

# YORKU

DECEMBER 2009



York's Undergrad Stars

# TOP TEN



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Walking Thornhill  
Literary Sportswriting  
Glendon's Power Player



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# YORK TO THE POWER OF 50





# YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY



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# DECEMBER 2009

Our top students, five years on. BY BERTON WOODWARD

# That Was Then

**S**o what would you do with your York BAs in psychology and philosophy after graduation? Why, become a tea entrepreneur, of course, like Hoda Paripoush. And what if your York BSc led you to become a PhD candidate researching stem cells? Why, dream of opening a Chinese restaurant, naturally, like Xin Wang.

York's tagline, as everyone knows, is "redefine the possible", and our top students often do. Paripoush and Wang are two of the people we featured in the December 2004 *YorkU*, in our second annual cover package on York's undergrad stars (see it at [yorku.ca/yorku](http://yorku.ca/yorku)). As we prepared this year's list, I checked back with six of the seven from 2004 to see how they were faring five years later.

Glendon Paripoush (BA '05, BA Hons. '08) told us in 2004 that she thought she'd go into naturopathic medicine. She did start, but decided that "rather than being a physician and treating patients in a clinical environment, I craved a more creative path to pursuing the art of living." So along with returning to Glendon, she got into tea, as an importer, blender, retailer and certified sommelier. "As I grew up in a family where the samovar was always brewing, tea ran in the blood, so to speak," says the child of Iranian parents.

China-born Wang (BSc Spec. Hons. '06) is currently at the University of Calgary working on his biology PhD, but he plans to take up to a year off when he's finished to think hard about his next steps. He feels torn between the life of a scientist and the joys of serving dim sum. "I have



actually liked cooking since I was a boy."

Others from 2004 have stayed on track. Schulich's Andrew Rashidi (BBA Spec. Hons. '06) is now a chartered accountant, as planned, and working for KPMG in Toronto. Aileen Rapson (BES Hons. '06, MES '09) has landed a dream job for an ecologist – working as a species-at-risk analyst for the Ontario government's Natural Heritage Information Centre in Peterborough, where she has a direct impact on conservation policy. Ilil Naveh-Benjamin (BA Spec. Hons. '06) graduated in psychology from the Faculty of Arts in pre-Health days and is now at prestigious Cornell University, in the third year of her psych PhD. But she's no longer so sure she'll end up in academia.

"I am not conventional," Atkinson's Habibah Ahmad (BA Hons. '06) told us in 2004, and she's still blazing trails. She travelled for a year by herself through the Middle East, then came back to Toronto to work on health promotion for African Muslim women in the difficult area of HIV/AIDS – "There's so much stigma," she notes.

To be sure, none of our top students are ever conventional, and we are delighted to celebrate that. ■

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Send letters, submissions, comments and ideas to [editor@yorku.ca](mailto:editor@yorku.ca).

York's outreach and community engagement are part of its DNA. BY MAMDOUH SHOUKRI

# Bred in the Bone

**F**rom the top of the new York Research Tower, you get a stunning view of the Keele campus – the sprawling lawn of the Harry W. Arthurs Common, the roads that ring the campus, the woodlots, and the buildings that house our labs and lecture halls. You also get a unique perspective of our broader locale – from York Region in the north to the City of Toronto in the south; from Markham in the east to Brampton and Mississauga in the west.

But York University is more than just the geographic centre of the Greater Toronto Area: we have an important role to play in the growth and development of our region. Universities have traditionally struggled to reach out to their community and the wider world in an effort to become or remain relevant. But York is not a traditional university. Outreach and community engagement are bred in the bone at York; they are part of our DNA.

## As the GTA comes to

To take just one example, in September 2008 we launched the York University-TD Community Engagement Centre at Yorkgate Mall. The centre provides community members with information and services – tax preparation, advice on running a small business, tutoring and mentoring – and gives our students valuable hands-on learning experience. In just over a year, more than 12,000 people have visited the centre.

York is making great strides in building stronger communities, and our connection with surrounding areas gets stronger as York becomes a more urban university. The dedicated busway from Downsview subway station is an important step forward, cutting commute times not only for students but for people living and working in the community. The arrival of the subway will utterly transform York, eliminating some 1,700 buses per day from the Keele campus and making York a commuter hub connecting the City of Toronto with Vaughan and York Region, and points east and west.

Mamdouh Shoukri is York's president and vice-chancellor.



As the GTA comes to York, we need to think carefully about where we want York to go. To ensure we realize our potential for community building, we have undertaken a strategic planning process that will lead to the development of a Provostial White Paper. This process will provide a renewed strategic vision and describe where we want to be 10-15 years from now by seeking to answer basic questions: What do we hope York University will be? What are our aspirations and hopes for this great institution? And how do we align

those aspirations with the needs of society?

One thing that won't change is York's commitment to public service. As we turn the page on York's 50th anniversary celebrations, we look to the next 50 years with a mixture of hope and optimism. We are proud of York's history – all the things we stand for, all that we have achieved in the past five decades – but it is York's future that is truly exciting. In the next 50 years, York will build on its strengths and grow as a centre for research – a place that helps solve some of the challenges we face. York will grow academically, especially in the areas of science, applied science and engineering, to offer our students the broadest range of opportunities possible and to help our province and country build a stronger foundation for social and economic development. And York will grow in importance, a place that helps shape our communities, our region and our world. ■



## Check List

Young hockey players are at risk from defensive body contact

**I**s bodychecking endangering young hockey players? A recent study by former York student Joel Warsh (BSc Hons. '07) indicates it is. Warsh, the study's lead author, under supervision of Alison Macpherson, professor in the School of Kinesiology & Health Science in the Faculty of Health, found a definitive link between legally defensive bodychecking and increased risk of injury to players.

Macpherson, Warsh and two other researchers conducted a systematic review of published research from three countries and found that defensive bodychecking (designed to legally separate a player from the puck) was frequently cited as a leading cause of injury across all age levels and divisions of play in youth hockey leagues in all three countries – Canada, the United States and Finland.

"Ice hockey is considered by many to be our national sport," says Macpherson. "The numbers are huge. More than 500,000 young players are registered in Canada. But there has always been controversy associated with the ages at which bodychecking should be legally permitted. Most recreational leagues for children do not allow bodychecking."

Macpherson notes that many European countries never allow it, whereas Ontario allowed checking in competitive leagues in the peewee (11-12 years old) division and above in the 2008-2009 season. Macpherson and Warsh's study of the literature found bodychecking was described as the "mechanism of injury" for 2.9 per cent up to an astounding 91 per cent in the 20 studies analyzed. (Only one study out of the 20 found it to have no harmful physical effects.) "Our findings support current recommendations that children play in non-contact hockey leagues until at least bantam [13-15] or later," says Macpherson. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED



BOOKS

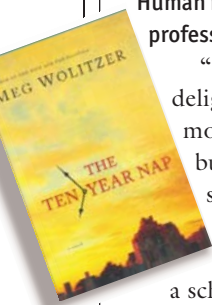
# What They're Reading

York people reveal what's on the bedside table

**Souha Ezzedeem**

Human resource management professor

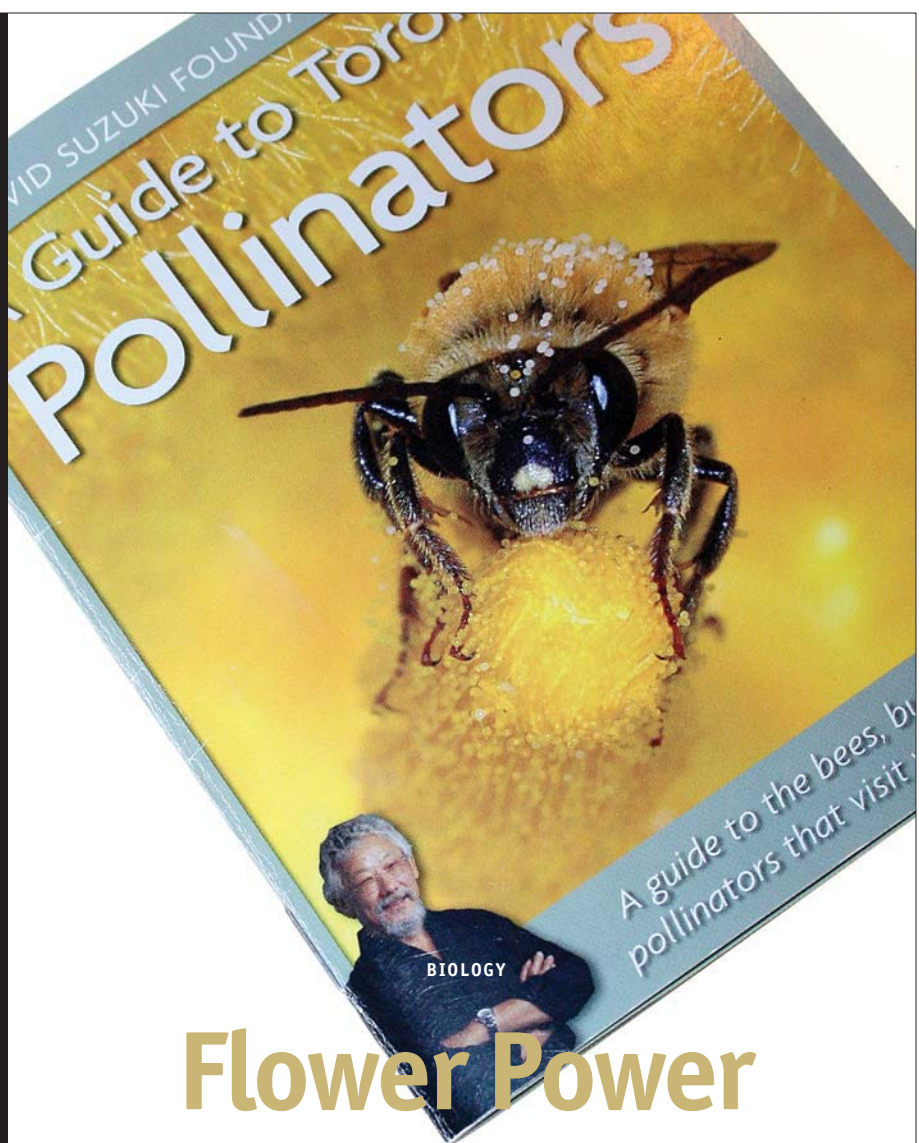
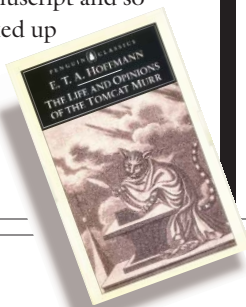
"Good books turn delays into delight. I can steal a few more moments while I await a late bus, an overlooked physician, a student on his way. I just finished Meg Wolitzer's latest novel, *The Ten-Year Nap*. As a scholar of gender and work-life balance, I was intrigued by the stories of four stay-at-home moms in post-9-11 New York City. The emptiness and loss they feel after 10 years is vividly described, and the humour of obsessions over friends who cheat on their husbands and men who cheat on their expenses is readily apparent."



**Sally McKay**

PhD student, art history & visual culture

"Our books tend to gravitate to the bed. They pile up on it, under it, over it and get jammed down between the pillows and the headboard. If you dug through the sheets right now you'd find Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* – which is a hilarious hybrid and somehow better than a mere violent gimmick, mostly because Jane Austen herself kicked ass – and E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr*. The setup is that a house cat wrote a novel on the back of another manuscript and so both stories got mixed up and published in alternating segments (with bits missing)."



## Flower Power

York's bee expert publishes a guide to Toronto's precious pollinators

**Y**ork biology Professor Laurence Packer has published Toronto's first guide to our more common local pollinators – in this case, bees, wasps, moths and butterflies. Titled *A Guide to Toronto's Pollinators*, the book was sponsored by the David Suzuki Foundation in an effort to raise awareness about the value of these insects to plant and wildlife diversity in the Greater Toronto Area, says Packer.

It's now widely known that there is a crisis in declining bee populations, especially among the Apidae family of bees, which includes bumblebees, honeybees, carpenter bees and some other solitary bees. While the jury is still out on what kind of economic effect crashing bee populations could have on cash crops, Packer's bee guide couldn't be more timely in encouraging identification and heightening awareness of the many bees in both the city and surrounding country that aid in food production and flowering plant reproduction.

The guide runs to 35 pages with close-up colour photos of each pollinator, and Packer has supplied fact-filled descriptions of the 29 pollinators he lists. There is also an informative couple of pages defining pollination and pollinators, as well as a handy checklist on "things to do" to attract pollinators to your garden or yard.

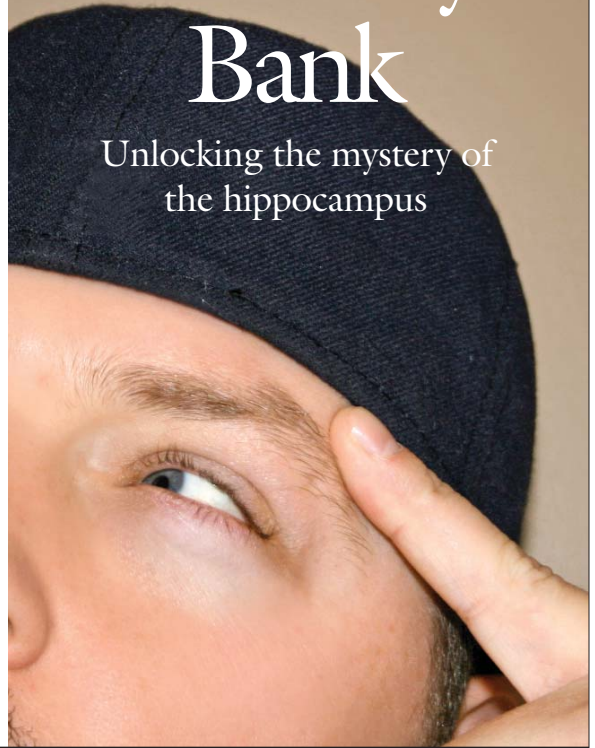
The book is available for \$5 from the David Suzuki Foundation at [www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org). ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

THE BRAIN

# Memory Bank

Unlocking the mystery of the hippocampus



**I**t's hard enough remembering friends' birthdays, let alone recalling a lifetime of personal memories. But whether caused by pathology or accident, severe memory loss often means people lose a part of themselves.

Researchers have long known the brain's hippocampus is key to accessing memories. But now its role in accessing the type of memory known as "autobiographical episodic memory" (memory of past personal experiences) is better understood, thanks to recent research by York psychology Professor Shayna Rosenbaum and colleagues. "There are different aspects of memory that change with healthy aging, including episodic memory, and these are related to structural changes in regions such as the hippocampus and the frontal lobes, as well as changes to connections between regions," says Rosenbaum, who is based in the Faculty of Health.

Many researchers believed the hippocampus supported both episodic memory and semantic memory (memory for general and personal facts) in the same way – that is, both types of memory relied on the hippocampus temporarily until the memories were established in other brain regions outside it, Rosenbaum says. Now her research challenges that notion.

Her study found that damage to the hippocampus was more significant than previously thought – in terms of memory storage and retrieval – and that it could affect access to long-term autobiographical episodic memory even if the rest of the brain remained perfectly healthy.

"Our work helps predict the types of memories lost following brain injury and diseases affecting the hippocampus, including Alzheimer's," says Rosenbaum. "It may also help direct methods for preserving certain types of personal memories, by teaching some patient populations to learn about new experiences or relearn old ones by focusing on and reviewing the gist of those experiences rather than worrying about the details." ■

BEHAVIOUR

# Bad Dates

Aggression in teen relationships can be serial – and serious

**A** string of aggressive partners among dating teens may not be just bad luck with romance – it's more likely to be a peer problem, suggests a study by Jennifer Connolly, psychology professor in York's Faculty of Health and director of the LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence & Conflict Resolution.

Connolly's study discovered teenagers often move from one aggressive dating relationship to another – one that is the same or worse – if there is violence or delinquent behaviour among their peers. In fact, 13 per cent of the 621 teenage volunteer participants in her study had experienced aggression in two different relationships within a year, either as perpetrators of aggression or as the victim, or both.

Although under-studied in comparison to research on adult intimate violence, adolescent dating aggression has a serious negative impact on the victims' health and well-being. The effects of dating aggression on girls, for instance, can include substance abuse, eating disorders and suicidal thoughts, among others.

What can be done? Connolly says that while dating aggression is a significant relationship problem that affects the romantic lives of many teens, at the same time, peer pressure can also be used for a positive outcome. "Adolescence is an opportune time to intervene and pave the way for teens to develop long-term, healthy romantic relationships," says Connolly. "Peer-led anti-violence projects that engage youth and create non-violent relationships are one important way to change youth aggression." ■





THINKERS

# Will Press Lever for Food

A new book explores the legacy of B.F. Skinner

**F**amous for his behaviourist theories and his rat-pushing-a-lever-for-food experiments (in a device known as the Skinner box), B.F. Skinner grew up in Pennsylvania and had an idyllic childhood. Although he studied English and wanted to be a novelist, reading the works of people like Pavlov inspired him to abandon that aspiration and enrol in Harvard's graduate psychology program. His work contributed immensely to experimental psychology of the time.

York psychology Professor Alexandra Rutherford has published a new book that examines the immense influence of Skinner (1904-1990) and his followers. Titled *Beyond the Box: B.F. Skinner's Technology of Behavior from Laboratory to Life, 1950s-1970s*, it looks at the ways Skinner's ideas have transcended the lab and become part of daily lives in the postwar era.

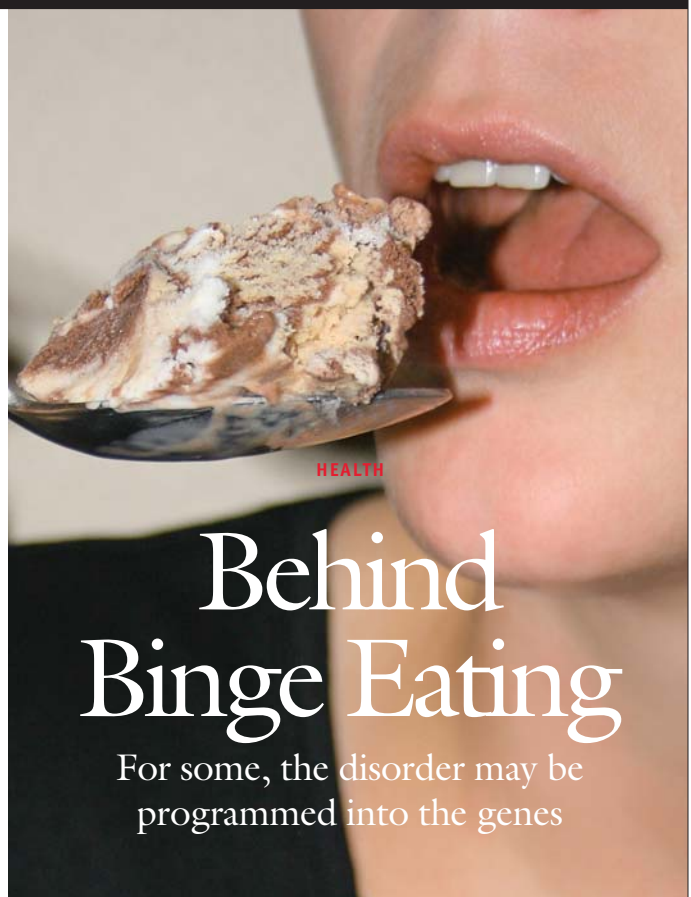
To detail the Skinnerians' innovative methods, Rutherford uses extensive archival materials and interviews to study their creation of human behaviour laboratories and management programs for juvenile delinquents, psychiatric wards and prisons, as well as their influence on the self-help industry with popular books on how to quit smoking, lose weight and be more assertive.

Rutherford says Skinner called on people to understand the enormous potential of a world more intentionally controlled and engineered, although this message was often poorly received. "Skinner was heralded as one of the most incisive thinkers of his time," says Rutherford. "But he also had many critics. In my book, I wanted to see if it was possible to reconcile his transformation from laboratory scientist to public intellectual against the backdrop of mid-20th-century American life." ■

**A**re some people "destined" to be fat? Well, if binge eating is an underlying cause for some obese people's weight, the answer appears to be yes. A recent study by York researcher Caroline Davis, professor of kinesiology in York's Faculty of Health, and colleagues, indicates that – for some – the tendency to binge eat may be programmed into the genes.

Her study, published in the journal *Obesity*, identified clear genetic differences between obese people suffering from binge eating disorder (BED) and obese individuals who did not. Davis says BED individuals appeared to have "a hyper-reactivity to the hedonic properties of the food itself." Hedonic literally means "pleasure-related", as in "hedonism", and Davis's findings suggest BED is a biologically based subtype of obesity linked to a specific receptor in the brain's opioid or "liking" system. (The same receptor has been linked to drug and alcohol addiction.)

So saying no may be made even harder for those with the liking gene, because we're a sweet-tooth, fast-food nation. "It's a predisposition that is easily exploited in our current environment with its highly visible and easily accessible surfeit of sweet and fatty foods," says Davis. "For some individuals, overeating is a relatively passive event that occurs almost without awareness as a result of liberal snacking and large meal portions with high fat and sugar levels. For others, overeating can be compulsive and excessively driven, as demonstrated by those who binge eat." ■



HEALTH

## Behind Binge Eating

For some, the disorder may be programmed into the genes

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

# Coffee's Perks

Why caffeine benefits male ALS sufferers, but not females



**S**ure it might keep you awake nights, but an unusual side benefit of drinking coffee has been discovered by York researchers and colleagues. Lou Gehrig's disease, a.k.a. amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), appears to respond favourably to coffee and caffeine in males but, sadly, not in females, says the study's lead author Rajini Seevaratnam (MSc '09), a former graduate student in York's School of Kinesiology & Health Science in the Faculty of Health.

Researchers from York and McMaster University looked at the antioxidant effects of coffee, caffeine and chlorogenic acid on ALS, a fatal disease that damages key neurons in the brain and spinal cord. "Although ALS was discovered more than 100 years ago, neither the cause nor cure has been found, but oxidative stress seems to play a role in its development," says Seevaratnam. The next step was logical. "We thought it worthwhile to examine what role antioxidants – compounds that

protect cells from oxidative damage – might play," says York kinesiology Professor Mazen Hamadeh, the study's principal investigator.

Coffee is popular in diets worldwide and is a significant source of antioxidants, including caffeine and chlorogenic acid. Seevaratnam's study separately examined the effect of coffee, caffeine and chlorogenic acid on oxidative stress, antioxidant enzymes, inflammation, stress response and cell death in male and female mice models of ALS.

The findings? "If we extrapolate our results to human patients with ALS, then coffee appears beneficial to men. However, for women with ALS, coffee appears neutral – providing no benefit or risk," says Seevaratnam. "Yet caffeine appears harmful, so women with ALS or at risk of ALS may want to restrict caffeine consumption or switch to decaffeinated products high in antioxidants." ■





# THE TOP TEN

With ties in two Faculties, York has a bumper crop of undergrad achievers this year.

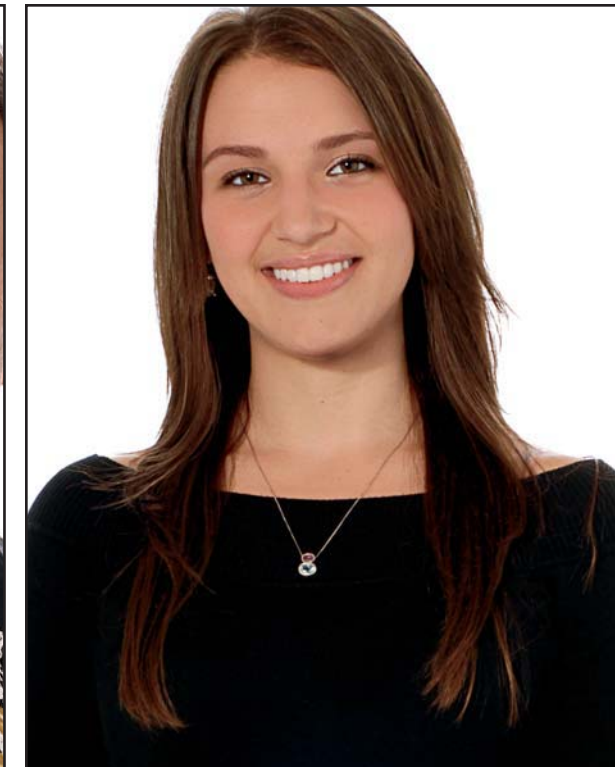
BY MARTHA TANCOCK n PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

**W**HAT DOES IT TAKE to be a top student? Intelligence is a given, energy is a bonus but hard work, perseverance and discipline have propelled these 10 achievers to the top of their Faculties midway through their undergraduate career. All are talented, and some have overcome language, cultural and economic obstacles to reach the pinnacle in *YorkU's* seventh annual survey.

This year stands out for ties in two Faculties, most remarkably that of best friends Sara Fairweather and Sandra Gianggioppo

in the Faculty of Science & Engineering, who grew up together (see page 16). Each scored a cumulative grade point average of 9.0 (out of 9) at the end of second year. Luke Lenardon and Parth Patel also tied, at 8.65, in the Schulich School of Business.

This is also the last time there will be winners in eight Faculties. On July 1, after the end of the qualifying period, the new Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies replaced the Faculty of Arts and the Atkinson Faculty of Liberal & Professional Studies. So look for seven top students next year – unless there's a tie.







## Into the Current

**Reiko Obokata**

Faculty of Environmental Studies GPA: 8.2

**WHEN REIKO OBOKATA GRADUATED** from Grade 8, her downtown Toronto school created the Academic Athlete Award just for her. She was always top of her class and involved in every sport. But this daughter of theatre artists also played violin and loved to sing in choirs, so she auditioned for the Music Theatre Program at the Etobicoke School of the Arts. Ever in the chorus, the jazz chanteuse who writes “folky” songs transferred to another school and “did cool things” like plan auctions for the shelter committee. A stimulating world issues course rekindled an interest in the environment for this urbanite who spent childhood summers camping in Ontario’s north. After Grade 12, she took a year off, worked at Sears, visited Costa Rica’s national parks, then enrolled at York. “I’m not afraid to spend Friday night in the library,” says the part-time stockroom clerk. She loves researching and writing essays about refugees, tropical conservation and environmental policy. “The issues are so current and so relevant to life.” When world woes overwhelm her, she jogs, practises yoga, hangs out with friends and watches bad reality TV shows. Still, she dreams of journalism. “The world is a shaky place right now and I want to contribute to making things better.”



## Staying at the Peak

**Markian Farenech**

Faculty of Health GPA: 8.94

**LEAN AND KEEN**, that’s Markian Farenech. At 6 foot 2 and 180 pounds, the 20-year-old kinesiology student has been weight training since Grade 10, determined to live forever in peak condition and avoid the bad back that forced his once-athletic father, his idol, into early retirement. This summer, while renovating the family room, he biked every morning and worked out every evening. Winters, he and his friends play hockey; summers, golf. He considered pro golf – he’s that good – but says he can’t bear competition pressure. The Mississauga homebody loves cooking – low fat, high protein, salads and “whole wheat everything”. Next to TSN, his favourite channel is the Food Network; he never misses “Chef at Home” and “Licence to Grill”. Reading is a chore, but Farenech loves to learn and shrugs when his older brother ribs him about perfectionism. In Grade 6, “I got sick and tired of being an average student,” he says. “Mediocrity bugs me.” Like his dad, this Ukrainian Catholic plans to marry, have two sons and teach high school. His mission: to make phys-ed classes mandatory after Grade 9. “For the welfare of our society, I am going to do everything in my power to teach people to be active and to eat properly.”





## Steeped in Culture

**Lisa Choi**

Faculty of Fine Arts GPA: 8.24

**WHEN LISA CHOI VISITED** her older sister in La Paz, Bolivia, last summer, strangers would ask her where she was from. “Canada,” said this daughter of Korean immigrants who’s played ice hockey on Toronto rinks since she was four. “What could be more Canadian than that?” Nobody believed her. The experience only fortifies the proud Scarborough resident’s impulse to buck stereotypes and challenge the way people think about the world. Growing up, Choi was an unstoppable, all-around athlete who loved hockey, soccer and long-distance running. Easily bored, this high-achieving introvert thrived at a project-oriented alternative high school where she roamed far and wide through the curriculum. Her parents hoped their science-smart youngest would study medicine or law. Choi did flirt with forensic science but finally couldn’t resist studying fine arts and culture at York, eager to critique the Canadian cultural landscape and continue painting, drawing and sculpting. Now 20, she’s earned two chemistry credits, just in case art restoration calls her, but urban planning seems a more likely destiny. This year, she’s decided to major in urban studies as well, bent on creating a more inclusive world. “Once you understand how culture works, you can make society a better place.”



## On Public Service

**Jaclyn Volkhammer**

Glendon GPA: 8.5

**IT’S HARD TO CHOOSE** a direction when you are curious about and good at everything. If Jaclyn Volkhammer had listened to her high school teachers, she would have pursued sciences or engineering. But the A+ product of French immersion schools decided to keep up her French and study political science, environmental studies and economics at cozy, bilingual Glendon. During term, the 20-year-old from Richmond Hill lives in residence, thrives on little sleep and devotes hours to clubs concerned with such issues as the environment and human rights. For fun, she plunks the piano and watches World Wrestling Entertainment. Summers, she runs the local museum’s paleontology and forensic science camps and reads everything from science fiction to war journalism. Shy and soft-spoken but no shrinking violet, Volkhammer is grooming herself for public service. Last spring, she was elected to Glendon’s student government and next year she hopes to win a seat on York’s Senate. The multilingual granddaughter of German and Macedonian immigrants itches to get out in the real world. She’ll do a master’s in public and international affairs – at Glendon, where else? – then run for parliament, draft environmental policy or join the diplomatic service. “I’ve always thought it was a noble job to serve one’s country.”



## Sisters in Spirit

**BORN THREE MONTHS APART,** Sara Fairweather and Sandra Giangioppo have been best friends since the day before kindergarten, when their mothers, both imaging technicians and also best friends, introduced them. In Grade 5, they did their first project together on the pyramids of Egypt and got the only A+ in the class. “That’s when we realized we were an unbeatable team,” says Giangioppo. Through elementary and high school they studied the same subjects, played the same sports and won similar academic and athletic awards.

At York, the President’s Scholars started in kinesiology, then transferred into biomedical sciences, aiming for medicine. They still live around the corner from each other and hang out with the same close circle of friends. Through hard work, planning and nose-to-the-grindstone marathons to prepare for exams – separately and together – the 20-year-old lab partners achieve only the very highest marks. They insist they don’t compete, but rely on, help, encourage and celebrate each other. People say they’re like twins, but they’re far from identical.



**Sara Fairweather**

Faculty of Science & Engineering GPA: 9.0

**THE SECOND OF THREE SISTERS,** Sara Fairweather has always driven herself, in and out of the classroom. The tiny perfect daughter of a building contractor father and X-ray technician mother, she consistently made the honour roll. She graduated with a 97 per cent average in Grade 12 and was named athlete of the year for playing on practically every sports team in the school, including ultimate Frisbee. But soccer is really her game. Fairweather can feel overwhelmed by studying, and soccer “is a really great release.” She would have joined York’s team but weekend practices would have interfered with precious study time, so she plays for Vaughan instead. This past summer, Fairweather worked two days a week for a radiologist, volunteered one in a hospital mammography department and studied for the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT). Weekends she reserved for time with friends, dates with her boyfriend and trips with her younger sister to visit their grandparents. She would like to continue living at home, but much depends on medical school. “I know I have a long road ahead, but I am excited to see where it takes me.”



**Sandra Giangioppo**

Faculty of Science & Engineering GPA: 9.0

**SANDRA GIANGIOPPO IS ALWAYS SMILING.** “A smile goes a long way,” says the sunny, outgoing baby daughter of Italian-Canadian parents. No surprise that she was voted friendliest graduate in Grade 12. For the past few years, Giangioppo has been teaching children of all ages, including those with disabilities, how to swim. “That’s when I knew I wanted to be a pediatrician.” No doubt she will be. From a very young age, “I’ve always wanted to do everything well.” A whiz at time management, she juggles studying, time for family and friends, and this past summer, a full-time office job at the Toronto Transit Commission, volunteering at a local hospital and preparing for the MCAT. “It’s all about maximizing your time,” she says – aiming for balance while aiming for the top. At high school, this team player won the Athletic Citizenship Award, acted in *Jitters* and was on the spirit committee. “I don’t like missing out on anything.” Future bliss for Giangioppo will be treating sick children, raising her own kids and being healthy, happy and “surrounded by the good people I love.”





## A Love of Numbers: Part 1

### Luke Lenardon

Schulich School of Business GPA: 8.65

**LUKE LENARDON WAS ACCELERATED** in Grade 1, so his parents knew he had brains. But until Grade 10, he couldn't care less about school and spent all his time playing soccer and hockey. Mom, a guidance teacher, told him to smarten up. When he noticed his friends winning academic prizes at the annual awards breakfast, he vowed to win every one in Grade 11. And he did. "I tend to be pretty competitive," says the 20-year-old from Etobicoke. He took sciences, imagining himself as Dr. Lenardon, until accounting caught his fancy. "I love numbers," says the son of a computer programmer, and he fixed his sights on being a chartered accountant. No one-hit wonder, he won the Governor General's Academic Medal for highest marks in Grade 12 – and a President's Scholarship to attend Schulich. Last summer, taking time off from selling water systems for his uncle, he visited Italy and saw the poverty his grandparents left for a better life in Canada. "It motivates you," says Lenardon, who likes to trade stocks and pictures himself a CEO one day. He might travel high on the corporate ladder, but he won't likely budge from Toronto and his big, happy family, source of summer jobs and inspiration.



## A Love of Numbers: Part 2

### Parth Patel

Schulich School of Business GPA: 8.65

**PARTHKUMAR PATEL WAS 11** when he moved to Canada from India with his parents and older brother. He spoke only Gujarati and knew little English but soon "got the hang of it" – enough to fill his first and all subsequent Canadian report cards with As. The award-winning biology student dreamed of becoming a doctor until he fell for the "amazing depth and breadth" of accounting in Grade 11. Good at numbers and interested in working with people, this 20-year-old plans to be a chartered accountant with one of the big four international firms. Patel takes nothing for granted, mindful of his engineer father and mother's sacrifice to give their sons a better education. "I try to do my best in everything," he says. In high school, the soft-spoken scholarship student played trombone and found expression in poetry. At Schulich, volunteering to do Web design has led to becoming IT director for the Corporate Social Responsibility Society and an online managing editor of the school newspaper. He takes time out to follow NBA basketball and TV series "Heroes" and "Lost". A prayerful Hindu, Patel also volunteers at an old-age home every week, committed to "contributing to others' lives in a positive way."



## Star-Spangled Scholar

### Hiam Amar

Faculty of Arts\* GPA: 8.85

**HIAM AMAR WANTS TO BE A CORPORATE LAWYER**, not in Canada but in Boston, a city he has been visiting since he was seven with his older brother just to see the New England Patriots play. “I love American culture,” says the 20-year-old from North York. This year, his photographic memory will come in handy as he preps for the Law School Admission Test, aiming to score high “so my options are open.” After nearly flunking Grade 11, he vowed never again to risk jeopardizing his education – his path to success – and matriculated in a blaze of glory. Then he enrolled in York’s interdisciplinary Law & Society Program. “It was a chance to take as many different things as possible” – acting, religion and history, as well as philosophy and law. Amar will be the first in his family to graduate from university. Raised by a doting single mom and supportive brother, this sports junkie wins scholarships and waits tables to pay for his education – and tickets to baseball, basketball and football games. As soon as he’s established as a lawyer, he will buy his mother a house. “I want to take care of my family the way they’ve taken care of me.”

*\*Now part of the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies*



## Life Experienced

### Dan Stapleton

Atkinson Faculty of Liberal & Professional Studies\* GPA: 8.16

**DAN STAPLETON JOKES** that he was such a bad student his parents promised him a new bike if he came home with a C. Growing up in Toronto’s west end in the 1950s, he repeated two grades and quit school as soon as he could. But he was no slouch. He taught himself drums and formed a band, then interrupted his quest for ’60s rock stardom to do missionary work in England. Back home by 23, he married, bought a house and supported his wife and four kids as a musician, entertainment planner and magician. He opened a game store, taught judo and for seven happy years served as a Mormon bishop. Curious about the Bible’s origins – and encouraged by his wife, a student at York – he audited an Old Testament course taught by Tony Michael, who had taken Stapleton’s own youth seminary class years before. Then Stapleton mustered the courage to take a Bible course for credit. He was 58. Judged on the rigour of his arguments, not penalized for spelling and grammar, he came home with As. “I completely surprised myself,” says the part-time student, now 63 and hooked on critical thinking. “I have turned 180 degrees and have a completely new and exhilarating outlook on life.” ■

*\*Now part of the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies*



# Walking the Walk

With a Jane Jacobs tour of, yes, suburban Thornhill,  
Elana Anzel-Sivkin shows there's life after Steeles.

BY MICHAEL TODD n PHOTOGRAPHY BY KC ARMSTRONG



**T**WENTY-THREE-YEAR-OLD Thornhill, Ont., resident Elana Anzel-Sivkin can walk the walk and talk the talk, especially when it comes to conducting a “Jane’s Walk” of her home neighbourhood. If you think there’s no “there” there in the 905 area code, well, you’re in for a shock. In fact, Anzel-Sivkin would likely stack her suburban landscape up against any fancy downtown ’hood. The newly minted York environmental studies grad (BES Spec. Hons. ’09, conferred this fall) recently conducted the first ever Jane’s Walk focused entirely on Thornhill environs.

The walks, which started in 2007, were designed to celebrate the ideas and legacy of Jane Jacobs (1916-2006), an urban activist who championed community-led, pedestrian-based town planning over a car-centred approach. The walks also tackle the old city-planning conundrum: What makes a “space” a “place”? And they are usually led by local citizens who



are passionate about the area where they live. The theme of Anzel-Sivkin's Thornhill tour was "Places to Loiter and Other Fun and Cheap Activities".

Jacobs knew neighbourhoods are where you find them (or perhaps where you create them), whether physically, as in bricks and mortar, or in the mind. Some urban spaces are perhaps more recognizable as classic places than others (think Toronto's Annex, for instance, where Jacobs herself lived for many years). But the suburbs have their share, too, says Anzel-Sivkin, as her walk set out to prove.

So what is a Jane's Walk and how does it work? First, all walks are free. And at the simplest level, they are designed to make participants realize what makes their community special, instilling a sense of belonging and encouraging civic leadership.

Walks are led by anyone who has an

interest in the neighbourhoods where they live, work or hang out. Walks are not always about architecture and heritage, but

are designed to offer a more personal take on the local culture, the social history and the planning issues faced by residents. (Jacobs believed strongly that local residents understand best how their neighbourhoods work, and what is needed to strengthen and improve them.)

It's easy to see what makes Toronto's downtown spaces into places – they're full of historic buildings, old churches and synagogues, spruced-up lofts and brand new architecture, all coexisting. (Toronto boasted some 100 tours this spring, from the Dovercourt area to the Gay Village.) But when it comes to suburbs?

"I took a course this year in which we spent a lot of time discussing the idea of 'place'," says Anzel-Sivkin, who hopes

**"The design of a suburb does not mean that there is no possibility or desire for community."**



## WHY I GIVE TO YORK

"My family fled Finland after World War II because my father, for fear of a Soviet invasion, became involved in a military movement that was distributing guns to people instead of demobilizing. We moved to Venezuela but were once again uprooted when my father's successful business threatened powerful local interests. Eventually, we wound up in North America.

These experiences explain why I have devoted much of my career to researching the causes of displacement and lost opportunities.

They're also why I created the Paavo and Aino Lukkari Human Rights Fund at York and left a bequest to the fund in my will. It honours my parents' memory while supporting the work of students who share my passion for human rights and social justice in Latin America and the Caribbean."

*Retired professor Liisa North is a founder of the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean at York University.*

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to work in the realm of urban and regional environments. “Although I had heard of Jane’s Walk, it was only when I heard about it on the CBC this year that I had the idea of creating a walk in Thornhill. Our course required us to do research on our neighbourhoods and consider themes to help deepen our knowledge of them.” The result, she says, was that she began to see and accept that “the design of a suburb does not mean that there is no possibility or desire for community.”

What were the challenges of setting up a walk in suburbia compared to, say, downtown Toronto? For Anzel-Sivkin, it was getting beyond trying to “prove a point” that the burbs had life too. Something said by Jane Farrow, executive director of Jane’s Walk and the Centre for City Ecology, made her realize she had to rethink the walk’s intent. Guides, noted Farrow, should create a walk based on enthusiasm for the place itself. “So my walk ended up not being aimed at skeptical urbanites but at the local residents already connected to Thornhill,” says Anzel-Sivkin.

Although she got some coverage in local media, Anzel-Sivkin says she was doubtful many people would come out. But on the day, more than 45 turned up. “It totally exceeded my expectations!” she says. “At the end, many people came up to

me urging me to conduct another. So I was elated because of that and plan to do some more.”

So what kind of places did she focus on and how did she prepare? “I had a script that I worked up,” says Anzel-Sivkin. Mostly she chose places based on stories associated with them, like the local Mac’s store at the Chabad Gate Plaza, whose grassy knoll has served as a beacon for several generations of teens (but is now changing due to social pressures, she says). Parks were also on her agenda, namely Conley, Gilmore and New Westminster. Anzel-Sivkin also explored a phenomenon, perhaps unique to Thornhill, which she calls the “breakfast restaurant wars”. According to Anzel-Sivkin, breakfast restaurants in the area are popular hangouts and each one attracts its own particular crowd and well-known regulars.

The experience proved to her that residents, whether city-based or suburban, are longing for activities that allow them to connect with each other and with the place where they live. Says Anzel-Sivkin, “Things such as Jane’s Walks or community gardens afford residents opportunities to apply Jane Jacobs’ belief that understanding and connection is formed by social and physical activities – in the place where you live.” ■

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A man with short, graying hair and glasses is sitting on a dark staircase. He is wearing a dark, long-sleeved button-down shirt and dark trousers. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background consists of light-colored stone or concrete walls with dark horizontal lines. The lighting is soft and even.

# How People Really Live

ALL ABOUT DETAILS: Ornstein



A new research resource at York unlocks a treasure trove of StatsCan data.

BY DAVID FULLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

**T**HINK OF THE DIFFERENCE in storytelling power between a snapshot and a video. That's what York sociologist Michael Ornstein hopes to harness with the launch of a new Statistics Canada Research Data Centre at York. A snapshot is what you get from StatsCan's census, the once-every-five-years portrait of Canadians. From it we can learn, at a fixed point in time, how many Canadians are young or old, rich or poor, married or single, and use that information to inform social research. But Ornstein wants something more like TV's "Biography" – a series of snapshots taken over time, complete with personal interviews and a sense of narrative.

Statistics Canada has been making such video-like studies of Canadians for 25 years now – longitudinal surveys, as they're known, that give far more information on how a person's life story changes over time. Take poverty, for example. Census data will tell you how many Canadians are poor and by how much, but not what happens to them later. Longitudinal studies, such as the Survey of Labour & Income Dynamics which tracks people's income over six years, can tell you whether individuals spend their days as part of a permanent underclass or escape their spell of hard luck. "There is an enormous difference between a situation where people are more or less permanently poor for years and one where a lot of people experience poverty for a short time," says Ornstein, director of York's Institute for Social Research.

But there's a problem: longitudinal studies provide so much detail about the people who respond that showing the data to anyone – even qualified researchers – runs afoul of confidentiality provisions of the Statistics Act, which governs all of StatsCan's data collection activities. As a result, this rich store of data was long locked away and available only to government staff and a tiny group of researchers. "It was like a vast library where only the librarians could read the books," says Ornstein.

The solution was to create Research Data Centres, where the survey data could be kept in a secure environment accessible to accredited researchers. In 2001, York University, Ryerson University and the University of Toronto created one of an eventual 15 such centres across Canada, at the U of T's Robarts Library. To gain access to the treasure trove, researchers had to become "deemed employees" of Statistics Canada, subject to privacy laws, and do their work in a secure high-tech facility. It was better, but still not convenient for faculty who wanted to undertake the time-consuming work on the Keele campus. That's when Ornstein hit upon a synergistic solution.

York already had a facility, built for the Canadian Century Research Infrastructure Project, that met StatsCan security standards – one of seven such facilities built across Canada to digitize census data from 1911 to 1951. The project wrapped up in spring 2009, leaving a perfect space available at Keele for a data centre. Ornstein gained the support of York's Office of the Vice-President Research & Innovation for some renovations and equipment, and the centre opened in York Lanes in March. Now researchers whose studies receive approval from a review committee of the Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada will be able to consult the full set of returns for these studies, minus people's names, but revealing much about who they are and how they live. "These are the kinds of files that have a wide appeal across the social sciences and they are inherently interdisciplinary," says Ornstein. National studies on immigration, say, or children and youth, are of interest to sociologists, of course, but also to demographers, geographers, economists and psychologists.

Censuses and other studies over the past two decades have shown that immigrants in recent years are worse off economically than previous groups. To find out why, the federal government launched the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, which asked detailed questions about immigrants' backgrounds and their experiences after arriving in Canada. "The immigrant experience is all about details," says Ornstein, author of the 2006 study "Ethno-Racial Groups in Toronto, 1971-2001: A Demographic and Social Profile". "If you want to try to understand what racialization means, you have to move beyond the 'visible minority' categories like 'black'," he explains. "The black community in Canada includes a historic Canadian community, Caribbean immigrants and their descendants, and people with African origins. So, if you're trying to understand the educational and income implications of being black, there's an incredible difference between a refugee from Ethiopia and a person whose great-grandfather lived in Montreal or Toronto and whose ancestors came on the Underground Railroad."

Using both these longitudinal studies and the vast resources of the censuses, researchers at York will be able to describe the Canadian experience better than ever before. "The value of the longitudinal surveys and the censuses is that they allow you to think in much more complexity about how people navigate their lives," says Ornstein. "It's trying to understand the world as people see it through their own eyes rather than the eyes of a statistician looking down." ■

# Winning Combination

**W**ILL PRISCILA UPPAL'S NEW FICTION anthology, *The Exile Book of Canadian Sports Stories*, score points with readers? Nothing's for certain, but with the advent of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, she's hoping the zeitgeist will help create as much hunger for sports on the page as on the tube. Uppal, a poet, novelist, anthologist, York English professor and Ottawa native, is a bit sports-besotted herself. She loves nothing better than a session on an elliptical machine at the local gym, a round of fencing, some springboard diving or taking figure skating lessons. In between her sport hobbies, she somehow manages to find time to write.

While some might think writers are essentially couch potatoes curled up with the Next Big Novel, Uppal defies and eschews that stereotype. She claims the sports and arts worlds are a lot more similar than we think. "Although they're commonly pitted against one another," she says, "I think both worlds have a lot in common and that artists and athletes in particular have a lot in common. Both are incredibly concerned about form, about how to work within certain conventions and rules and restrictions. Artists and athletes are incredibly disciplined. They have to be because they are constantly looking for new ways to improve technique and skill."

With the Olympics close at hand, timing couldn't be better for readers. The book, the first anthology of its kind in Canada, contains works by some of Canada's greatest writers, featuring 26 stories by the likes of Barry Callaghan, Morley Callaghan, Katherine Govier, Stephen Leacock, Lucy Maud Montgomery, Mordecai Richler and Roch Carrier.

Tales cover a wide range of sports – from Carrier's ice hockey classic to boxing, basketball, skiing, extreme marathoning and tennis. In all, Uppal says, there are two dozen different sports represented. "So many writers I know play sports or were competitors. In the end I found so much good sports fiction I had to leave some of it out!" she says. "You can put together a baseball or hockey story anthology pretty easily.

And that's already been done for Canada, but no one has done a book of varied stories like this. I also included stories written by women, which are a bit of a rarity in sports writing circles." The only criteria for the selections were that they had to be "great literary stories" and be self-contained literary works written by a Canadian, she says. "I didn't include any novel excerpts because, as a reader myself, I just find that kind of thing so unsatisfying."

Uppal says readers will be pleasantly surprised by some of the authors found here. "Linda Griffiths has a story about baseball, and who knew Lucy Maud Montgomery wrote a sports story featuring sailing and rowing races? I had no idea she ever thought about sport, let alone wrote about it. I guess I was most surprised to find as many women writing about sports as I did," she says. (There are nine women authors represented, and 17 men.)

Uppal, who has included one of her own sports stories in the anthology, has also published five collections of poetry, from *How to Draw Blood From a Stone* (1998) to *Ontological Necessities* (2006), and two critically acclaimed novels – *The Divine Economy of Salvation* (2002) and *To Whom It May Concern* (2009). She has been the editor of numerous other anthologies, including *Red Silk: An Anthology of South Asian Canadian Women Poets* (2004, co-edited with York's Rishma Dunlop) and *Barry Callaghan: Essays on His Works* (2007).

Her interest in sports came naturally, Uppal says. Aside from being a lifelong hockey fan (her brother's wife is a professional hockey physician, hence she often gets great seats to games), Uppal played competitive basketball and volleyball and was a runner in high school.

"Sports and writing are playful, experimental, pushing the limits," she says. "They're both about testing oneself and making something that's uniquely yours. The greatest of athletes and writers are the people who redefine the whole game, or whose names are associated with a move or style." There is, however, one sports omission in the book, and that's curling. Says Uppal, "I couldn't find a curling story anywhere!" ■

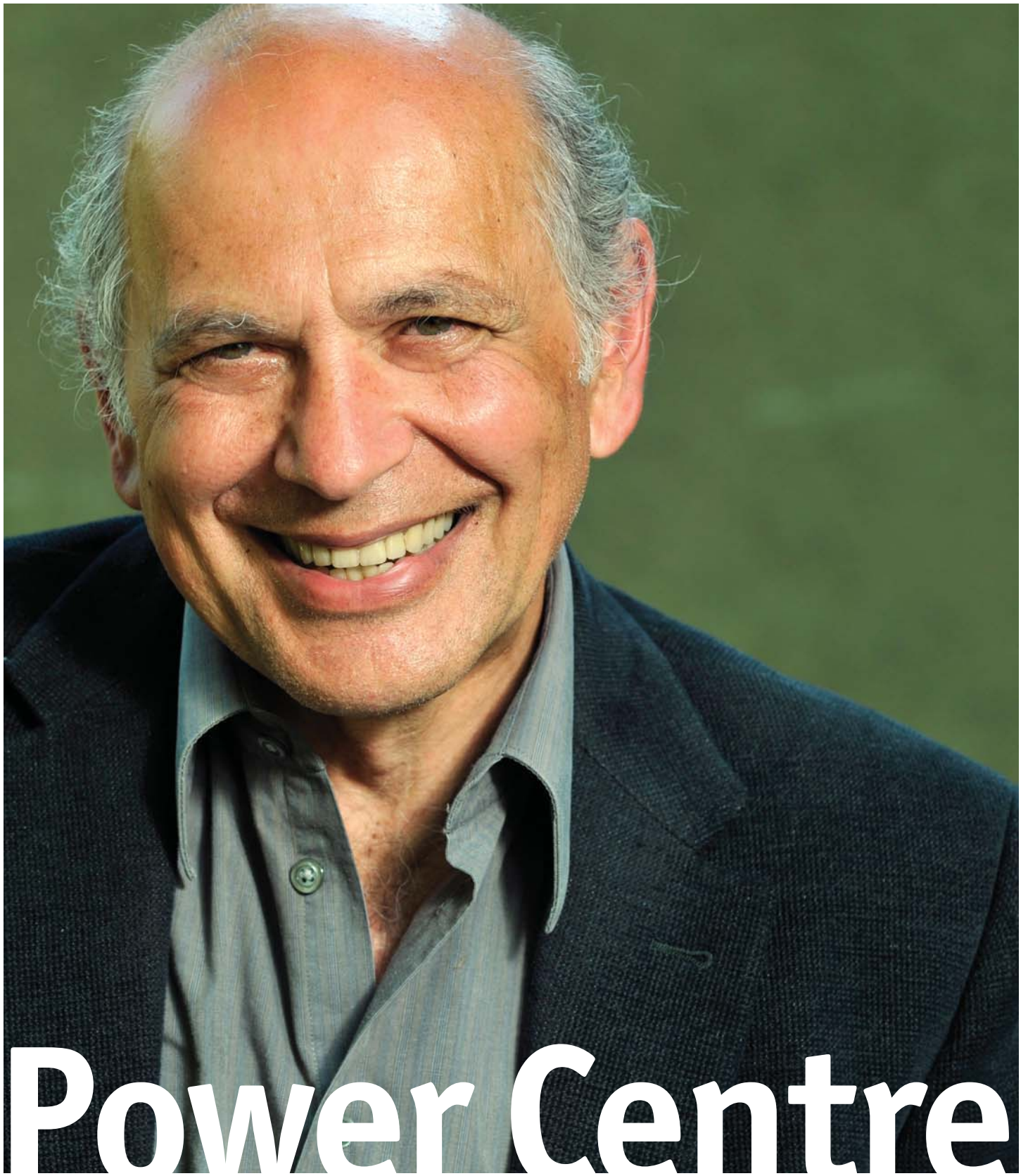




Do sport and literature mix?  
Check out Priscila Uppal's  
new anthology of Canadian  
sports stories. BY MICHAEL TODD  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

**CAN FUN**  
CANADIAN ATHLETES NA





# Power Centre

Former top mandarin Alex Himelfarb will bring Ottawa heft to  
Glendon's School of Public & International Affairs.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK n PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARY BEECHEY



**A**LEX HIMELFARB, once Canada's top civil servant, plans to start big conversations at York about big national policy issues. "There's a hunger for public policy discourse that's not short term or crassly political," says Himelfarb, a former clerk of the Privy Council who served three prime ministers. "The strength of our democracy depends in no small measure on the quality of public engagement and discourse. Anything we can do to elevate that discourse is important."

Last spring, Himelfarb finished his tour as ambassador to Italy and retired after a 28-year career in the public service. In September, the policy expert who started his career as a sociology professor returned to the academic fold – as the new director of the fledgling Glendon School of Public & International Affairs. "His rich experience as a public servant combined with his academic background is unusual," says Glendon Principal Kenneth McRoberts, who's been the new school's acting director for two years. "I think Alex Himelfarb is going to have a big impact."

At Glendon, Himelfarb will expand the school's research capacity and its professional development programming. He will teach in the master's program. But, most exciting of all, he will launch the Centre for Global Challenges, to stimulate research and foster public debate about Canada's place in a changing world.

The positive response to a Glendon conference last year on Public Institutions and Canada's Future confirmed for Himelfarb that there is "a huge interest and appetite" for informed debate about big topics. The conference featured former deputy prime minister John Manley as the keynote speaker and brought together journalists, senior civil servants, politicians and researchers eager to engage each other.

Himelfarb grew up in Glendon's neighbourhood and earned a PhD at the University of Toronto. He began his working career as a sociologist at the University of New Brunswick but left academia after nine years to join the Department of the Solicitor General in 1981. As a scholar, he'd co-authored university-level introductory textbooks and shared his expertise with several government commissions. "What always intrigued me was the interface between academics and decision-makers," he says. "I fell in love with the policy process." Over the next 28 years, he rose through the senior ranks of the federal public service to become deputy minister of Canadian Heritage in 1999, clerk of the Privy Council and secretary to the Cabinet in 2002 and ambassador to Italy in 2006.

In 2000, he received the Outstanding Achievement Award for sustained commitment to excellence in the public service and for fostering a vibrant national institution geared to future needs. There is no higher honour in Canada's civil service. His own accounting is more modest – "I was happy to have been involved on issues that matter to Canadians and for Canada" – but what issues they were: same-sex marriage, Canada's role in Iraq, the National Child Benefit, health care, Canada's park system, the Kyoto Accord, arts and culture, and e-government.

How did he arrive in the job at Glendon? Eight years ago, McRoberts called Himelfarb, newly appointed clerk of the Privy Council, to pick his brain about creating a bilingual graduate school dedicated to grooming high-level public servants. Over the course of many conversations, the Glendon College principal and the mandarin discovered a shared belief in the value of the public service to Canada and a mutual concern about its future.

"There's been an erosion of public space and a lack of public discourse," says Himelfarb. "Resurrecting a sense of the collective good and the role of government, and ensuring that we engage young people in these issues, are the shared passions of Ken and me."

Before he embarked for Italy, Himelfarb agreed to head the advisory committee that would guide the creation of the Glendon School of Public & International Affairs. Now, back home in Ottawa with his wife Frum, he's stepped into the director's shoes.

In his new role, Himelfarb sees an opportunity to counter head-on "the unfortunate and dangerous assault on the public service from various quarters." This fall, he has concentrated on creating the school's Centre for Global Challenges. Not only will it foster research, it will bring together researchers and practitioners on policy issues, the role of the public servant – traditionally that of giving "fearless advice", as he puts it – and the role of public institutions. Glendon, bilingual and multidisciplinary, is ideally placed, he says, to host such critical discourse.

"There are a lot of questions Canadians would like to debate now," says Himelfarb. "What lessons should we learn from the recent financial collapse? How can Canada be competitive among giants in a hyperactive global economy? How do we compete in a way that preserves the planet's natural bounty for future generations?" And that's just for starters. "We need a lot of voices to restore public discourse and public space," says Himelfarb. He's making sure some of them will come from York's Glendon campus. ■



**Piotr Derus**  
Green car campaigner

## Electrifying Issue

PIOTR DERUS GETS A CHARGE OUT OF electric cars. In fact, the Bolton, Ont., resident and recent York physics & astronomy grad (BSc '09) is now waging a one-man campaign to convince both local politicians and Ontario MPs that electric vehicles (EVs) are where it's at when it comes to Canada's transportation needs. For him, the days of gas guzzlers are definitely numbered.

"The only thing standing in the way of electric cars is government regulation," says Derus, who has a Web site and various YouTube testimonials devoted to the need for EVs. He recently submitted a petition and gave a presentation to Pickering and Durham councillors (who all signed it), calling for their support to make the federal and provincial governments move faster to allow EVs on the roads. (Low speed electric cars are currently undergoing

a pilot project in Ontario, but Canada is still far behind the US, Europe, Australia and Asia in adopting EVs, he says.)

While there is lots of interest in EVs, there's little information available to the public, Derus maintains. "I decided to create an information campaign and one thing led to another and to my petition to expedite the Canadian market arrival of electric vehicles."

Living in Bolton, Derus finds himself in a 905-area town not well serviced by public transit. So how did he get to York? "Carpool, or go with my dad who drives a truck. Most of the time I take the GO Bus. I refuse to own a gas car. But because of this I can't find a job. Well, at least it gives me time to think about the electric vehicle issue and pursue my campaign." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD





## Adrian Roberto

Actor

# An Early Start

UNLIKE OTHER KIDS who got into sports or music lessons, Adrian Roberto decided at 9 that he wanted to act, which left his parents puzzling over where to find an outlet for his budding talents. "They weren't stage parents by any means," says the recent graduate of York's Faculty of Fine Arts. At a friend's suggestion, Roberto's mother contacted the local community theatre and he won a bit part in *The Pajama Game*. He went on to be cast in other productions and learned to find his way in the acting community, where, he says matter-of-factly, "It's about who you know."

Fast-forward to age 13: with four years' experience, Roberto signed with an agent and, after his first audition, landed a part in the 2000 Golden Globe Award-winning Showtime feature *Dirty Pictures* with actor James Woods and directed by Frank Pierson, who wrote the screenplays for classic films *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Cool Hand Luke*. "It was bizarre," says Roberto. "I love watching movies and all of a sudden I'm in one." Dozens of other roles followed quickly, including parts in television movies, short films and a guest spot on the TV series "Degrassi: The Next Generation", all while attending Unionville's high school for the arts and taking private acting lessons – which explains why, after being accepted by York, he chose film studies instead of theatre. "I wanted to branch out," says Roberto, who graduated in the spring (BA Spec. Hons. '09) and plans to head for Hollywood as soon as he can. "I discovered a passion for screenwriting, but acting is still what I want to do." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MCKENZIE JAMES

## Megan Lummiss

Youth leader

# Battling a Stigma

MEGAN LUMMISS IS A FIGHTER – and a survivor. The 24-year-old York student, who is studying to become a social worker, struggled for years with mental illness, including obsessive compulsive disorders and depression. But with therapy and hard work Lummiss overcame her issues and moved on. She's now fighting a new fight, but on behalf of others. For the last five years Lummiss has been a youth leader speaking out to students about the stigmas associated with mental illness.

"I believe I have won the battle to some extent with mental illness," she says, "because it no longer controls my life and who I am. It has become manageable. I think that one really starts 'winning the battle' when you stop believing the stigmas and

stereotypes that are out there about mental illness – and that may have been attributed by others – and start accepting yourself for who you really are."

For her community service, Lummiss was recently awarded the prestigious Mary Neville Award by Peel Children's Centre in Mississauga, Ont. She is the youngest person ever to receive the award. "I present as a part of the Talking About Mental Illness coalition in high schools in the Durham and York Regions," says Lummiss. "I tell the kids mental illness is a lot more common than they think, help is available and suicide isn't an option. You can't keep problems bottled up inside. Early intervention is key." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK



# GIVING

## To the Next Level

Gift matching can turbocharge student support

**H**OW CAN YOU DOUBLE, triple, even quadruple your money instantly? The answer is both legal and very close to home: help support York students by donating through a gift-matching program. Rewarding student excellence and removing financial barriers through awards, bursaries and scholarships is one of the top priorities of the York to the Power of 50 Family Campaign for faculty, staff and retirees. Gift-matching programs allow donors to make an even greater difference.

Take Susan Prokopenko (MSc '70, PhD '73). In 1999, she and her husband, Professor Geoffrey Hunter, set up an award in his name to celebrate his retirement from York's Department of Chemistry. Friends and colleagues contributed generously and, through the provincial government's Ontario Trust for Student Support (OTSS), which matches private donations dollar for dollar, they were able to double the size of their gifts.

Sadly, Professor Hunter died in 2008. Now, Prokopenko has added her name to create the Dr. Geoffrey Hunter and Dr. Susan Prokopenko Award and has made the York University Foundation part beneficiary of her RRSP, to support the award once she passes.

Having benefited from student aid while an undergraduate, Prokopenko says it's her time to help others in the

same position. "It's the pay-it-forward principle," she says, "paying forward what people have paid me in the past. It's important to remember."

Donors can also take advantage of the government's Ontario Graduate Scholarship or the Ontario Graduate Scholarship in Science & Technology, both of which will triple private donations intended for graduate scholarships. At York, the 50th Anniversary Bursaries & Awards Program is raising \$5 million in expendable funds. Until Dec. 31, donors may double the impact of their gift, thanks to a special matching program.

Then there's York's Graduate Support Matching Program (GSMP), which will match both the initial gift and annual distribution of the donation. It enabled retired political science Professor Liisa North to turn her \$50,000 pledge into a \$100,000 named endowment fund. Moreover, at a matched distribution rate of five per cent, that amounts to \$10,000 per year in student support in perpetuity – four times what would have been the impact of the initial donation. North named the Paavo & Aino Lukkari Human Rights Fund in honour of her parents, who she says taught her the value of a dollar well spent. "I've always believed education is an investment in the future," says North.

Donors also have the option of combining multiple programs to create an



**AN INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE:** North

even bigger impact. That's what York biology Professor Emeritus Michael Boyer did when he established the Dr. Michael Boyer Award. The initial pledge of \$50,000 was matched 1:1 by both the OTSS and the GSMP, creating a \$150,000 endowment fund that will award one graduate student \$12,500 annually. "I know from working with graduate students how important scholarships and awards are," says Boyer. "In a discipline such as ecology they are vital for travel and other research expenses."

More than 2,000 University faculty, staff and retirees have made pledges and donations since the launch of the Family Campaign, helping to bring the overall York to the Power of 50 campaign for York's 50th anniversary to more than \$190 million of its \$200-million goal. For more information, call 416-650-8210 or visit [yorku.ca/foundation](http://yorku.ca/foundation). ■

When all else fails in Africa, you may need to see Le Patron. **BY STACEY TSOUROUNIS**

# Better Than Voodoo

**G**O BACK TO WHATEVER COUNTRY you came from. My passport was shoved back at me by the immigration official behind the counter, and I was waved off impatiently. I turned to leave the gated compound, sighing as I walked slowly back out to the road where motorcycle taxis waited in droves, spewing clouds of exhaust fumes. I slumped against a wall, fanning myself with my visa application (the best use I'd gotten out of it thus far). I'd been in Benin, in francophone West Africa, less than two days and was already dying to leave, having been plagued

leave you waiting. Perhaps you'll have to come back the next day. When he finally graces you with his presence, he'll regard you suspiciously for several minutes before even speaking to you (and you are certainly not permitted to speak first). You can't speed up the process, but absolute calm and patience are essential. Le Patron is all-powerful and knows it.



## Le Patron will make you wait

by hassles at immigration since the moment I'd crossed the border en route from Togo.

After my last journey to Kenya with York International in 2007, it had taken less than

a year for the thrill of travel to draw me overseas once again. I'd begun to feel the familiar restless longing pulling at me, urging me to explore the unknown. This time, it was the red earth and desert sands of West Africa that called to me. My very first experience of Africa had been in Benin several years earlier, and so, as a graduation gift to myself, I began to organize a "homecoming" voyage.

And yet, here I was, wishing I had never come, wondering if my passion for the continent was nothing more than selective memory. I'd been travelling for a month and had experienced little but setbacks, corruption and irritation. I'd done all I should have, given the circumstances: I'd stayed calm, I hadn't lost my sense of humour and I'd even hurled a voodoo charm into the ocean to rid myself of possible bad vibes. All to no avail. I seemed to have no possible recourse – save one.

I demanded to see Le Patron.

Literally translated, this means "The Boss", but Le Patron is so much more than that. He is the essence of patriarchy and corruption. Invariably an older, rotund man, Le Patron will make you wait several hours to see him while he listens to the radio, flirts with female staff, eats, drinks and watches TV. Perhaps he'll go home for a couple of hours to take a nap and

## several hours while he flirts with female staff, eats, drinks and watches TV.

I was led to a chair outside an office. I could hear Le Patron inside, eating and making odd snorting noises. After a couple of hours, I knocked on the door. I was ignored. Another hour later, the door opened, and without a word I was ushered inside.

I greeted Le Patron respectfully. He was unimpressed. I explained my saga about being denied a visa. I sighed dejectedly. I spoke to him in his native language, Fon. There was a long pause while Le Patron evaluated my performance. Finally, he glared at me and took my passport, telling me to return the next day. With that, he waved me away, turning back to the TV.

I showed up the next morning, expecting the worst. This time, Le Patron's demeanour was far more pleasant. He invited me into his office and then – miraculously – handed me a visa. We spent a good half-hour chatting about politics – he wanted to know when the West would stop robbing his people. Hmm. I knew he had robbed back, since I'd seen him extract money from a German couple. But he didn't ask me for a bribe. He was also the only high-up official on my entire journey who did not try to get me to sleep with him. I began to find him rather endearing, in a twisted sort of way. As I left his office I felt strangely sentimental about the whole thing, thanking him profusely.

Later that night, after arriving at the home of good friends in Cotonou, the lights went out due to a city-wide power outage. Again. We took mats outside and lay on the ground to gaze at a night sky filled with shooting stars. I felt very alive, very loved and very relieved. Mother Africa and I were on speaking terms again. ■

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Stacey Tsourounis (BA Comb. Hons. '09) graduated from Glendon in June. She wrote about East Africa in the December 2007 issue.



# 50



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