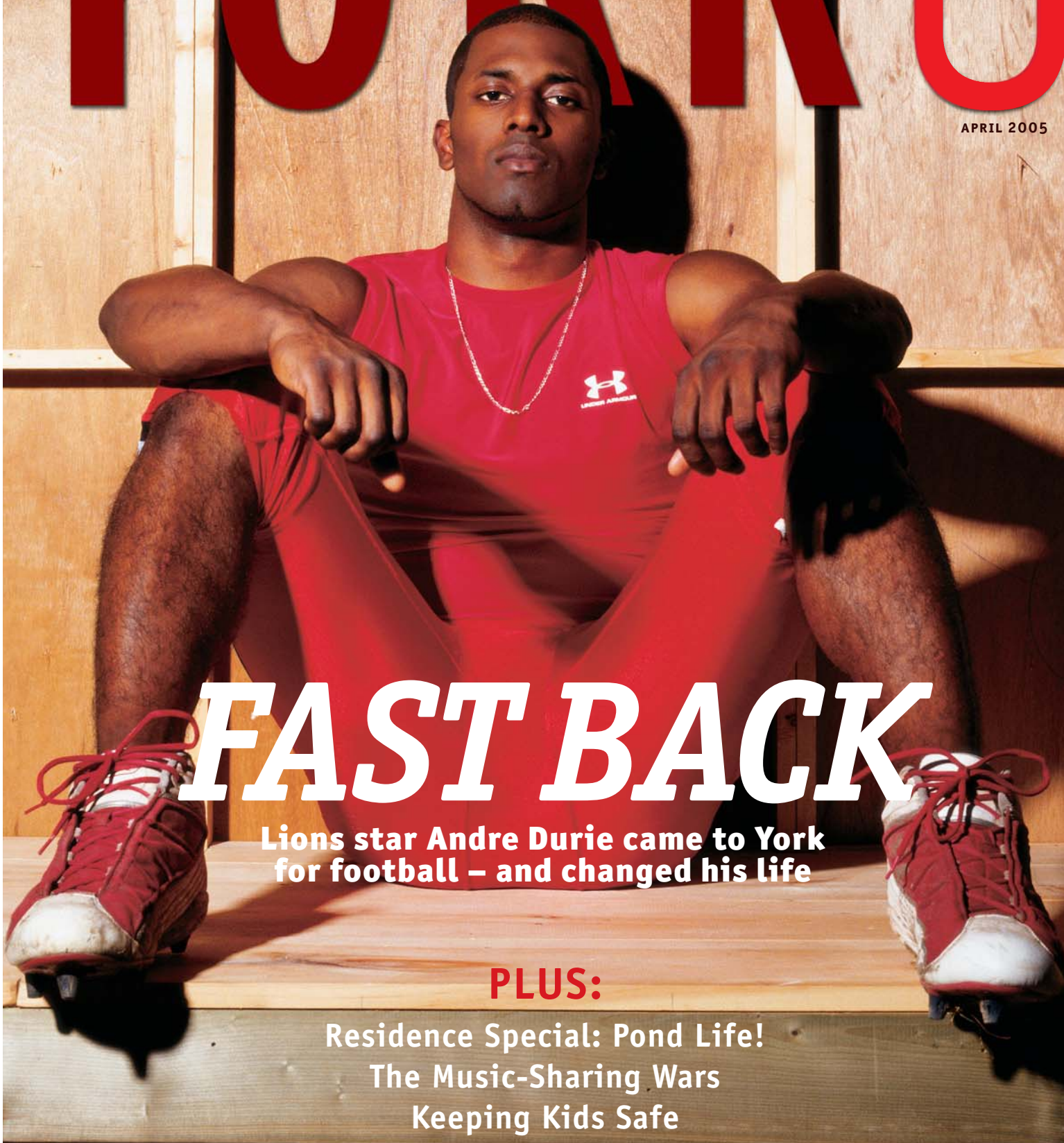


YORK

APRIL 2005



FAST BACK

Lions star Andre Durie came to York for football – and changed his life

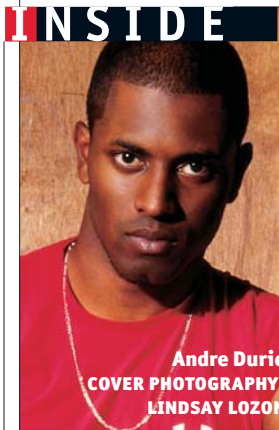
PLUS:

Residence Special: Pond Life!
The Music-Sharing Wars
Keeping Kids Safe

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YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY



Andre Durie
COVER PHOTOGRAPHY:
LINDSAY LOZON



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Students are key readers for *YorkU*. BY BERTON WOODWARD

Missing Link

Recently I found myself in Baltimore at a conference of the Washington-based Council for Advancement and Support of Education. At the podium in one session was a bright-eyed communications official from a Catholic university in Pennsylvania that aspires to be one of the best such institutions in the US northeast. He spoke very competently of the efforts his university was making to get its story out and raise its reputation. As he ran through the roster, though, I noted something I thought was missing. So at question time I asked him, what kind of communications do you have with your students?

Well, hmm, he essentially replied. "We pretty much talk to them before they arrive and then again after they leave," he said. He meant, of course, that the university woos prospective students via brochures and other media, and then stays in touch with graduates through the alumni magazine. But not much went out to students on campus. What was most striking to me about this answer is that it appears to be near universal. I asked the same question of several attendees at last year's annual conference of the Canadian Council for the Advancement of Education. Same reply, often in almost the same words.

So if you are a student reading this issue of *YorkU*, let it be known that you are helping to redefine the possible. *YorkU* proudly circulates all issues of its magazine to students via the campus racks, which we find are virtually empty by the end of each issue's term. It's worth explaining how our annual cycle works,



because it is different from other places. As we say on the masthead to the right, *YorkU* is produced bimonthly during the academic year – five issues in total. As at other universities, alumni are a major audience for the magazine, but far from the only one. Students, as well as faculty and staff, are key readers too – and they see more magazines. All five of our issues circulate on campus, keeping people informed about York's intriguing personalities, incisive research and major endeavours. Alumni, we feel, are well-served receiving three of these issues, in fall, mid-winter and late spring.

So there are two issues – December, and this one – when the biggest audience is students, followed by faculty and staff, and we in the campus community can talk mainly among ourselves (we still send the magazine to influential people outside). These issues give us a chance to do more student-focused features – such as this edition's cover subject Andre Durie, and life in the new Pond Road Residence – as well as profile interesting campus people, from music-downloading expert Markus Giesler to archivist Michael Moir. All in all, we hope there's something for everyone – and something to talk about. ■

Send letters, submissions, comments and ideas to editor@yorku.ca.

YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

The importance of student elections. BY LORNA R. MARSDEN

Power and Influence

The debate over the cost of a university education has never been more important in the public mind, as a result of Ontario's tuition freeze, the Rae Review and the dramatic surge in the desire for postsecondary learning. That debate will go on throughout the spring and fall as the recommendations of the Rae Review are worked through, but here on York's campuses there are also discussions about another type of cost – student levies.

Student levies are the outcome of referenda carried out by student governments. They cover such costs as those of the York Federation of Students and non-faculty colleges, radio station CHRY and *Excalibur*, the Ontario Federation of Students and the Canadian Federation of Students, and the capital required to build the Student Centre. Over the years, York's students have voted to support the World University



Campaigns entail lively

Service of Canada, the Community & Legal Aid Services Program, the Sexual Assault Survivors Support Line, the York Women's Centre and the Ontario Public Interest Research Group.

Student governments propose referenda and students vote on them when they vote for their new representatives. Student governments, which are important to the University in many ways, have a great deal of power and influence. Students who participate more fully in the life of York become agents of change for the community and develop the leadership skills that will contribute to Canada's future.

The good news is that the voter turnout for student government elections has risen from seven per cent in 2003 to 15 per cent in 2004. To make it easier to vote, especially for the commuters who account for more than 85 per cent of York's students, almost all groups will be employing a Web-based voting system. Everybody is hoping that the turnout in the next election will show a further improvement.

Campaigns for student government always entail lively

Lorna R. Marsden is York's president and vice-chancellor.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY COREY MIHALIUK

debate, deeply contrasting platforms and a blizzard of posters and signs. But democracy entails a dynamic mix of rights and

debate, a blizzard of signs and a dynamic mix of rights and responsibilities.

responsibilities – the right to be heard and the duty to listen, not only to what the other person has to say but to what they are. It is troubling when one group's rights are allowed to prevail over those

of another. Democracy is much more than the tyranny of the majority. By the same token, minorities, however vocal they may be, do not have the right to limit the freedom of movement or the academic freedom of others.

At York, we are all members of the same community and we reject utterly any claim to political, ideological, philosophical or religious superiority. We all serve as members of the community and, as such, all stand equal. In late 2003 we developed the Guide to Community Membership (to see it online, just Google that title). It is a timely restatement of the principles that make civil society work in a community as diverse and passionate as York.

I strongly urge all members of the York community to remind themselves of the reciprocal, egalitarian values that have bound us together over the past 46 years and to put them into practice. Even more strongly, I urge all students to vote in every student election. It's the best way to ensure you have an influence on the future of your University. ■

Body Check

Tattoos are all about defining yourself

Tattooing – once the province of “low” culture groups like bikers, sailors or prisoners – is the new “modern primitive” body art of choice, especially among undergrads, it seems. Why? One reason could be that body marking is now acceptable by “high” culture standards, suggests historian, adjunct professor and York grad (MA ’96, PhD ’04) Richard Gilmour.

“Tattooing has always been about defining yourself as a member of a group,” notes Gilmour. “It’s always symbolic, always a form of self-expression and personal empowerment.”

Gilmour is an authority on tattooing and how a culture “reads” bodies (he has extensive tattoos himself). His PhD thesis, entitled *Imagined Bodies, Imagined Selves*, deals in part with how white Europeans who were captured by native tribes between 1520 and 1763 had their bodies altered through various rites, including tattooing and branding. In the process they were considered to have become part of the tribe, but they also became outsiders from their original society.

“In the 19th century, North American bourgeois culture sought to define the appropriate middle-class body,” says Gilmour. “Those people outside that class used body marking to define themselves. The ideal middle-class body was once unmarked, but in the last decade it’s become more accepted in mainstream popular society. Post-structuralism has taught us always to read bodies like texts for their multiple meanings, which are determined by their shape, form, image, placement and relationships to gender.”

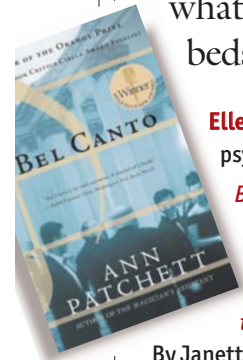
Like real estate, tattoos are about location, location, location. For women, a favourite spot is the lower back. Significance? “Women might be sending a sexual message by putting them there,” says Gilmour, “but not necessarily. Symbols on the buttock-cleft – Celtic designs, a Gordian knot or whatever – can simply indicate a person’s spiritual values.” ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

BOOKS

What They're Reading

York people reveal what's on the bedside table



Ellen Bialystok,
psychology professor:

Bel Canto
By Ann Patchett
HarperCollins
Due Preparations for the Plague

By Janette Turner Hospital
W. W. Norton & Company

"I've been reading *Bel Canto* (rich and engaging but too predictable in that Agatha Christie closed-world kind of way) and *Due Preparations for the Plague* (absolutely the best – riveting and provocative). I like well-written fiction that reveals something about the human condition through situations that challenge our comfortable lives."



Marcus Boon,
English professor:
The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More Than Human World

By David Abram
Vintage

"I am fascinated by the power involved in naming things. In this book a professional magician and anthropologist uses his travels in Nepal and Indonesia to advance a theory of language production as a practice by which we magically negotiate the relationship between ourselves and our environment. It brings together Aboriginal song-lines, shamanism, Beat poetry and phenomenology! A highly original, mind-boggling read."

STUDIES

Biotech's Risks

'There are huge social issues at stake'

While science makes innovative, almost daily discoveries, the credibility gap – between what the experts say the benefits of their discoveries are, and what the risks might actually be – continues to grow. An area of particular concern is biotechnology. Whether it's possible to regulate biotech and demand accountability in the global production of knowledge is a question Professor Roxanne Mykitiuk of York's Osgoode Hall Law School and doctoral candidate Dayna Scott are investigating.

"Government proclaims the benefits of biotechnology, but simultaneously they're privatizing health care. The question is, are the benefits of genetic technologies real and who is going to benefit from them or be able to afford them?" asks Mykitiuk, whose work is funded by the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Law Commission of Canada.

"None of these technologies are without implications. There are huge social issues at stake, particularly when it comes to reproductive technologies and genetically modified organisms. A central aim of our work is to highlight the changing relationship between experts, decision-makers, legal systems and citizens in the production of knowledge and power around biotechnological risk." ■

FAMILIES

Bad Words

A mother's insults can hit kids hard



Who hasn't heard the expression "sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me"? Sadly, insulting words do hurt, especially from parents. They can even do serious psychological damage – perhaps more than some kinds of physical violence, says Glendon psychology Professor Tim Moore, who has published results of his research on insults in the *Journal of Family Violence*.

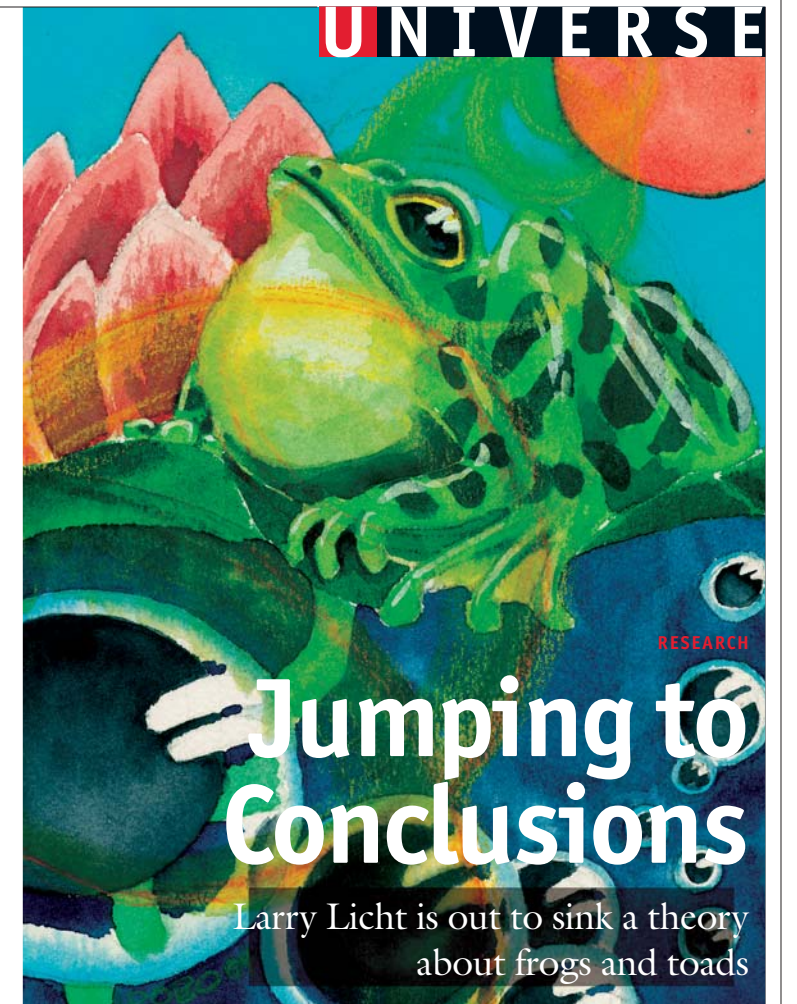
Words are especially potent when they are in the form of insults delivered by mothers and directed at their children ages 6 to 12, Moore says. "The data are somewhat counterintuitive. On the one hand, should it surprise us that children are negatively affected by their mother's insults? Maybe not, but the magnitude of the effect is alarming," Moore says.

Moore found that children from stable, relatively affluent homes in which mothers report the frequent use of insults show psychological adjustment problems similar to those of kids from chronically violent homes where the mothers (who Moore surveyed in battered women's shelters) did not use insults. For families combining physical violence and a mother's insults, the effect is devastating. "It's a kind of double whammy," says Moore. "The kids have severe adjustment problems."

Why should a mother's words matter more than a father's? Because whether we like it or not, moms are arguably the single most important person in a child's life. "It's not that mothers insult their kids more frequently than fathers," says Moore, "it's that their verbal abuse is more influential." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

UNIVERSE



Jumping to Conclusions

Larry Licht is out to sink a theory about frogs and toads

Larry Licht is as concerned about the planet as anyone, but when it comes to junk science, York's frog expert gets hopping mad. The biology professor's media beef is with the notion, currently being circulated, that increased UVB levels are linked to the disappearance of frogs, toads and salamanders. UVB, of course, is ultraviolet radiation that can rise due to changes in the earth's ozone layer.

"It's unlikely that naturally occurring UVB plays a role in the disappearance of amphibians," says Licht, a herpetologist who specializes in amphibian study. "Amphibian populations fluctuate widely year to year. It's more likely population crashes are due to pollution, pesticides and habitat damage."

To test the UVB hypothesis he decided to do his own experiments in the field as well as the lab. "Real-world tests are important because where frogs lay their eggs affects the UVB exposure. Water depth, turbidity and colour all play important roles in protecting eggs. It's very difficult to duplicate nature's conditions in a lab."

Results published in *BioScience* showed frog eggs and embryos have a melanin pigment that protects them by absorbing most UVB. They also have an enzyme that repairs DNA damage caused by UVB. And Licht found the jelly covering the eggs reduced UV impact. The pondside verdict? "The UVB theory simply doesn't hold water." ■

RESEARCH

CRIME

Below Suspicion

Lawyers unwittingly help criminals launder money



ILLUSTRATION BY ROB MACDONALD; PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

There's nothing new about criminals thinking of creative ways to hide the source of their wealth – be it in an Alberta cattle ranch, a luxury yacht or a Nazi dagger collection. What is unusual is the frequency with which organized crime uses lawyers to help them do it, according to Stephen Schneider, a research associate with York's Nathanson Centre for the Study of Organized Crime and Corruption, affiliated with Osgoode Hall Law School. Examining past RCMP money-laundering case files, Schneider found that in fully half of them, lawyers helped cleanse the money.

The published study also notes that "in the majority of police cases involving lawyers, they appear to have been unaware of the criminal source of funds provided by an offender." Were the barristers naive? Despite the apparent grounds for a new set of lawyer jokes, the answer is no. Only in a minority of cases were there elements that should have raised a lawyer's eyebrows, according to Schneider, a criminology professor at St. Mary's University, Halifax. "In most cases such suspicious circumstances weren't present." ■



TAGLINE

RESEARCH

Step This Way

Getting in the swing of old-time fiddling and dancing styles

When it comes to music, what's "traditional" is sometimes a hard thing to define. But if all goes well, York doctoral student Sherry Johnson may soon be a little closer to pinning down the truth in relation to Ontario old-time fiddling and step-dancing styles. Both traditions have existed in Canada since British and French immigration, with particularly strong musical communities existing now in areas such as the Ottawa Valley, Sudbury, North Bay, Stratford and the eastern Toronto area.

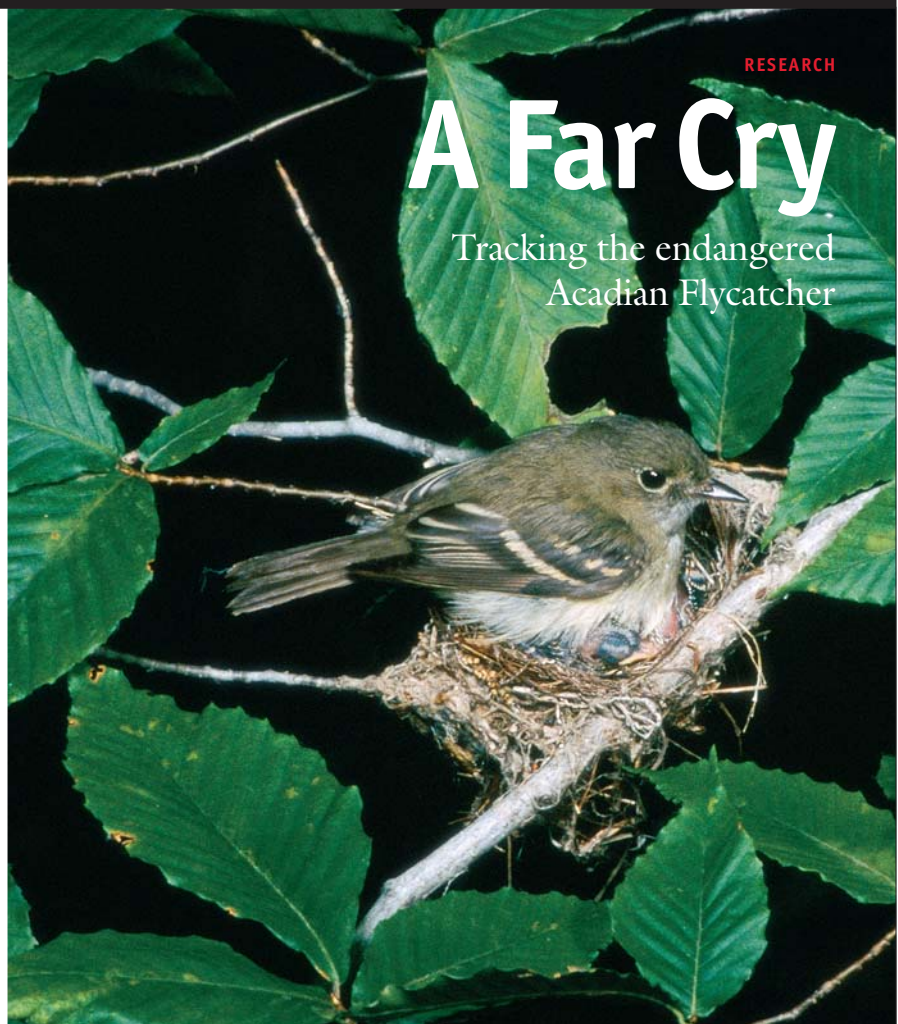
There's little written on Ontario fiddle history and almost nothing on step dancing, so Johnson, an ethnomusicologist as well as a fiddler and step dancer, is breaking new ground. Much of her work is based on oral research with young and old competitive players and dancers.

Fiddle and step-dance contest styles are always evolving, says Johnson, so exactly what a "traditional" performance is, remains ambiguous. "Performers are always moving –consciously and unconsciously – between past and present. It's a constant interplay between the two." ■

The Acadian Flycatcher's unique two-note song, "tee-chup", may soon be no longer heard – in Canada anyway. On the endangered species list, only an estimated 40-50 pairs now exist in southwestern Ontario, one of its breeding grounds. But research by York ornithologists Bridget Stutchbury and Bonnie Woolfenden could help reverse that decline.

Stutchbury, a Canada Research Chair in Ecology and Conservation Biology, and Woolfenden, a Postdoctoral Fellow, are monitoring habitat disruption and other factors threatening the birds. (Acadian Flycatchers remain widespread and common in the eastern US.)

An important aspect of Stutchbury and Woolfenden's research is the use of genetic fingerprinting to determine the distinctiveness of "Ontario" vs. "US" populations. "We can now trace gene flows, so we can see if Ontario birds mix with American ones, or how groups move around the Great Lakes area," Woolfenden says. "The more we know the better. Any behavioural data is valuable for making decisions about protecting the Acadian Flycatcher's habitat." ■



RESEARCH

A Far Cry

Tracking the endangered Acadian Flycatcher

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED; FLYCATCHER IMAGES COURTESY OF BONNIE WOOLFENDEN



UNIVERSE

SPORT

Cricket Crazy

There are no sticky wickets for the York game

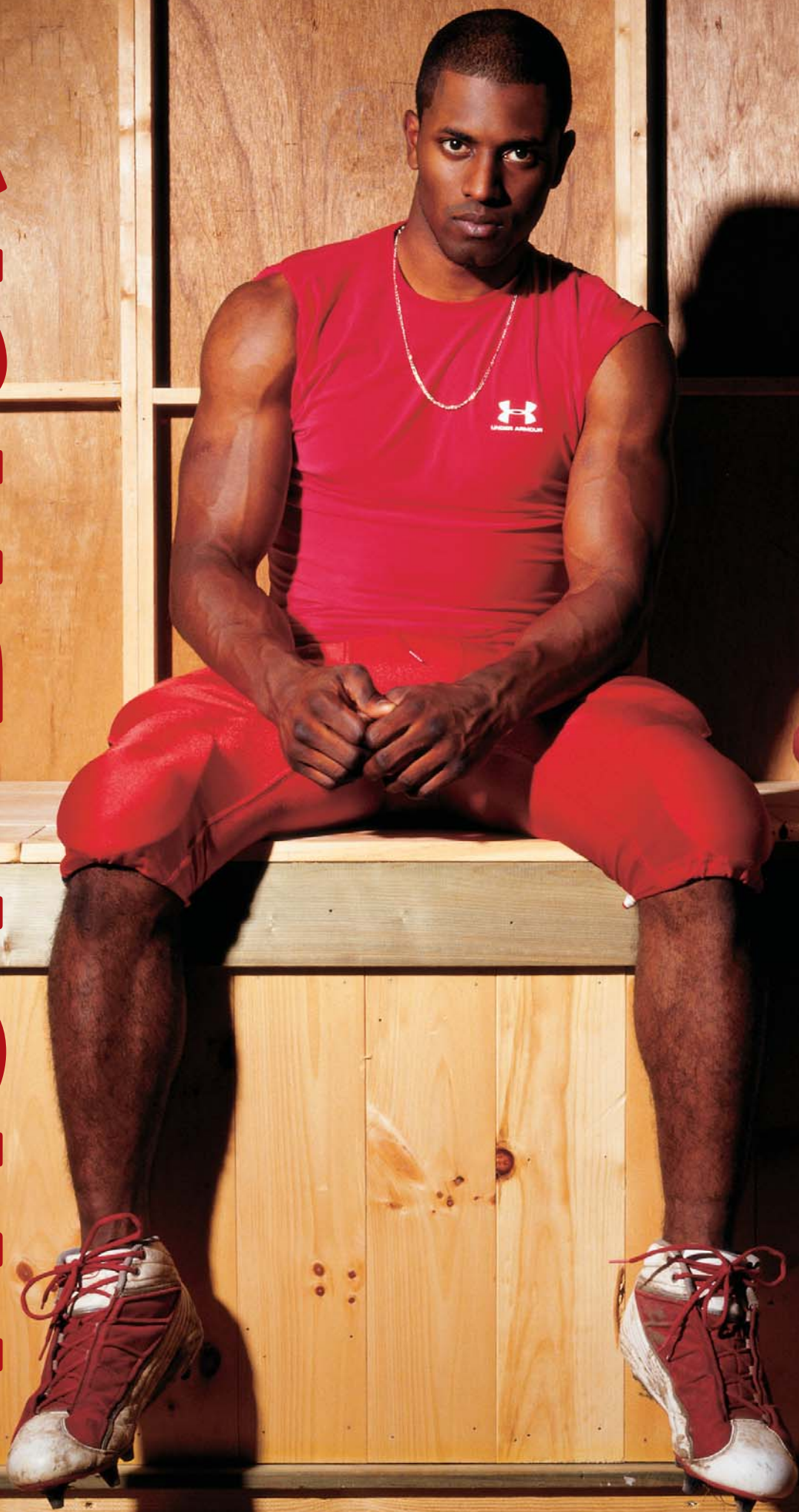
There has never been a shortage of bats on campus – of the baseball kind anyway. And now you can add cricket ones to the list. The sport is so popular with Commonwealth-heritage students that York is U, the student spirit group, has created the annual Cricket Challenge. This year 140 students asked to play in it. "Cricket is big in many Commonwealth countries," says Jeremy Greenberg, coordinator of student alumni programs. "Since we've got a lot of students who play it, we decided to create an official event catering to their love of cricket and celebrate who they are."

As part of the tournament's tradition, organizers name top players in the game's two key positions. This fall's winners were brothers (and teammates) Amin Khan (left) for Best Bowler and Haroom Khan (right) for Best Batsman.

"York's got some great talent here," says Haroom Khan, who's played cricket for the last 12 years. "Without a doubt we've got people good enough to make the Canadian national team," he says. An admitted cricket addict, Haroom says his favourite stars are Pakistan's Imran Khan (no relation), a first bowler, and the now retired Wasim Akram, a left-arm fast bowler.

Greenberg says the two-day tourney has become so popular that "we didn't even need to advertise it this year. Word of mouth was enough." ■

FAST BACK



COVER

Lions star Andre Durie came to York for football – and turned his life around.

BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

P OETRY IN MOTION. That's how Andre Durie fans describe the York Lions' hottest new running back. Tales about Durie's amazing on-field exploits found their way into major media not long ago, including a two-page spread in *The Toronto Sun's* sports pages. Durie is a 23-year-old, second-year arts student with a difference – he has a wife and two kids. It's a big responsibility to carry. Bigger than a football anyway, and one Durie apparently doesn't want to fumble. So although the 5-foot-11, 205-pound Lion has CFL – maybe even NFL, depending on who you talk to – stencilled all over him, he's putting Amber, his wife, and his two kids, Malcolm, 3, and Cian, 1, first. Then comes his education. Football comes third. That's just the kind of guy Durie is, which is to say, he isn't about to shirk his duty on or off the field.

HOW GOOD IS DURIE? Let the stats speak. In September he was named the CFL/CIS player of the week for scoring six touchdowns to lead the Lions to a 55-53 win over the University of Waterloo Warriors. Durie was only the second player in Canadian Interuniversity Sport history to achieve six touchdowns in the same game, tying a record from 1977 by Jim Reid of Wilfrid Laurier. Durie's 36 points in the game ranked fifth on the CIS all-time list.

Durie's so good he even garners praise from the competition. In a fall *London Free Press* story, University of Western Ontario running back D.J. Bennett said Durie was his role model. "As far as what kind of runner I want to end up being," Bennett said, "he's the guy. He's the whole package.... What makes him more impressive is every defence in the league knows he's getting the ball. He's York's only weapon."

Well, maybe not York's only weapon – but a lethal one. Durie rushed for 100 yards or more in 10 of the 14 regular season games he has played with the Lions in two years. And his list of achievements is nothing short of astounding: 1,367 rushing yards on 148 carries (9.3 yards a carry) in '04, and the distinction of being York's first player to rush more than 1,000 yards in a season.

The latter figure broke the 977 yards established in 1999 by Jeff Johnson, now with the Toronto Argonauts. In 2003, his rookie season, Durie had set an Ontario University Athletics single-game record of 349 yards in a game against the University of Ottawa. He finished this year second in the country in rushing yards and touchdowns (16 scored in

COVER

eight games), slightly behind another star player on the Canadian scene, McMaster's Jesse Lumsden. Not surprisingly, Durie has already been scouted by the Argonauts and the Montreal Alouettes.

YORK LIONS HEAD COACH TOM GRETES says that in his 30-plus years at the helm of coaching high school and college ball, "Durie is the best I've seen. He's a natural athlete. You can't teach the kind of moves he makes. It's all intuitive. I mean, you think you've seen it all as a coach by my age, but in practice after practice he came out this year and did something new that would blow us away. I'd turn to the other coaches and say, 'Hey, did I just see him do that?!'"

Durie, however, is modest about his exploits. "You know, I don't dwell on those things too much. On statistics. It's about the team for me. The game. I'm part of a bigger group. I'm just glad I can do well."

Durie's football prowess was recognized early, when he was star running back for the Ontario Varsity Football League's Mississauga Warriors. Even at the age of nine, when he played with the Mississauga Football League, he was raising eyebrows. But while he shone on the field, school was another matter. He grew up in Mississauga in a single-parent family with two brothers and a sister and attended three different high schools. He finished secondary school, but didn't shine academically and didn't have the marks to get into university. After graduation he kicked around working various jobs.

"It was pretty tough for my mom with four kids," he says. "I worked a lot doing stuff like selling chocolates door to door, working in a restaurant washing dishes. I'd get home at 2am and try to do my schoolwork. So I didn't do all that well academically, but it wasn't because of ability. I was trying to take the load off my mom."

HIS MOTHER, MELVA, was actually instrumental in getting Durie to attend York. As legend has it, she approached Gretes and fellow Lions coach Mike Williams during a "Test the Best" event at the Vanier Cup. (The annual "TTB" has promising high-school athletes strut their stuff in various football drills – jumping, running, speed and agility exercises – under the watchful eyes of university team coaches.) "Yeah," says Durie with a smile, "my mom was kind of like my agent."

Gretes was impressed with what he saw, although he'd actually known about Durie's promising abilities when he was

still in high school. "I'd been to a couple of games out in Mississauga and he caught my eye. I kept hearing about him," says Gretes. In the end, Gretes had Durie come up to York, gave him a tour, had him talk to various people, and laid out an academic plan for his studies. Durie didn't have the marks to get into university directly from high school, so he entered now as a mature student.

Durie says he'd had his eye on other universities like Acadia and St. Francis Xavier, "but I decided on York. I liked the feel of it and it was closer to family."

"First year [2003] was hard for him for sure," says Gretes. "He struggled academically at first, but he's back on track. He just needed a game plan, a strategy he could focus on." Now Durie's got a second chance at remaking his life and providing for his family.

Durie agrees he found first year hard, especially writing essays. "You know," he says, "one of my teammates, who's a don here in Stong, helped me. He'd spend hours with me going over those first essays, whipping them into shape. He helped me learn how to write. That's the kind of people I've been lucky to meet."

'In practice after practice he came out this year and did something new that would blow us away. I'd turn to the other coaches and say, Hey, did I just see him do that?!'

THESE DAYS DURIE'S so busy with school, family life and football that even if he had a lot of hobbies he wouldn't have much time to pursue them. "I do collect football memorabilia. I guess you could say that's my hobby," says Durie. His oldest son was recently diagnosed with autism, which places extra stress on both him and his wife, Amber (who he met nine years ago in high school). "My oldest is doing great though. We've got him in special classes. It's important to treat autism early before certain behaviour patterns set in. But that means Amber really can't work because there's so much going on with the kids. And I've got school. So, financially, it can get a bit tough."

But Durie takes the work, struggles and sacrifices in stride (he's a running back after all), and remains a team player both on and off the field. "I grew up with a pretty much absent dad," he says. "He wasn't really there for us. I don't want that for my kids." And despite the accolades Durie never loses sight of what's important. He's no egoist. A recent anecdote Gretes tells illustrates this perfectly. "Team members were nominating people for most valuable player for the upcoming athletic banquet. I know some athletes nominated themselves. But Andre was putting forward everybody else. That's the kind of guy he is." ■



A nursing student sees protection.
A biologist sees SARS.
A sociologist sees chaos.

QUESTION EVERY ANGLE. STUDY EVERY ANGLE. RESEARCH EVERY ANGLE. WELCOME TO THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIVERSITY. AT YORK, WE BREAK DOWN TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES AND BRING TOGETHER THINKERS FROM EVERY DISCIPLINE TO TACKLE REAL-WORLD ISSUES. LAST SUMMER, WHILE OUR MATHEMATICIANS MODELLED THE SARS OUTBREAK, WE ALSO BROUGHT IN HEALTH POLICY EXPERTS, GEOMATIC ENGINEERS AND POLITICAL SCIENTISTS TO EXPOSE EVERY ANGLE OF THE PROBLEM. THE SAME PHILOSOPHY TRAVELS THROUGHOUT YORK, WHERE IN ADDITION TO INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS, STUDENTS CAN COMBINE MAJORS IN COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FIELDS. AT YORK, NOT ONLY IS IT POSSIBLE TO BOTH STUDY PHILOSOPHY AND GO TO SCHULICH, IT IS ENCOURAGED. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIVERSITY, [VISIT YORKU.CA](http://YORKU.CA).

YORK U
UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY
redefine THE POSSIBLE.

POND ROAD RESIDENCE, the latest jewel in York's crown, has 440 beds, common areas on each floor and a colossal 4,500-sq-ft lounge that looks out onto a landscaped courtyard and the building's namesake byway. There are 214 two-bedroom suites, each with a bathroom and full kitchen, plus guest suites and 10 don suites. The building, which opened last August, is environment-friendly, with an in-slab radiant heating and cooling system, heat recovery on exhaust air and a 10,000-sq-ft planted roof that increases thermal insulation and absorbs runoff.

So how is Pond life? Well, for these students, it looks like they've found a home away from home. Angela Mikhail (standing), first-year theatre major, chose Pond because, she says, "I liked the fact it had a shared kitchen and bathroom, but I could have my own room." Amanda Gomes (reclining), also a first-year theatre major, wanted to try living independently. She admits she misses her parents' cooking, but "I love it here – it's worked out really well."



Caitlin Hopkins,
second-year kinesiology
and psychology

Home:
 Toronto.

Came to residence because:
 I didn't want to have to commute on the 401, and I like waking up late!

Favourite object in room:
 My posters and a neon sign of a palm tree. It all reminds me of the beach.

Favourite York experience so far:
 Partying and being able to choose my own courses.

Pond Life

Students settle in at York's newest residence. BY MICHAEL TODD
 PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED



**Paul Zitano,
second-year
communications and
political science**

Home:
Niagara Falls, Ontario.

Came to live in residence because:
Living on campus is really convenient.

Room décor description:
Like walking into a bar.

Best thing about rez life:
Finding I could balance school work with eating properly and cleaning everything. It has surprised me. I'm glad I found out that it's possible.

**Claudia Jeronimo,
first-year criminology
and sociology**

Home:
Johannesburg, South Africa.
But I've really been living for the last two years in Etobicoke.

Favourite object in room:
My big pink photo album. It's filled with shots of places and friends from South Africa.

Favourite York experience so far:
Campus nightlife. The cliché about living on campus here was that there'd be nothing to do. Not true.



**Nish Zaveri, Pond Road
don; fourth-year finance
and economics,
Schulich School of
Business**

Home:
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Why he wanted to be a don:
When I first came to residence my don helped me out a lot. He made me feel welcome at York. I thought this would look good on my resume and, secondly, I thought this would be a good way to give back to the residence community.

What he does:
Students, especially new ones, are excited to live on their own, but at the same time they are a little scared because they don't know what to expect. That is where I step in. I would say my role is to make residents feel welcome. ■■

I WAS A YORK GUINEA PIG

Ever wonder what it's like to volunteer for one of the many research studies you see advertised on campus? So did we.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

IF YOU'RE ANYTHING LIKE ME, you are your own favourite subject – endlessly fascinating and full of surprises! So I couldn't help wondering what I would learn about myself if I signed up for a few personality studies advertised around campus seeking volunteers. I began to check a few out: don't qualify for these bulimia nervosa or binge eating studies, am too old for this aging, memory and cognition study. What about this one offering cash payment for only 40 minutes of my time? Nope. I'm neither East Asian nor male.

Last year, almost all Intro Psych students – 4,559 to be exact – clocked two hours each as volunteer participants in 188 research studies at York, which boasts Canada's biggest psychology faculty. It's not for cash: they do it for the marks. Psych students can boost their final average by as much as three per cent just by participating in research studies posted on the University Research Participants Pool (URPP) Web site. "It used to be a bonus system, but now it's built into the grade," says Jennifer Mills, a psychology professor in charge of URPP this year. "The rationale is there's an educational component because students learn how to run a study and they gain the perspective of being a participant."

To give me access to the URPP list, Mills assigns me an ID and password. There's a smorgasbord of clinical, cognitive, perceptual, physiological, social and personality studies that involve playing computer games, filling out questionnaires, squeezing rubber balls, judging fashion-magazine ads or pretending I'm a juror at a trial. "For a lot of students, it's their first exposure to research other than learning from a textbook," says Mills. "It's experiential learning." And we're not talking weird 1960s-style LSD experiments here. "We can't ethically cause participants to be at risk either physically or emotionally," says Mills. "If there is any significant risk, the study would not be allowed."

While marks may be incentive enough to recruit volunteers at York, doctoral psychology student Ben Giguere has also promised cash – \$50 if funding allows (the average is \$10 an hour) – plus movie coupons and even candy as "compensation".

I volunteer for two studies, not for marks, but out of sheer curiosity. The first is on juror decision-making. Fourth-year psych major Sonia da Silva, on duty that day in Prof. Regina Schuller's research lab, ushers me and a first-year student into a tiny, airless basement room in the Behavioural Science

Building. We sign the consent form, then she hands us manila envelopes and asks us to read trial transcripts and answer questionnaires enclosed. I become engrossed: a young woman has accused a young man of date rape. The former classmates had met on the subway, gone to a bar, then headed to her apartment to look at their high-school yearbook. According to her, he drugged her, then raped her. According to him, she had initiated sex and fabricated the rape story after she found out he was engaged. It is a classic case of he said, she said. I don't hesitate to indicate on the questionnaire that I believe the girl. But I pause, and reread the questions that probe my assumptions about rape victims. Are there really people who believe that women who wear revealing clothing, flirt or drink alcohol "deserve" to be raped?

The student finishes first. Da Silva debriefs us separately, asking us not to share details of this study because others might be planning to participate. "We want the answers to be as spontaneous as possible," she says. Our first question, of course, is: what was the verdict? Though the transcript is based on a real trial, da Silva and lead researcher Gwen Jenkins use it as a framework upon which to hang different variables. Sometimes the girl drinks alcohol, sometimes they both smoke pot, sometimes an expert witness testifies. All these factors can influence a jury, and the researchers hope to find out by how much.

I don't finish the second study. After 90 minutes of memory tests and mental gymnastics, my brain is mush. The study consists of four major memory tasks to determine whether humans remember better by doing or by saying, by being presented things in themed clusters or randomly one by one. I also do a battery of unrelated cognitive exercises that test our verbal fluency, spatial sequencing, general knowledge. Halfway through, I lose momentum and the student conducting the study offers to stop the testing. I am grateful, and exhausted.

So what insights did I gain by volunteering to participate in these studies? That I enjoy word games and know a lot about the world, but that my mental stamina ain't what it used to be. That memory loves action and things grouped by theme. That in date-rape cases, juries usually acquit the accused if his accuser had been drinking alcohol or on drugs at the time. And that women still face big hurdles in our society.

Both researcher and subject benefit from such studies, says York sociologist Rachel Schlesinger. "Everybody involved in a study is changed. Studies prompt you to think in a different way. They get the wheels turning." ■

RESEARCH

ALISON MACPHERSON LAUGHS at the mention of a ubiquitous flyer around campus – one that says “Stats doesn’t suck!” She knows how lively statistics can be. In fact they’re downright useful in helping her negotiate the minefields of controversy in her area of child injury prevention research. Sitting in her office, you wouldn’t think the unassuming Macpherson would be one to pick a fight. Yet for the past four years, stats have drawn this new member of York’s School of Kinesiology & Health Science into some of the hottest child-safety debates in the world.

Take bicycle helmet laws, for example. In Ontario, they’re a fact of life, so much so that the provincial government is considering extending the law to skateboarders, inline skaters and adult cyclists. But in Quebec, which has no helmet law, and England, where the British Medical Association took a stand against one, legislation is viewed as an assault on personal freedom as well as a threat to cycling and, believe it or not, the environment. Both places have active organizations dedicated to fighting legislation that Macpherson argues helps prevent up to 85 per cent of children’s head injuries from cycling accidents. Statistics are her main weapon in a war of numbers that has landed her in an ongoing debate with an Australian critic on the effectiveness of helmet legislation. And just how does this former hospital administrator and mother of three handle such battles? “I do the best research that I possibly can, come up with the best evidence I can, and let the data speak for themselves,” she says.

Another brush with controversy came in a study brought about by the Toronto school board’s unpopular decision to suddenly demolish playground equipment in 2000 (her research will show that replacement equipment did reduce injuries). Although she claims conflict is her least favourite part of the job, Macpherson’s latest project won’t convince anyone she isn’t flat-out looking for trouble: it’s a study of injuries from bodychecking in minor hockey guaranteed to make Don Cherry grimace. Although the article has yet to be published, Macpherson says the number of injuries among young hockey players aged 10-14 is rising. “The issue of bodychecking in youth hockey requires a good hard look,” Macpherson said after the release last year of hockey injuries data by the Canadian Institute for Health Information. It’s that kind of data that Macpherson, who sometimes represents the institute as an expert spokesperson, is using for her study, which looks at

injuries in Ontario and Quebec. “Playing hockey should be fun. It shouldn’t be sending so many kids to hospital,” she said.

Critics of population-based injury prevention studies say their authors would have parents “wrap children in cotton wool”, if they could, to keep them safe. It’s a charge Macpherson, who was recently appointed adjunct scientist for the Institute of Clinical Evaluative Studies, rejects. “The whole goal of injury prevention is to reduce the number of serious injuries while maintaining the promotion of physical activity,” she says. “You will never find an injury prevention researcher who says kids should stop playing hockey or kids should stop biking.”

Macpherson’s own children, 12, 9 and 4, enjoy skiing and biking – with helmets, of course – and the oldest competes in diving. They are a big part of the reason she chose to research child safety. In her former job as manager of admitting and patient registration at Montreal’s Children’s Hospital, she helped compile some of the data she now uses in her studies. When she was laid off in 1996, Macpherson received a training allowance that enabled her to enter graduate studies under renowned pediatric epidemiologist Barry Pless at the McGill University Health Centre. As a researcher, she worked with both the Montreal regional health board and the Pediatrics Outcome Research Team at Toronto’s Hospital for Sick Children. Her 2003 doctoral thesis on bike helmets was the paper that started the debate with her Australian counterpart. She joined York’s faculty in 2004.

It’s after looking at her work history and choice of research subjects that the picture of Macpherson, the passionate child-safety advocate, starts to emerge from her scholarly statistical world. She appears as every bit the crusader, ready to spread the alarm raised by the numbers of injuries caused by such simple things as kids crossing the road to school or babies toddling around in wheeled walkers, which Canada only banned in April last year. It is the first country to do so despite numerous studies by epidemiologists like her proving how dangerous the devices can be.

“Stuff like that does drive me crazy,” Macpherson says, explaining why she tries to promote awareness of her and others’ research through organizations like SafeKids Canada. “The time of the scientist working in isolation, if it ever existed, is gone. I see it as part of my job,” she says, before adding unconvincingly, “I’m not an advocate. My job is to generate the research.” Either way, she’s making the world a little safer for a lot of children. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF GEORGE

Feeling Their Pain

Preventing childhood injuries is a quiet crusade for epidemiologist Alison Macpherson. BY DAVID FULLER

Living in the Past

York archivist Michael Moir delights in collecting the voices of history. BY DAVID FULLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK



SOURCES

A FEW YEARS AGO, archivist Michael Moir arrived at an underground parking garage for a meeting with two grim-faced police constables. Cloak-and-dagger this was not: their job was to supervise the handover of more than 700 volumes of old records bound for the government archives of the former Metropolitan Toronto. The constables took no pains to hide their lack of interest in the burden, which included more than a hundred years of dusty record books, some dating as far back as the 1830s. “This stuff was just ancient and they didn’t have any great desire to be involved,” recalls Moir, now head of archives & special collections at York. “As the week went on, they found themselves flipping through the duty books and looking at how a police station was operated 50 years ago or a hundred years ago and they developed a sense of connection to how their predecessors did their work.” It’s the moment Moir lives for: when the records come to life and the voices of the past speak for themselves. “By the end of the week, both of those constables were quite interested in the project and what was going to happen to the records.”

Making that “first-hand level of connection” with the past is what led Moir to earn a master’s degree in Scottish history and eventually become, last year, president of the Champlain Society, an organization dedicated to publishing primary documents about Canada’s past. His love of archives began when he was a research assistant in the University of Guelph library, writing explanatory passages for a collection of letters from a 19th-century Scottish missionary stationed in Nova Scotia. Moir joined York in the summer of 2004 after 22 years working for archives in Toronto, first as archivist for the Toronto Harbour Commission, then Metro and the newly amalgamated City of Toronto, where he became director of corporate record systems and city archivist. At every stop, he experienced the thrill of rescuing historical riches that otherwise might have been lost or destroyed.

Since arriving at York, Moir has seen many motley collections of cardboard boxes arrive carrying treasures destined to become part of the University’s collection. In the space of just a few days before the holidays in December, he and his staff logged in personal donations from air force pilot, writer and lawyer Maj.-Gen. Richard Rohmer and composer and digital music authority Paul Hoffert, a member of the Canadian rock band Lighthouse. The bonanza continued when, on the last day before the University closed for the holidays, Moir unwrapped a shipment of material from the Warwick Publishing Group’s music magazines *Coda* and *Opus*. The trove included approximately 12,000 photographs of jazz and classical musicians from the late 1950s up into this century. These additions bolster an already impressive collection of fine arts and literary documents that ranks among the finest in Canada.

Scouting for suitable new donations to the archives also keeps Moir busy. In addition to doing his own research on Toronto’s maritime history, teaching and sometimes speaking as a guest lecturer, he’s negotiating with potential donors. It’s a process that can take a few days or more than a year. The acquisition of the Rohmer papers happened mere days after Moir, a former piper in the army reserves Rohmer once commanded, received a tip suggesting he approach the friend and former colleague of York Chancellor Peter Cory. In the world of archives, personal connections can make a major difference: Walter Pitman, author and former president of Ryerson University and the Ontario Arts Council, donated his papers to York after spending many hours at the University working on his 2002 biography of Canadian composer Louis Applebaum. Pitman’s decision came at the encouragement of Suzanne Dubeau, assistant head of archives & special collections. Hoffert placed his papers with the archives’ third-floor facility in Scott Library because he teaches at York and wanted convenient access for his ongoing research.

While the collective heartbeat of the archives’ staff always quickens with the arrival of new material, Moir’s joy is tempered by the challenge of storing – and retrieving – information in a digital age. “People used to keep diaries,” he says, “and now we have online scheduling software and blogs. People used to write letters, now we write e-mails to people and attach digital images.” The problem is compounded by the progress of technology and the lack of consensus on how information is going to be preserved over several generations when operating systems and media change seemingly every other year.

But it’s the thought of future researchers and students coming to York to pore over what he calls “the embodiment of somebody’s thoughts and aspirations” that ultimately keeps Moir smiling – as he did that day in an underground garage at the sight of two reluctant “historians” reading old police log books. ■

FACULTY

WHEN IT COMES TO THEORIZING about how the Web is changing people's buying behaviour and creating new consumer communities, Markus Giesler seems to have his finger on the pulse. The 28-year-old, German-born Giesler, who calls himself a "consumer anthropologist", is something of a wunderkind around York. An expert on new technologies and their impact (present and future) on the entertainment business, he's also the youngest marketing professor in North America, according to *The New York Times*.

Several prestigious European universities were trying to hire him, including the renowned Haute École de Commerce in Paris. But Giesler gave thumbs up to an offer from York's Schulich School of Business ("one of the top addresses worldwide," he says). He came on board this fall fresh from a visiting scholarship at the Kellogg School of Management and a summa cum laude PhD in marketing from Witten/Herdecke University in Germany. He has worked for various Fortune 500 companies including Sony, 3M, McDonald's and BMW.

From an early age Giesler was intensely interested in music (an interest that has carried over into his academic research). Money was scarce while he was growing up, so Giesler delivered newspapers to pay for piano lessons. He became entrepreneurial in other ways too, setting up a recording studio in his basement at 17 and eventually producing German pop records, commercials and music for film scores. He played piano in bars ("mostly blues and contemporary stuff") to help pay the bills. Later he owned his own label as well, and counts a career total of more than 300 records to his credit. But he left the music industry because of the rise in music file sharing, he says. "I saw the writing on the wall."

As a consumer anthropologist with real-world entertainment experience behind him, Giesler knows the terrain he theorizes about. He has written many articles on file sharing, Napster, online consumption, consumer resistance and entertainment culture. His research now focuses on areas such as entertainment marketing and the relationships among consumption, culture and technology. (He's also investigating the consumption of conspiracy theories on the Net.)

Giesler says when Napster came along in 1998 people didn't realize what it meant, or how it would change the landscape. A recent Ipsos Reid poll seems to back up his theories. Conducted for the federal government in the fall of 2004, the poll found that 70 per cent of Canadian youth aged 12 to 21 thought it was morally acceptable to download music, video and software from the Internet for nothing. They expressed little interest in purchasing music online, according to the poll. Only 12 per cent said they would stop file swapping if they could pay a small fee to download their favourite music tracks instead.

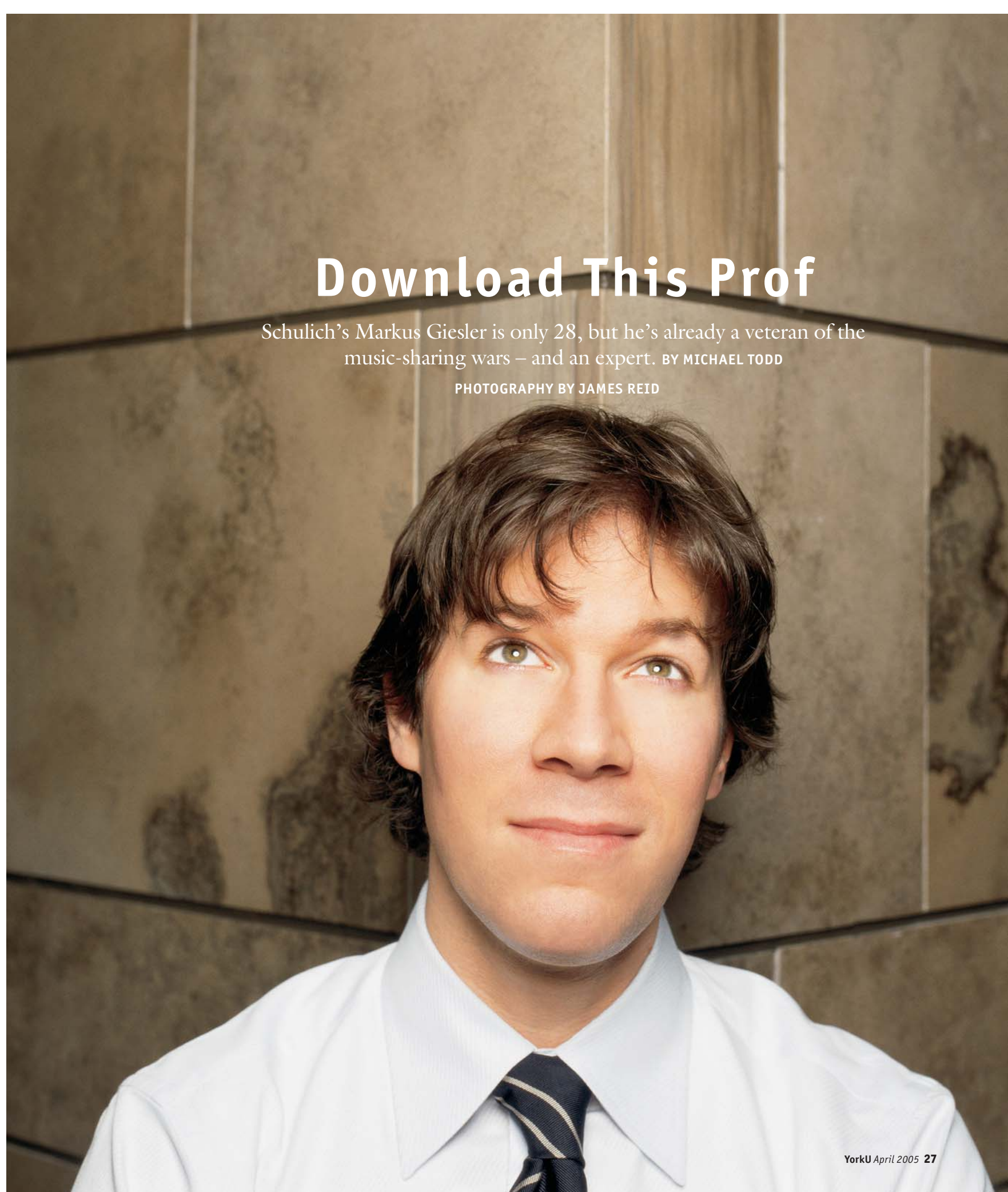
Giesler did a four-year ethnographic study on Napster and file sharing called Rethinking Consumer Risk: Cultural Risk, Collective Risk and the Social Construction of Risk Reduction. Napster, of course, was the first music software that enabled music fans to swap songs stored on their computers with each other and to find each other through a central directory. Users could trade in bootlegs, rare tracks and current releases by major artists. Napster has since turned commercial, but other downloading software has risen to take its place.

One of Giesler's conclusions was that downloaders are willing to "share the risk" of court action by record companies because of safety in numbers. "Technology has always driven consumption and vice versa," he says. "The point is, consumers of music won't be scared off by threats of legal action." Consumers use technology to send "gifts" to one another (by sharing files), but they can also hide behind the very technology they use to subvert corporate control. The risk of being caught for sharing files is minimal compared to the benefits (free tunes, a sense of community, etc.).

Giesler contends that what business now needs to do is rethink how it sells entertainment. "We're living in a technologically advanced and increasingly globalized world, in which everything is connected but nothing adds up," he says. "Instead of going to war with their potential customers, companies should explore new forms of entertainment consumption and profit from the technocultural transformation."

"This is a wake-up call. Napster may be dead but the 'Napster Experience' still epitomizes one of the most innovative cultural crystallization points in the social cosmos of cyberspace."

Consumers have spoken. The idea of what now constitutes a community in cyberspace – or in the real world for that matter – is being transformed by the Web. Who needs stores or malls when you can get the music you want, or share the music you have, virtually? Apple Computer's Steve Jobs, with his iPods and iTunes, has been listening to consumer anthropologists like Giesler. Jobs got it – now maybe record company executives will. As Giesler says, "technology has always driven consumption." ■



Download This Prof

Schulich's Markus Giesler is only 28, but he's already a veteran of the music-sharing wars – and an expert. BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES REID

A

PASSIONATE DEFENDER of the wrongfully convicted. A crusader for human rights and social justice. A talented teacher and warm friend. Dianne Martin was a very special person in the memories of her friends and colleagues. With her death on Dec. 20 at 59, York's Osgoode Hall Law School lost one of its leading lights. An Osgoode graduate (LLB '76) as well as a professor there, Martin was the co-founder of the Osgoode Innocence Project, which seeks to gain justice for the wrongfully convicted (see YorkU, February 2004), and a co-founder of Toronto's Association in Defence of the Wrongly Convicted. She played a key role in the release of such high-profile prisoners as Guy Paul Morin and Romeo Phillion. She also fought for change on issues ranging from police interrogations to midwifery.

In her memory, Osgoode has established the Dianne Martin Bursary Fund and, through its alumni association, a special award, the Dianne Martin Medal for Social Justice through Law. The commemorative bronze medal will be awarded annually to a member of the Canadian legal community who has exemplified Martin's commitment to the use of law as an instrument for achieving social justice and fairness.

In early January, friends and colleagues gathered in Osgoode's Moot Court to celebrate Martin's life. Here is a sampling of the often-tearful remembrances:

When a group of faculty members gathered to remember Dianne, one of our colleagues produced a T-shirt for the Innocence Project at Osgoode Hall Law School. He told me Dianne had sold it to him for \$20 to raise funds. The nice thing about the shirt is the saying on the back, from *Lovers in a Dangerous Time* by Bruce Cockburn. It says, "Kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight."

Now, I have to highlight that there is a somewhat ironic note at the bottom that says, "Used by permission." It is difficult to imagine that if you are prepared to kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight that you need to ask anyone's permission to do it. But Dianne wanted to note that the saying was used by permission.

That saying captured Dianne's belief that we can't afford to settle for the way things are and that if we don't tackle the problems in this world, things will get worse, not better. That is what she achieved as a teacher, social activist, scholar and friend.

Patrick Monahan, dean of Osgoode Hall Law School

I remember heading off with Dianne to police headquarters to meet with the Toronto police commissioner, trying to launch complaints. The atmosphere was a little like the Mad Hatter's tea party catered by Kafka. Dianne sat at the end of a long table, the police commissioner at the other end. Dianne was completely composed and not intimidated.

I also remember when Dianne took on the hold-up squad, which was not considered to be a career-enhancing move in those days. This was an era when getting full disclosure was not a right but a privilege. Dianne fought on, reforms were instituted. It now will go better for the poor souls stuck in the interrogation room, thanks to the work done, in part, by Dianne.

Jack Gemmell, former law partner

Her commitment to social justice really shone through her teaching. She was a champion of women's rights. In recognition of her work, the Elizabeth Fry Society named her a "Rebel with a Cause" and that title suited her and delighted her. She worked to see that things were made right.

Osgoode Professor Joan Gilmour

I am one of Dianne's baby lawyers. I met her when I was a student at Osgoode. She told me about the case of Romeo Phillion. Dianne insisted that we [members of the Innocence Project] devote whatever time and energy we could to his cause. She constantly demanded more of us. To know Dianne was to know how much she cared about the wrongfully convicted. It was an intense privilege to be there with her when Mr. Phillion walked from prison after 32 years.

Lawyer Anna Martin (no relation; LLB '02)

There was no client that she could not see some redeeming features in, even those who she recognized that we had to protect ourselves from. She could always find something of merit to that human being.

Michael Lomor (LLB '79), former law partner

She was shy, sometimes she was self-conscious, she was bold, she was passionate, she was intelligent, she was thoughtful, she was compassionate, she was provocative – but she was fair.

Osgoode Professor Marlys Edwardh (LLB '74) ■

Legally Rebellious

Osgoode's Dianne Martin was a passionate fighter for social justice. BY JENNY PITT-CLARK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF GEORGE

Maryam Mirza

Muslim reformer

Speaking Out

ON NOV. 13, MARYAM MIRZA made history: the York political science student delivered part of the Eid-ul-Fitr sermon to celebrate the end of Ramadan at her Etobicoke mosque. Her maverick imam had heard the 20-year-old address previous Islamic gatherings and invited her to script a sermon for a mixed audience, traditionally addressed by men. "It's the first time in North America, as far as I know, and maybe the world," says Mirza.

Muslims, the future teacher told the 300 mostly Guyanese and Caribbean immigrants assembled that historic Saturday, need to embrace change. "I said in my sermon, when people do the pilgrimage to Mecca for the Hajj, men and women pray shoulder to shoulder. Why do we have to partition our mosques?" Fearing ridicule, she faced criticism from conservatives but earned praise from progressives. Media from around the world besieged her for interviews. "What I've done goes beyond boundaries," she says. "I hope it opens doors for Muslim women." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK



Alok Mukherjee

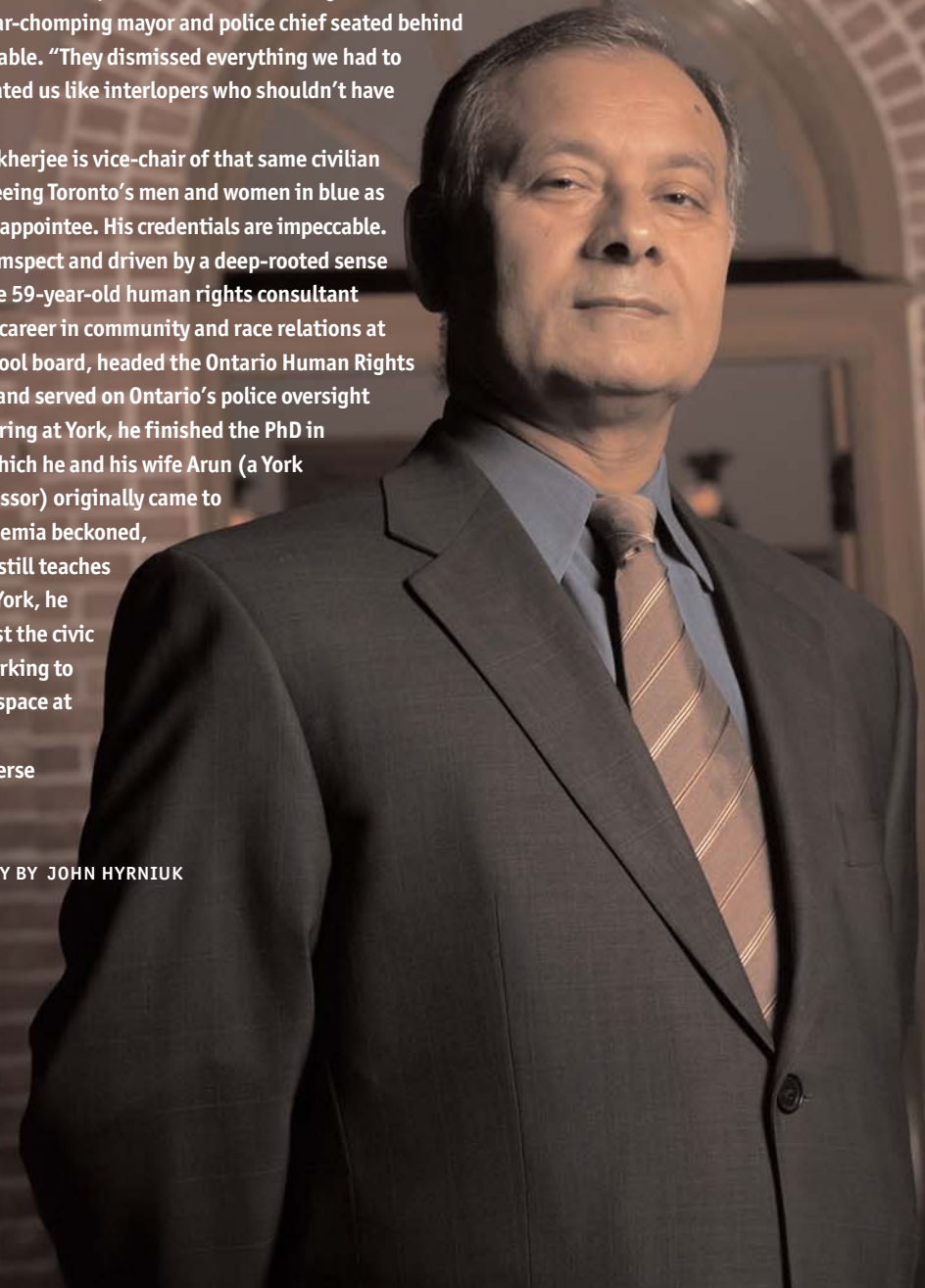
York grad, police board member

Cop Watcher

ALOK MUKHERJEE REMEMBERS his first encounter with the Toronto Police Services Board. It was around 1978. He and some friends were appealing for fairer treatment for the city's South Asians. Escorted by officers into a wood-panelled boardroom, they stood before the chummy, cigar-chomping mayor and police chief seated behind a heavy oak table. "They dismissed everything we had to say. They treated us like interlopers who shouldn't have been there."

Today Mukherjee is vice-chair of that same civilian board, overseeing Toronto's men and women in blue as a city council appointee. His credentials are impeccable. Tactful, circumspect and driven by a deep-rooted sense of justice, the 59-year-old human rights consultant trailblazed a career in community and race relations at Toronto's school board, headed the Ontario Human Rights Commission and served on Ontario's police oversight body. Last spring at York, he finished the PhD in English for which he and his wife Arun (a York English professor) originally came to Canada. Academia beckoned, but while he still teaches part time at York, he couldn't resist the civic fray – and working to create equal space at the table for Toronto's diverse cultures. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN HYRNIUK



Reflections of a tsunami survivor. BY RUDHRAMOORTHY CHERAN

The Sea Forsaken

I WAS BORN IN JAFFNA, in northern Sri Lanka. We had no mountains, no rivers. Monsoon rains were unpredictable. Nothing grew naturally in my beloved but barren land, except perhaps men's beards. But we grew up with the sea. Songs about the sea by our fisher-folk permeated my childhood. The only beautiful natural asset we had was the sea, the vast, open sea. It was not always blue.

Many people know me as a sociologist and researcher. While this is true, a more appropriate description would be to say that I am a poet – I work with words and imagination. My first published poem appeared in a Sri Lankan literary journal in 1975. It was titled “The Sea”. Ironically, my seventh collection of poems, released in India just a few days before the Asian tsunami, was titled *Return to the Sea*. My fantasies, imagination and dreams have always been inseparably linked to the sea in all its forms, sounds, colours and depth.

On Dec. 26, 2004, I was on the beach with my sister, her two children and my brother-in-law, in a small village called

Before we could pack up,

Bentota, on the southern coast of Sri Lanka. It was about 8:45 in the morning and we had just returned from our breakfast. The children wanted to be in the hotel pool and we pondered the possibility of going for a swim or enjoying a lazy read-snooze session. When we started walking on the beach trying to locate a few deck chairs, I noticed something strange. The water was suddenly rushing towards us with ferocious speed.

My intellect did not light up but my instincts did. We ran and the sea chased us. I have never run that fast in my entire life, even when chased by gun-toting Sri Lankan soldiers in the mid-1980s. Putting her own instincts to work at the right moment, my sister managed to grab her daughters and run. With great difficulty we negotiated the rising water, floating debris and sinking hope. Our rooms were on the third floor and we got there just ahead of the surging waves below. By the time we reached our rooms, the first floor was gone. Within 20

Rudhramoorthy Cheran is a research associate with York's Centre for Refugee Studies and teaches in the Department of Sociology.

minutes or so, the sea crawled back, taking everything on the ground.

What followed in the aftermath were moments of silence. I had no idea what had happened. All I could sense was that this was not ordinary. This body of water was not the one I had come to know, love and cherish.

We decided to leave, but before we could pack up, the sea came back – with a vengeance. This time the waves were giant monsters. They struck the second floor of our hotel with such power that all the glass windows, doors and patios were broken and tossed away like plastic toys. Fortunately, the third floor, where we were, remained untouched. Then the sea receded again. We made our way downstairs and waded through the waist-deep water that was moving less quickly by then. We scrambled up to the platform of Bentota's railway station – the highest terrain we could locate. The rest was just a dream.

When the waves hit for the third time, we were safely on our way to the capital city of Colombo in my brother-in-law's Toyota. The car, awash in water, had been parked outside the resort compound beside a parapet and had its

own story of survival.

Now, after recurring nightmares with sounds of broken glass and pounding waves, what I do not remember is how I survived. But what I do remember is the colour of the wave. It was the colour of death.

I no longer have the same relationship with the sea. It has been permanently altered, perennially shifted and perilously wounded. The classical Tamil poetry I studied in school had potent descriptions of three catastrophic tsunamis submerging Lemuria, the ancient Tamil lands that once bridged India and Africa. Although I was certain this was just a fanciful legend, I have second thoughts now. Meanwhile, the imaginary web that once mediated our myths and reality lies ruined on the shores of Sumatra, Sri Lanka and India.

Strangely, I feel fragile and empowered; sleepless but still dreaming. ■

