sex, simply because that is not the type of life experience needed by the individual in that particular lifetime. There are no judgements in the spiritual world as to how one chooses to express one's sexuality. Rather the goal is to express one's sexuality with love, truth, wisdom, and courage." (Barbara Brennan, *Hands of Light*)

Similarly, we are called to which spiritual tradition will best serve our learning in this life. We can find the love, truth, wisdom, and courage, to be open to others' ways and drop our fear of difference, whether it's spiritual or sexual. I have to believe that the Divine loves each of us equally and that it is only our own human limitations that create division.

Shelley A. Harrison is an Energy Healer in Ottawa. She graduated from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing 4-year professional training and has been working in private practice for 10 years. She visits Toronto regularly to see clients and visit her brother, Jeff, the editor of this magazine. You can write Shelley at fromtheheart@pinkplaymags.com or visit her at www.doveheart.ca.



Summer Horoscopes

by Micki Lee

PISCES (Feb 19-Mar 20)

July: This is right time to make decisions pertaining to your career.

August: There are high possibilities of you getting into problems with your colleagues.

September: Possibility of travel with family is foreseen.

ARIES (Mar 21-Apr 19)

July: An easy going month at work.

August: Communication will be the key, both at work and at home.

September: Don't lose any business opportunities coming your way.

TAURUS (Apr 20-May 20)

July: Finance and romance on your mind and in your life too.

August: Life should be full of wonderful surprises.

September: Energy might come out as aggression too.

GEMINI (May 21-Jun 20)

July: This month will bring a few challenges in the start.

August: Short trips during weekends are not ruled out.

September: Your ideas and team building attitude will cause things to turn your way.

CANCER (Jun 21-Jul 22)

July: Caution is advised during the third week of the month. Health issues might creep in.

August: Personal and professional life will blossom during this period.

September: You will be in the spotlight because of your hard work and dedication.

LEO (Jul 23-Aug 22)

July: Keep fingers crossed for exciting career opportunities coming your way!

August: Personal life will see a strong boost through meeting old friends and making new acquaintances.

September: Money is sure to find its way to your bank account.

VIRGO (Aug 23-Sept 22)

July: You will get considerable support from teammates and colleagues.

August: Might get a bit slow and frustrating.

September: Traveling is in the cards for business.

LIBRA (Sept 23-Oct 22)

July: Health could be the biggest cause of concern.

August: Keep patience and take things as they come.

September: There will not be much success coming in even after much hard work and long working hours.

SCORPIO (Oct 23-Nov 21)

July: Work done in the office will show up and will upgrade your position in front of your superiors.

August: Those in love can expect some forward movement in their relationships.

September: Don't lose any opportunity to show your gesture to those for whom you care.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov 22-Dec 21)

July: Welcome note in the form of less work pressure and stress.

August: Rely on your intuition in making important decisions at work.

September: Some not so good news will be coming your way at the end of the month.

CAPRICORN (Dec 22-Jan 19)

July: Those looking for a change of job or a career hike might get an opportunity.

August: Singles awaiting marriage might get lucky finding their life partner in the first half of the month.

September: The month will be full of social events and activities.

AQUARIUS (Jan 20-Feb 18)

July: It's the right time to increase your skills and knowledge through some advanced programs.

August: Money and finance will not be a problem, but the spending might be!

September: You will not be able to give much of your time at home with your family.

Micki Lee is a business woman from Oshawa who uses the stars as a guide for her daily life.



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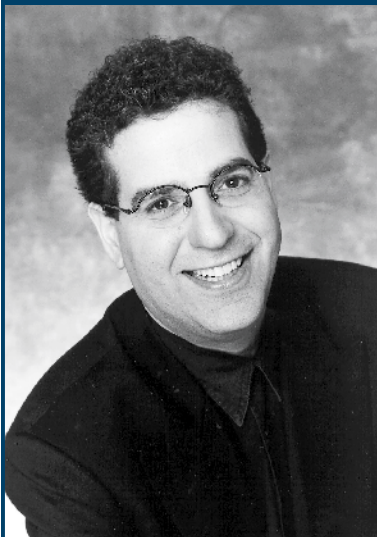


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Looking Back

Lisa Gore

By May 2009, I'd had a long-distance relationship with my Canadian partner for a year but, living in Jamaica, I had been involved in lesbian activism and had become very "hot"—I had my car vandalized, with swear words all over it. It was a good time to leave.

Coming to Canada was a very different experience for me than for most refugees. Most refugees who come here have a very difficult time but I came into my own space with my partner. I was able to feel very comfortable immediately, to explore and get to know my city in a way that many others wouldn't have.

But it didn't mean I didn't mourn. I did mourn. I missed my country, my culture. I missed the butcher I argued with every Saturday. I couldn't stand the man but I now found myself missing him. I missed the smell of my country and I missed my Mom something fierce. I found myself unable to even talk about her for quite some time.

Two days after I came to Canada, my partner took me out to dinner on Church Street. She parked at one end of the street so we'd have to walk the entire strip to the restaurant. She did that on purpose because she then took my

hand and my heart skipped a beat. I did not feel that we could do this! But I realized that I was bringing my own experiences of persecution in Jamaica with me. She held my hand and I felt elated but scared, a weird mix of feelings, but I realized that no one was looking at us. That was my 'a-ha' moment.

Then I spent two weeks terrified I'd never be able to go back home. Would I even WANT to go back?

Coming to work for the 519 has soothed my soul, using my experience to help other people who are new to Canada feel welcome, taking them from the beginning of the refugee process right through settling them and integrating them into the LGBTQ communities and beyond. The 519 has never done anything like this before. The program flourished and I flourished with it.

I'm 45 years old but moving to Toronto has reduced me to a 15-year-old. I feel like a teenager again, learning all kinds of new things—some exciting, some scary. It's a journey and I'm enjoying the journey.

Lisa Gore is the LGBT Newcomer Services Coordinator at the 519 Community Centre.

Photography by Carly Blackwood

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