

THE UNIONVILLE HOWL



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Indigenous History Month

By Madeline Giuliano



ILLUSTRATION BY ANDREA LEUNG

June is Indigenous History Month. This month brings opportunities to recognise and address the challenges that Indigenous communities continue to face to this day.

One of the most pressing issues that Indigenous communities face is overall poorer health. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognised that colonization is a fundamental underlying determinant of Indigenous health in Canada. Chronic illnesses like heart disease, respiratory problems and diabetes are much more likely to occur in Indigenous peoples and communities due to the links between income, health and other social factors.

Everything, from health and employment to education, is due in part to Generational Trauma. Historical or generational trauma occurs when trauma is passed down through generations. To put it in other words, when people are hurting as a result of traumatic events, they can pass that feeling on to their children, who, in turn, pass it off to their own children. Residential schools deprived Indigenous youths of their communities, their culture, their language and their families. Many of the survivors returned to their communities feeling disconnected and lost. Their children often inherited their pain and sense of loss. As a result, a cycle of suffering was created.

What are schools doing to help? The York Region District School Board (YRDSB) has released its Indigenous Education and Equity Strategy which includes how the board plans to consult with Indigenous communities, remove systemic barriers for students, implement protocols to address discrimination, and provide respectful spaces for smudging and other faith-related practices. These are only a few of the actions YRDSB has promised to take and we highly encourage students and their families to read the strategies for themselves.

Changes need to be made both in the way we currently do things as a country and also how we plan to approach things in the future. Canada is built on the oppression of Indigenous peoples and the systems we have in place are designed to perpetuate these inequities. YRDSB is taking steps in the right direction, but we all have to play our part. We need to continue to stay educated, support Indigenous businesses and activists, and fight for Indigenous social justice and equity rights.

Canada

What Asian Heritage Month Means to Me

By Lois Chan

The first time I became acutely aware of the bridge between being ‘Chinese’ and being ‘Canadian’ was in front of my grade five teacher, as she scanned the list of possible topics I could do for my history assignment.

“Why don’t you look into the CPR?” she suggested, one of the last rows that remained uncrossed.

The Canadian Pacific Railway. Trains didn’t have any appeal to me; they were just as they are: steel and coal and smoke. When my teacher noted the involvement of Chinese immigrants in the creation of the railway, my interest was piqued, especially when she said, “It was tragic.”

I didn’t know what she meant.

With research came the heavy weight of Chinese-Canadian history: one Chinese worker died for every mile of track laid through the Rocky Mountains. They were paid wages half, a third, a quarter as much as white men. Explosive nitroglycerin, malnutrition, and the winter chill became the end of many lives. The Chinese Exclusion Act followed since their services were no longer needed.

I am a child of first generation immigrants, but the injustices that spanned the textbook pages before me bled into my skin. What I realized then was that I would never be *just* Canadian. I would always be Chinese too.

The 2021 theme of Asian Heritage Month is “Recognition, Resilience, and Resolve”. While this month calls for the celebration of Asian-Canadian achievements, it also serves to solemnly remember racial injustices of the past. It is through the acknowledgment of the past that we can create a better future for the diverse generations that occupy Canada.

The recognition of Asian-Canadian contributions to society brings light to the abilities of experts in their fields; pioneers that exceeded in spite of discrimination and proudly embraced their heritage throughout their rise to excellence. By taking note of our origins, we can find the beauty and importance of culture present in our nation. Where the hit *CBC* sitcom *Kim’s Convenience* delivered witty, heartfelt jokes within the familiar setting of Toronto, it also pointedly paid homage to the Korean-Canadian experience. In Raymond Moriyama’s architectural works, his designs for iconic Canadian buildings—such as the Toronto Reference Library and Ontario Science Centre—have been cited as reasons for improving Canadian and Japanese relations, especially with his status as a WWII internment camp survivor. Establishing impressive feats in Canadian history does not mean intersectional Asian identities should fade away under a monolithic stamp of being *just* Canadian. By proudly waving a flag of many colours, Canada can properly represent the true face of its people.

People who have endured racism and exclusion over the years and continue to face hardships deserve to be recognised. The strength it takes to bear discrimination is extremely commendable—especially when those of Asian heritage paved the way to educate others through their strength. For novelist Shyam Selvadurai, exploring cultural themes provides a way for readers to relate or understand his experiences as a gay Sri Lankan who grew up around conflict based on ethnicity. When Dr. Durai Pal Pandia first arrived in British Columbia, he saw that the immigration policy and voting rights were not equitable for Indo-Canadians. His dedication to change was key in urging the government to make necessary developments for its newer inhabitants. Land makes no judgments, and the soil of our shores welcomes every step, regardless of race or origin. Just because there may be looming obstacles in the Asian-Canadian journey, the ground that is Canada keeps us standing strong.

It is imperative to have the resolve to fight against anti-Asian discrimination because the commitment to better our communities is what makes Canada a more welcoming place. By actively creating and taking opportunities to integrate and highlight Asian cultures in our country, harmony is found through social diversity.

The theme ‘Recognition, Resilience, and Resolve’ for 2021’s Asian Heritage Month encapsulates the attitude needed in overcoming the past and present racism in our country. It is through proud Asian-Canadians that we know historical injustices do not define our nation—rather, our diverse citizens make up the Canadian image. There is no need to separate *Asian* from *Canadian*.

Imagine that we are all on the same train. One made of more than steel, coal, and smoke. It is a train teeming with the beautiful laughter of many tongues—professions of joy in many dialects. Each seat in the cabins, occupied by people swathed in the bright, rich colours of kurtas, cheongsams, and áo dài. The aroma of spiced dishes drifting in out the windows, each one made in the name of love and memory and tradition.

It is a train with no particular destination or any specific, existent terminus. It is a train that runs through time, with the nose pointed towards ‘*progress*’, ‘*hope*’, the ‘*future*’. Perhaps it is named *Canada*; the letters or characters of it in multiple scripts, dashed across the sides.

Yet—I like to think it is named *Home*. The forces of nature, age, nor hate cannot wear such an inscription out of existence.

Notable Canadian Women

By Lois Chan

Canada is a country that pays its dues to the influential women that have been proud to call themselves citizens of this land. In every field, whether it be science, politics, economics, art, or activism, these Canadian women of diverse backgrounds have empowered all those that follow in their steps.

In 1944, when Irene Ayako Uchida enrolled in the University of Toronto to obtain a master’s degree in social work, she was unexpectedly introduced to the field of genetics by her professor. What happened then, to a 27 year old seamstress with a bachelor’s in English Literature, was a transformation into Canada’s lead pioneer in the development of cytogenetics. Her scientific discoveries have served to secure universal health to this day, enabling early screenings for chromosomal abnormalities.

There are many titles held by Jean Augustine that emphasize her status as a trailblazing Canadian icon. After all, becoming the first Black female politician elected to Parliament, then Cabinet, and as the Fairness Commissioner are no small feats. On top of her political career, Augustine established herself as an advocate for social justice; she became the central figure in urging Canada to recognize February as Black History Month. Her dedication to cultural appreciation has helped the country progress into a nation recognized for its diversity.

Having been born into a politically active Jewish family, it was no surprise that Naomi Klein has a penchant for using her voice boldly. As a social activist that takes to the press to voice her call for neoliberalism and anti-globalization, Klein has written a number of critically acclaimed treatises featured on the New York Times Bestseller lists. At the core of her works, Klein aims to broach the realm of ethics that is being negated within the global economy — specifically the suppression and progress of class, climate issues, and politics.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ANDREA LEUNG

Vivek Shraya is a Canadian accomplished in nearly every aspect possible, as an artist with a portfolio that encompasses music, literature, visual arts, theatre, and film. She began songwriting at the age of 13, going on to produce one of CBC's best Canadian albums in 2017, *Part-Time Woman*. As a writer, Shraya has insightfully examined the themes of gender, culture, and social justice through graphic novels, books, and children's literature. Currently, she is a board director of the Teagan and Sara Foundation for LGBTQ+ women, and a mentor to young writers of colour through her imprint V.S. Books.

Each generation has a group of activists that fight for justice and prosperity, so the youth of present-day Canada have Autumn Peltier as their very own hero. The 16 year old clean water advocate from the Wikwemikong First Nation on Manitoulin Island was honoured as a water protector and warrior by the Assembly of First Nations. Peltier was appointed Chief Water Commissioner by the Anishinabek Nations, continuing her great-aunt Josephine Mandamin's legacy after her death. Her work has brought her three consecutive nominations for the International Children's Peace Prize, and universal renown.

These women are just a few of many that have contributed to change, not just in Canada, but in the world as representatives of our country. They remind us through their work and character that everyone has a voice, a set of hands, and the heart to make a difference.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANDREA LEUNG

Kamloops Residential School

By Madeline Giuliano

Please be warned that readers may find some of these details disturbing.

In light of recent events there is truly no way to talk about Indigenous History Month without speaking about the absolutely tragic discovery at the Kamloops Residential School. Residential schools were church-run, government-sponsored schools that Indigenous children were sent to nationwide. They were designed to both convert and assimilate children into “Canadian Society”. Their goals were forceful and carried out with a racist mindset that was only made worse by the abuse these children faced. The term for these schools was first established after 1880. The last residential school in the country to close down was closed in 1996. It is estimated that 150,000 First Nation, Inuit, and Métis children were subjected to these schools.

On May 27 2021, Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced that they had uncovered the remains of 215 Indigenous children buried at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Kukpi7 (Chief) Rosanne Casimir believes that the deaths of these missing children were undocumented and covered up by the church and the school. Some of these children were as young as three years old. The Residential School closed in 1978.

In response to this shocking discovery, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau vowed “concrete action” including speaking to his cabinet ministers about supporting survivors and communities. In the wake of the gravesite discovery many Canadians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have said that they are refusing to celebrate Canada Day this year since they are no longer proud of their country. There have even been renewed calls to cancel the holiday altogether. Whatever the outcome may be, it is important for everyone living in Canada to reflect on the injustices that Indigenous people continue to face and determine what we can do to support reconciliation moving forward.

World

COVID Vaccine: Behind the Scenes

By Amber Liu

For many, the ability to finally book a vaccination appointment is a comforting light at the end of a long, bumpy tunnel. The COVID-19 vaccines currently being distributed across the globe are no small feat, having been developed in record time—less than twelve months, where the previous record (the mumps vaccine, developed 1960) was four years. Understandably, people will have questions: how is it possible for this newfangled mRNA (messenger Ribonucleic Acid) tech to be so effective? How many doses have been given to Ontarians so far? Most importantly, perhaps: will your arm really hurt *that* much? This article seeks to answer those questions without bogging your brain down with information as best as it can. However, there's no guarantee it'll be quite as interesting as the introduction.

Traditional vaccines usually take around a decade to develop and months to produce, since they work by injecting a piece of a weakened or inactivated virus into the body to trigger an immune response and develop antibodies. The development process must be tailored for a specific virus or bacterium.

However, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines use a revolutionary new “plug and play” approach: mRNA, or messenger RNA, which acts as a recipe and teaches cells how to make a harmless protein (“spike protein”) that causes an immune response. It may be good to know that the mRNA is synthetic (artificially made), and that it does not enter the nucleus of the cell, where DNA is stored. The mRNA is delivered into the upper arm; after the protein is made, the cell discards the instructions. The spike protein is then displayed on the cell's surface, and the body recognizes it as foreign. In retaliation, antibodies are produced, and an immune response is mounted against the protein, the way one would occur against an actual COVID-19 infection.

This is why most people will feel side effects of some sort—soreness at the site of injection, fatigue, headaches, and mild flu-like symptoms are all completely normal, and usually pass in a few days. Temperatures above 40°C and other extreme symptoms (hives, swelling of the face or mouth, trouble breathing, extreme drowsiness) should be reported to a doctor. The body develops an ‘immune memory’ in the weeks following vaccination, and will be protected in the future in case of infection, without ever having to face the serious consequences of COVID-19. The first dose primes immunological memory; the second dose, which solidifies it, gives 95% protection against COVID-19.

All the vaccines approved for use in Canada have undergone rigorous testing, with the most recently approved being the single-dose Janssen vaccine. Canada is currently undergoing its largest vaccination campaign in history—according to *Our World in Data*.

With more and more people getting their first dose, students and teachers alike are finally feeling something they haven't felt in ages: optimism. What's not to look forward to? Restaurants, amusement parks, trips to the beach... and of course, school. All in due time, though—Ontario as it is right now isn't quite set to reopen properly for a while. In the meantime, though, here are some students' thoughts on getting vaccinated:

“Things are finally starting to feel normal. Hopefully getting vaccinated can get people back together again.” — Nika, from SVS

“It makes me happy that I am now a part of the Canadian COVID vaccination graph shown on Google.” — Cindy, from UHS

“I feel more protected and I'm glad people around me are more protected as a result as well...” — Grace, from SVS

It is easy to see why the phrase “May you live in interesting times” is such a potent curse. Returning to boring normalcy sounds *far* more exciting than living through a historical event, as funny as that may sound. However, it is only through the efforts of countless researchers and scientists that we are able to have effective vaccines distributed across the globe within a year of COVID-19's first few cases. Then—and only then—can we bid goodbye to the days of online-schooling-induced eye strain, back pain, and stress.

Insight

Mental Health: Strategies

By Isabelle Li

As society becomes increasingly aware of the importance of maintaining our mental health, we are actively seeking new strategies to improve it. And rightfully so, because mental health is considered to be just as important as physical health!

Canada's history of mental health features significant recent developments in how it is understood. According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, we have advanced from the ancient belief of mental illness being caused by supernatural forces, to opening the first insane asylums in the early 1800s, which were later reformed to treat mentally ill patients in hospitals specifically designed to *help* instead of *punish* them. Recently, funding has been drastically increased for research and treatment regarding various mental health issues. Nowadays, the maintenance of mental health is widely known to be important, and many resources are available to the public to help them regulate their mental health. However, mental illness is currently the most common health problem in Canada because while our universal healthcare covers patients with psychiatric illnesses, many mental health issues are not psychiatric illnesses, and are therefore not covered. Unfortunately, there is a lot of room for improvement when it comes to the selection of mental health services offered to Canadians, as the industry is still fairly new.

In school, we are taught to maintain our physical health by getting enough sleep and eating healthy foods, so why isn't mental health taught as well? Shouldn't the mental health of students be prioritized just as much, if not more than physical health? After all, many students experience a lot of school-related stress, especially in high school where we obsess over grades, our futures, college and university admissions, peer groups, and relationships. In fact, the Canadian Mental Health Association reports that 3.2 million youth in our country aged 12-19 are at risk for developing depression

Here are some basic strategies for improving mental health that should be taught in school:

When you have a bad day, talk about your feelings. This can be with someone you trust, such as a parent, friend, or guidance counselor. If you do not wish to share your feelings, you can make a video and audio recording of yourself talking about your thoughts. This will allow you to reflect on them and think your feelings over. Alternatively, you can even talk to a pet or find a quiet area to speak to yourself. Now, this may seem a bit odd, but talking to yourself has been scientifically proven to reduce stress and anxiety by enabling you to see your situation from a different perspective, according to the University of Michigan.

If talking isn't something you enjoy, expressing your thoughts non-verbally is an option as well. For example, you can keep a journal or scrapbook where you write about your feelings or artistically express your thoughts through doodling.

You can exercise whenever you're feeling overwhelmed by negative emotions. Studies have shown that physical activity directly improves self-esteem and confidence. Exercising is also a healthy way to let off some steam and reflect on your thoughts. Some examples of physical activity you can do include going for walks to your favourite places, doing yoga, dancing to your favourite songs, and basically any other activity you enjoy that involves movement.

Another option is to take some time to do an activity you enjoy. This could be playing video games, listening to music, or watching a movie. Doing so will give you some time to cool off and process your strong emotions so that you can think about your situation objectively, and eventually come to a well thought-out decision on your next course of action.

Practice mindfulness on a regular basis to improve your long-term mental health. You can meditate for a few minutes each day, or do other activities of your choosing, like Tai Chi or yoga. Although this may seem unnecessary when you first start out, you will find yourself approaching situations as you go about your daily life with reduced stress once you practise it often enough. There are many apps that can guide you through the meditation process, such as Headspace, Insight Timer, Zen, Simple Habit, Medito, and Meditation.

Self-love is essential in retaining a healthy state of mind. Basically, it refers to prioritizing your mental health and taking care of your needs before anything else. A simple way to begin is to start your mornings by waking up at a consistent time every day, looking yourself in the mirror and saying something positive. You should also try to get into healthy habits such as making your bed, washing up, and eating a nice, proper breakfast each morning. A little bit goes a long way!

Interviews

Get to Know your Teacher with Ms. Barazesh!

By Syeda Shanzay Kamran and Lois Chan

What's your favourite book these days?

One of the two novels I'm currently reading and enjoying is *Washington Black* by Esi Edugyan. It deals with the slave trade in Barbados; it's beautifully written. The second book I'm reading is nonfiction, *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi, which gets into the gender climate of Iran. The author actually quit her job so she could have more freedom as a woman to discuss feminist topics, and started these meeting circles to discuss novels. One of them being *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov. The book gives great insight to what women experience and their hardships, especially within academics and my home country. There's a lot to take in. They're both slow reads because they're heavy topics to process.

How do you handle stress as a teacher?

I don't handle it very well, I think! A lot of people say I look calm all the time, but there are a lot of things to shuffle and my own expectations to work with. It can definitely cause a lot of procrastination on my end, but over the years I've learned some tricks. Breathing and meditation, trying to get movement and exercise in – I've been walking to and from school, getting that fresh air –, accepting that you need breaks and not feeling guilty for them, and treating yourself to happiness. If you want something that'll relax you, go for it! Society measures our value by how productive we are but we are being productive if we take some time to ourselves by listening to our wants and needs. Taking care of yourself, though it may not be part of your work, is a part of yourself and will make you not burnt-out; maintaining healthy boundaries.

What is your favourite thing about being a teacher?

Being able to interact with students and being surrounded by youth to understand their perspectives. I'm continually amazed by how open-minded this generation is, to the point I wish I was a student at this age. There is so much compassion and kindness in everyone; there is an impressive sense for social justice.

Why did you decide to become a teacher?

Having restrictions in Iran meant that when I came to Canada in Grade 1, I saw that many people weren't invested in education compared to Iran, even without censorship and access to resources. So I wanted to have a role in allowing students to know more about the world and cultivate their curiosity. As I went through high school and university, that desire to teach and expose everyone to ideas and information around the world only grew. I valued the influence and power that teachers have to make society advance and progress.

Who had the biggest impact on the person you are today?

I would say my grandparents on my mother's side. I was very close to them. My grandmother passed away ten years ago. They taught me my values and I have a lot of memories with them. My love for reading comes from my grandfather. I was surrounded by books because of him. He'd always be reading. I get my thirst for knowledge from him. They were extremely open-minded and accepting of people from different walks of life. They always supported me and my art education. They're my heroes.

Who is your favourite author?

Haruki Murakami, his writing is just absolutely amazing. There are so many emotions and experiences that people go through that are hard to express, but Murakami is able to translate and present them in his works. It's very interesting how Japanese as a language allows for a focus on the psychology of human beings. The way he explains them through everyday occurrences is relatable.

Do you read self-help books?

Not so much, I haven't been fully pulled in by them, though I've tried some. But there is one author, Pema Chödrön, who is an American-Tibetan Buddhist that writes about being able to cope with difficulties in life. I'm big on meditation so her perspectives on suffering, acceptance, and endurance are very strong messages and tools to take into consideration.

Robert Wiersema: Author & Book Critic

By Syeda Shanzay Kamran



PHOTO BY ATHENA MCKENZIE

ROBERT WIERSEMA IS THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF BEFORE I WAKE, BEDTIME STORY, AND FOUR OTHER BOOKS. HIS BOOK REVIEWS REGULARLY APPEAR IN THE TORONTO STAR, THE GLOBE AND MAIL, QUILL & QUIRE AND MANY OTHERS. CURRENTLY, HE IS A PROFESSOR AT VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY WHERE HE TEACHES CREATIVE WRITING. IN THIS INTERVIEW HE TALKS ABOUT HIS JOURNEY OF BECOMING A WRITER, INSIGHT INTO THE OBSTACLES HE HAS FACED AND GUIDES US ON HOW TO BETTER AS WRITERS.

Take us through your writing career.

I always wanted to be a writer. I wanted to write comic books. In grade two, I wrote this long serial picture that ran across many, many pages of paper taped together. People would ask me what was happening here and there because the drawings were so terrible. I eventually just gave up on the drawing. From then on, I thought writing would be what I was doomed to do and I kept up with that. When I was in high school I wrote a lot; I spent most of my weekends writing really bad short novels, coming of age stories, screenplays, plus reviews and columns for the school and local paper. I worked on the university paper during my freshman year and did a couple of years of creative writing, then transferred into English. After, I kind of gave up for a while but finding out that I was going to be a father made me panic. For the course of three months, I wrote that panic into what would be my first published novel, *Before I Wake*, pouring my fears about fatherhood into fiction. Just before that—rather at the same time—I started reviewing for money, and got on as a freelancer with *Quill and Quire* magazine, which added to my portfolio. I still write a fair bit for the *Toronto Star* and the *Quill and Quire*.

How did you find your own voice as a writer?

This is one of the trickiest things I find in teaching because I think your voice is going to be there whether you are aware of it or not. One of the classics is to type out pieces of someone else's work. Whether it's Stephen King or Margaret Atwood, see what their voice is like. Additionally, a lot of writing has to do with trust; trusting yourself and trusting your reader. When it comes to finding their voice, people get frustrated and that worry blocks it. If you just let yourself relax, let yourself write naturally and abandon the thought of impressing someone, abandon the idea that you are writing only to get published. For me, it was when I stopped taking my creative writing classes because I was trying so hard to impress people, trying too hard to find my place in that literary community and these people were, in my mind, so much more serious than I was, so much better than I was, so much more well-read than I was. I was putting around basically these costumes to try to fit in and eventually I realized that it wasn't a good use of my time and my money. I was getting further away from what I wanted to do. I transferred out of creative writing and did my degree in English. Only then, when I was just writing for myself, with no one to impress, no community to fit into—that's when I found my voice.

Are you currently working on any writing projects?

I don't usually talk about works in progress, but I can tell you where this one came from. It was rooted in a newspaper story that I saw eight summers ago about two girls that were ten and twelve, who disappeared from a provincial campground in Ontario, where they were camping with their parents. They were found, and they were fine, but the idea of two young girls disappearing into the woods made the hair on my neck stand up. So there is a story here that is going to address central questions about what happened to these two girls in my novel when they are gone for three days and what happens to them in the woods, because neither of them can remember. Also, what happens twenty to sixteen years later, when they have been living with uncertainty in their lives, trying to figure out in their own way what happened back then. What happens when they go back into the woods?

What are some suggestions you would give to young writers on improving their writing?

My main suggestions and this is for writers of all ages: don't just write when you have something due, don't just write when you have a big deadline, write as much as you can and read as much as you can. If you don't read, you won't have any sense of what the world you are entering into is like. Don't just read the things you like, read things from all over the place... If you do both of those things and you are faithful to it, your writing can't help but get better, and you will blossom.

What were some of the challenges that you faced early on in your career and even now?

Early on in my career, there was frustration. I mean this expectedly continued—the sort of logistical stuff about the publishing industry: not being able to find a publisher, not thinking I was good enough, and all of the personal stuff. More problematic I think was when I went through a few years of depression, and was working through a first draft. The revision wasn't working. The guidance that I had gotten from some people wasn't appropriate, and that sort of blocked up the pipeline for me. So I had those two things overlapping, which led to a couple of years where I didn't do any work. It was only by getting on anti-depression meds and deciding to actually shelf that book, not to abandon it, that things changed. Since then my writing has been relatively free and clear.

Spencer Williams: Clinical Research Analyst

By Syeda Shanzay Kamran

SPENCER WILLIAMS STARTED HIS CAREER AS A CLINICAL RESEARCH ANALYST AT YORK UNIVERSITY. SINCE THEN HE HAS BEEN CONDUCTING RESEARCH STUDIES ON VARIOUS TOPICS SUCH AS MENTAL HEALTH, FITNESS AND MANY OTHERS. IN THIS INTERVIEW, HE TALKS ABOUT HIS JOURNEY, THE SKILLS NEEDED FOR HIS OCCUPATION, HOW HE HANDLES STRESS AND ADVICE FOR STUDENTS WANTING TO ENTER THIS FIELD.

Can you please walk me through your journey from high school until now?

I grew up in rural Southwestern Ontario. I wanted to pursue some kind of career in Health Sciences. One of the challenges was that at my school there weren't many opportunities for health sciences and the guidance counsellors were trying their best. We were kind of looking at what I liked, and so we were looking at becoming a Phys. Ed. teacher. I did want to be a male nurse which was mostly frowned upon by my family and my guidance counsellor. That turned me off quickly and at that time I didn't have a lot of mentorship so I just kinda went with the flow. I studied at York in September of 2011. I studied Kinesiology Health Sciences and minored in Psychology. I was interested in not just how movement helps people heal but understanding the underlying psychology of mental health. I was in this one course, Body's Light, which was taught by Dr. Noah Wayne and it was all about exposing upper-level undergraduate students to meditation. The best feature was that for twenty to thirty minutes for those hour and a half classes we would actually practice meditation. In one of the second last lectures, there was a guest speaker, Dr. Paula Rivero, who brought forward his research about mindfulness meditation and exercises and things for health coaching in different institutions. I asked a lot of questions and he got into all the science of it.

He totally blew my mind. Shortly after, another professor told me that Dr. Paula Rivero was interested in having me as a graduate student. That led to me joining the Master of Science in Kinesiology Health Sciences. He took me under his wing and mentored me. I worked for 17 to 20 hours a week. It consisted of helping professors, marking and grading, teaching tutorials, labs, stuff like that. After that, I participated in a research trial at York University called the Mindfulness Virtual Communities project and the other one was the health coach trial with the Centre of Addiction and Mental Health. I would say to students that it is really good to set your eyes on a certain career but I have learned to respect in a mindful way and to honour your interests as they change.

How do you handle the stress that comes with this line of work?

Every job has deadlines. Pressure is the nature of work. You are trying to balance a lot of portfolios. Everything has different timelines. We work with a lot of grant funding so when grants want to give you the money that's when things start and when they want to take away the money, that's when things end. You have to be able to project manage and be able to know what I need to be working on today, what I should be working on this week, this month. Coordination can actually help manage the group stress so that you are not working hard on something that is flexible at the moment and will be important six months from now. For my personal stuff, physical activity, mindfulness meditation, yoga - it is important to find things that you actually like and what makes you feel relaxed. Use scheduling software, Google calendar to help you stay organized because that is what computers are for. This helps me use my head space for other things.



PHOTO BY EHEALTH INNOVATION
UNIVERSITY HEALTH NETWORK

What are some of the skills that you have developed during your time as a research assistant?

You are going to be supporting a team. That's the most important thing to remember, nothing really important or worth doing gets done without working in teams. Teams can be big or small. I think it is really important to get to know yourself, what your personalities are like, and try to focus on your strengths while working within those teams. Knowing that everyone in your team is going to have strengths and weaknesses is why it is okay to be vulnerable and ask lots of questions. Also, be open to getting to know your teammates as there can be a lot of good stuff that can come from that.

What advice would you give someone wanting to enter your field?

Things I would really encourage students to do, and this can start as early as high school, is to get involved and feel connected. Find out if your school has paid and unpaid internships and co-op. These are awesome entry point vehicles into the workplace. We learn so much more from walking around mindlessly than we do from reading a chapter from the textbook and that's because we learn best when we are with people. You can turn your interest into connecting with real industry experts who want to take you on for internships and co-op. These things are going to help you with your people skills, focus on communication, learning how to be assertive, being patient with others, learning how to regulate your emotions and things like that. That's what is really important and you only really get from getting involved in group activities. I have found great opportunities to meet people from programs such as meetup.com and others. I encourage students to be open-minded and try to get involved as much as they can. School should come first but part of your education should be to have this well-rounded kind of working professional experience. Connections are so important. When people make emotional connections with you that means so much more than what hard skills you know. No one should take shortcuts in life but you might find yourself not writing as many applications because of the existing relationships.

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