



# YORK

FEBRUARY 2004

## LAUGHING MATTERS

**HOW FOUR GRADS GOT SERIOUS ABOUT COMEDY**

Janet Van De Graaff  
of CBC's Royal Canadian Air Farce

**Mars: the search for life  
Inside the Innocence Project**



INSIDE



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# YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY



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# FEBRUARY 2004

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# First Look

**O**F ALL THE REACTIONS we've had to the first issue of *YorkU*, I have to say my favourite came to me by way of John Lennox, dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. John told me of his 92-year-old uncle, William Pearson, who, as a donor to York, received the October edition with youthful meteorologist Natasha Ramsahai on the cover, and the spread on the new Seymour Schulich Building inside. "He commented to me about how interesting he found the magazine," says John, "and when I asked what, in particular, he enjoyed, he replied, 'everything.' He remarked on the contents, the graphics, and said that he really didn't have any idea of the scale of the building that is taking place on this campus." His uncle hasn't visited the campus, notes John, who observes: "If part of the goal of *YorkU* is to communicate effectively with those who are not part of the University community, then that goal appears to have been successfully realized in the case of at least one donor."

You can see why we're gratified. At the same time as that issue was striking a chord with a 92-year-old, its popularity with students seemed clear: copies disappeared rapidly from campus news racks, which had to be restocked in unplanned numbers. Alumni responded warmly as well. Louise Mahood, whose Web site as a consultant to working women describes her as the first woman to graduate from York with a BA ('84) in history and women's studies, was pleased we'd produced a university magazine "that assumed we are literate." Another alum, Howard Halpern (BA '70), told us: "You



made it interesting without sacrificing class – a difficult balancing act." We had some professional reaction, too: "As an old printer and graphic designer, I can tell you that the design and execution, quite apart from the assortment of very interesting topics, is excellent," wrote Mark Meslin of Toronto, who has three York graduates in his family.

Not that we didn't annoy some people. One correspondent was incensed by our York People feature on lawyer Lesli Bisgould, who focuses on animal rights. He thought she was undermining the bedrock of English law. On the other hand, another writer said he was "encouraged and captivated" by Bisgould's "noble cause".

I also have to elaborate on research undertaken by Women's Studies Program PhD student Katherine McKittrick, who we talked about in the Universe story "Hair Apparent" on the return of the Afro. She clarifies that it was not her, but US writer Lisa Jones, who suggested that black women who dye their hair blonde are enhancing their blackness. Her current dissertation, McKittrick adds, is on "black women, geography and the poetics of landscape."

Keep the cards and e-mails coming. ■

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

# YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET

Getting the word out about York's research excellence. BY LORNA R. MARSDEN

# In the Real World

**W**HEN I WAS APPOINTED PRESIDENT of York seven years ago, the good news in Canada was the trajectory for Asteroid 3753 Cruithne, which had been discovered by York researchers Paul Wiegert and Kim Innanen. But the bad news was that while most people had heard about this fascinating discovery – the asteroid accompanies earth in its orbit, making it the planet's only natural companion besides the moon – the public failed to connect it to York University. That is our challenge – to get the world to realize the long and distinguished history of science, research and discovery at our University.

While the presence of research and an associate vice-president responsible is of long standing, it was only in 2000 that York appointed its first VP Research & Innovation, Stan Shapson. The aim of this new position was to bring focus and



## As Vice-President Stan

leadership to York's research effort, to maintain it as a central part of the University's long-term strategy and, above all, to get the word out about research at York. Our 21 research centres report to VP Shapson, as does the Office of Research Services, which works with researchers and applicants for grants in all 10 faculties.

The results of this organizational change are beginning to show. VP Shapson has made York's presence felt in granting council circles and has supported the work of dozens of distinguished colleagues. At the same time, he has guided us into a more sophisticated strategy for meeting our three goals of focus, strategic thinking and profile.

Pointing to the key interests of granting councils, the VP R&I has supported groups of interdisciplinary researchers in the important areas of health, sustainability and the environment, culture and entertainment, and international studies. York's interdisciplinary and collaborative focus helps us to approach these issues in a truly unique way.

Innovation is key to this effort. So is working with the com-

## Shapson puts it, "Research at York tears down the ivory tower."

munity, transferring technology and knowledge. York spin-off companies are contributing to economic development. Our researchers are helping to shape local communities like neighbouring York Region by contributing their expertise to businesses and public services. Our health policy experts are providing new ways of thinking for governments. As Stan Shapson puts it: "Research at York tears down the ivory tower."

Recently, five new Canada Research Chairs were awarded to our researchers, bringing York's total of CRCs to 26. Carriona Sandilands is developing the first international research network in environmental cultural studies. Eric Hessels is working on a method to trap antiatoms in order to better understand the Big Bang theory. Gordon Flett is exploring the relationship between perfectionism, psychological disorders and health and well-being. John Tsotsos is developing robotic wheelchairs for the disabled that can be controlled by vision. And Sergey Krylov is examining techniques for tissue regeneration in damaged organs for many diseases that are currently considered incurable.

That's research in the real world. To find out more, just log on to [www.research.yorku.ca](http://www.research.yorku.ca) and see how York is redefining university research in Canada. ■

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

PHOTOGRAPHY BY COREY MIHALIUK



# UNIVERSE



CLEAN WORK: Driver Colin Hissa

TRANSPORT

## Green Machine

Natural gas buses bring a breath of fresh air to campus

**T**hey might be red, but they're still green. York's growing fleet of natural-gas powered buses is the environmentally friendly choice for shuttling people to and from York's GO station and other spots. The University recently began switching to natural gas vehicles – NGVs – as an alternative to diesel buses and gasoline vans. Natural gas burns cleaner than diesel or gas and drastically reduces tailpipe emissions. Some bus basics:

n The switch to natural gas saves 25–50 per cent in fuel costs. Natural gas prices fluctuate according to the market.

n The capacity of the fuel stored on an NGV – usually in cylinders mounted on the roof – gives it about 75 per cent of the range of a diesel bus. It goes further in winter – natural gas is compressed, so more fits as it contracts in cold weather.

n Natural gas produces much less gunk (OK, particulate matter) than diesel fuel. That means less air pollution and longer engine life. Diesel fuel is highly complex, and its exhaust contains more than 40 compounds classified as known or possible carcinogens, mutagens or endocrine disruptors. Natural gas buses produce almost none of these.

n Natural gas buses are less than half as loud as diesel buses. Testing shows NGVs operate around the decibel level of an electric shaver. Diesel buses operate nearer the level of a jackhammer.

n York's GO NGV makes six round trips a day to and from the York GO station, backed up by other York vehicles as needed. The six NGVs also handle many of the Glendon-Keele shuttles as well as evening escort services.

n Aside from the big Orion bus shown here, York's other NGVs are Ford factory-produced – there's a 24-seat bus and four vans. They exceed Ontario vehicle emission standards.

n Big buses like the GO NGV can cost between \$350,000 and \$550,000 or more. They carry up to 70 people seated and standing.

n York's Transportation Services plans to have its full 12-vehicle fleet running on alternative fuels within the next two years.

n The entire University community is going green. As recently as four years ago, 70 per cent of people arrived at the Keele campus in single-occupant vehicles. Now 60 per cent arrive by alternative means – mainly transit, plus car pools and bikes. Even so, University officials note that commuting problems won't be solved until the subway reaches York. ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICK REID



PUBLIC SPEAKING

“Being a curator gives you this wonderful opportunity to really be in touch with contemporary art. That’s always been my interest. So the best situation is something like the AGYU, where you can continue to do the most interesting sort of contemporary projects that are way out there in front.”

PHILIP MONK,  
new curator of the Art Gallery of York University,  
in the *Toronto Star*

RESEARCH

# Buried Treasure

Canada’s hidden history unearthed

**S**tarting this year, York scholars will be unearthing a trove of Canada’s hidden history: previously unprocessed census records for the 40-year period from 1911 to 1951. Based at York and six other Canadian universities, the five-year Canadian Century Research Infrastructure (CCRI) project will develop databases derived from census records and other sources, such as newspaper reports and legislative debates.

Mining 40 years’ worth of information should yield valuable insights into the country’s social, economic and cultural shifts, says Gordon Darroch, sociology professor and York’s CCRI centre director. “It will give us new insights into things like the changing character of labour, housing, immigration, families, education and urbanization,” Darroch says.

Among other topics, the data should also paint a clearer picture of children’s lives in those years, says Evelyn Ruppert, centre coordinator. “Children and youth are mostly absent from even well-documented historical archives. CCRI databases will enable research about their changing lives in the 20th century.” The national project’s databases will be available to students and researchers via the Web, and will link with existing census databases covering the years from 1871 to 2001. ■



EMPLOYMENT

# Making it Work

Are good jobs more precious than ever?

**O**ver the past decade, it has become a little harder to find a secure job. Though the majority of Canadians still hold full-time, permanent jobs, their numbers have dropped since 1989. At the same time, the ranks of those juggling part-time, temporary jobs have swelled.

Some market analysts say this trend has stabilized. But not Leah Vosko. In recent studies, Vosko, a Canada Research Chair in Feminist Political Economy at York, and fellow researchers have argued that “precarious” employment continues to grow.

Vosko and her research team suggest we stop dividing the labour market into only two camps – those with full-time, permanent jobs and those with part-time, temporary employment. Instead, we should look at a larger statistical snapshot that includes income levels, access to employee rights and benefits, and union membership. Says Vosko: “It’s important to develop policies and programs to re-regulate the labour market so that flexibility does not mean insecurity.” ■

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF CANADA; PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICK REID

WEBLOG

## SITES UNSEEN

ARE WEB BOOKMARKS A REFLECTION OF WHO WE ARE? YOU DECIDE, AS WE START ASKING YORK PROFESSORS WHAT THEY KEEP ON THEIR BOOKMARKS PAGE. THIS SET BELONGS TO YORK PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSOR SUZANNE MACDONALD, ASSOCIATE VICE-PRESIDENT RESEARCH, WHOSE SPECIALTY IS ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR.

[WWW.CRYPTOZOOLOGY.COM](http://WWW.CRYPTOZOOLOGY.COM)

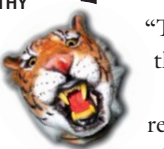
A SITE DEDICATED TO THE “SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF HIDDEN ANIMALS” – MEANING CREATURES LIKE THE SASQUATCH AND THE LOCH NESS MONSTER. CHECK OUT THE USER-POSTED PICTURES.

[WWW.ENRICHMENT.ORG](http://WWW.ENRICHMENT.ORG)

THE SITE HELPS PEOPLE WHO WORK WITH CAPTIVE ANIMALS FIND WAYS OF KEEPING THEM HEALTHY AND HAPPY. ONE ARTICLE EXTOLS USED FIREHOSES, WHICH TIGERS, FOR INSTANCE, CAN ATTACK AND TEAR AT WHEN YOU WRAP MEAT INSIDE.

[WWW.PIGEON.PSY.TUFTS.EDU/CCS](http://WWW.PIGEON.PSY.TUFTS.EDU/CCS)

THE SITE OF THE COMPARATIVE COGNITION SOCIETY, WHICH STUDIES COGNITION IN ANIMALS. WHILE MAINLY FOR EXPERTS, IT CARRIES SUCH NEWS ITEMS AS “BABOONS CAN THINK ABSTRACTLY.”



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NANCY MERCADO



SOCIAL STUDIES

# Booze Hound

Uncorking Canada’s drinking habits

**A**lthough Canadians have imbibed for a good 400 years, we’ve kept our ambivalent attitudes toward the country’s booze-fueled history all bottled up. Now York social scientist and historian Craig Heron has popped the cap on the murky world of “first contact” (Native North Americans meet European firewater), booze cans, rum runners, the temperance movement and Prohibition. His new book, which documents our love-hate affair with demon alcohol, is called, appropriately, *Booze: A Distilled History*.

“Surprisingly, there has been very little written on the history of drinking in Canada,” says Heron. “There have been some books on temperance, Prohibition, smuggling and what-not, but nothing that looked at drinking and its effects across the whole span of Canadian history since 1600.”

Heron’s book is what publishers like to call crossover product. “It should appeal to the general reader who likes to be well-informed, as well as academics,” he says.

“Canadians have always had contradictory attitudes about drink. Those attitudes are reflected at local liquor stores. In Ontario, it was only the threat of privatization that scared the LCBO into competing in the marketplace. Buying alcohol wasn’t supposed to be pleasant.” ■

PUBLIC SPEAKING

“If we answer the question ‘Was it fair and balanced?’, the real answer is, the saturation coverage became part of the crisis. The cumulative effect of the reporting was as important as the quality. It did create the impression that the crisis in Toronto was much more severe than it actually was.”

DANIEL DRACHE,  
associate director of York’s Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies and co-author of a report on media coverage of SARS, at a news conference

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICK REID



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## Who are York's Students?

From a 2002 survey of York undergrads:

- n FEMALES STRONGLY OUTNUMBER MALES: 61% OF DIRECT-ENTRY UNDERGRADS WERE WOMEN; 39% MEN.
- n 44% OF STUDENTS SAID THEY WERE NOT BORN IN CANADA. THEY CAME FROM A TOTAL OF 88 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES.
- n CHINA WAS BY FAR THE MOST COMMON COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OUTSIDE CANADA, FOLLOWED BY HONG KONG, POLAND, INDIA AND IRAN.
- n AVERAGE AGE OF FULL-TIME STUDENTS: 22. PART-TIME: 32.

- n 81% WERE SINGLE AND HAD NEVER BEEN MARRIED; 15% WERE MARRIED AND 11% HAD CHILDREN.

- n 53% LIVED AT HOME WITH PARENTS OR SPOUSE; 13% LIVED IN RESIDENCE.

- n FULL-TIME STUDENTS WORKED AN AVERAGE OF 15 HOURS PER WEEK.

- n 20% WERE INVOLVED IN VOLUNTEER WORK.

STUDIES

## Tragic Waste

Behind the Walkerton disaster

**I**n May 2000, seven people died and 2,300 fell ill in Walkerton, Ont., after deadly E. coli bacteria contaminated the local water system. It was one of Canada's worst public health disasters. How did it happen? An inquiry blamed an unsafe well, a heavy rainfall, the town's water manager, political neglect. But Harris Ali, a sociologist in York's Faculty of Environmental Studies who analyzes the impact of environmental calamities on human health, suspected the Walkerton outbreak had been "incubating" for some time. He began a sociological and ecological autopsy.

Factory farms – and there are more in the Walkerton region than anywhere else in Ontario – process as many as 25,000 head of cattle a year. Livestock processors treat cattle as industrial "food production units" and take measures to compress their birth-to-slaughter throughput – dose them with disease-preventing antibiotics, fatten them on grain and bone meal, keep them inactive indoors. The byproduct is tons of waste, spread wide on unsuspecting fields. These are the conditions – resisting antibiotics, thriving on waste – that have inadvertently stimulated the evolution of a once harmless bacterium into something deadly. We disrupt nature's cycles at our peril, argues Ali, who published his study on Walkerton in September. ■



RESEARCH

## The Roots of Pain

Reducing suffering from cancer

**T**here's no surefire cure for cancer pain, but there may be more helpful physical and psychological strategies to deal with it. Lucia Gagliese, a York kinesiology & health science professor, is studying how young and old patients alike cope with gastrointestinal cancer, to see whether there's a link between physical pain and psychological distress.

"From preliminary findings, it looks as though the differences in pain lie in its impact and in how people cope – not in their age," says Gagliese. She says that those who have not learned adaptive pain-coping mechanisms in their life are the ones who suffer most from cancer pain.

"We're also looking at other causes of why people experience pain differently. We know that elderly people are less likely to be given painkillers, for instance, and we want to know why. That may be because some health-care workers believe elderly patients are more likely to become addicted to painkillers."

Gagliese hopes her work will lead to new programs for helping cancer patients cope. Given Canada's aging population, the study couldn't be more timely. ■



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL HUDSON; ILLUSTRATION BY ROB MACDONALD

PERFORMANCE

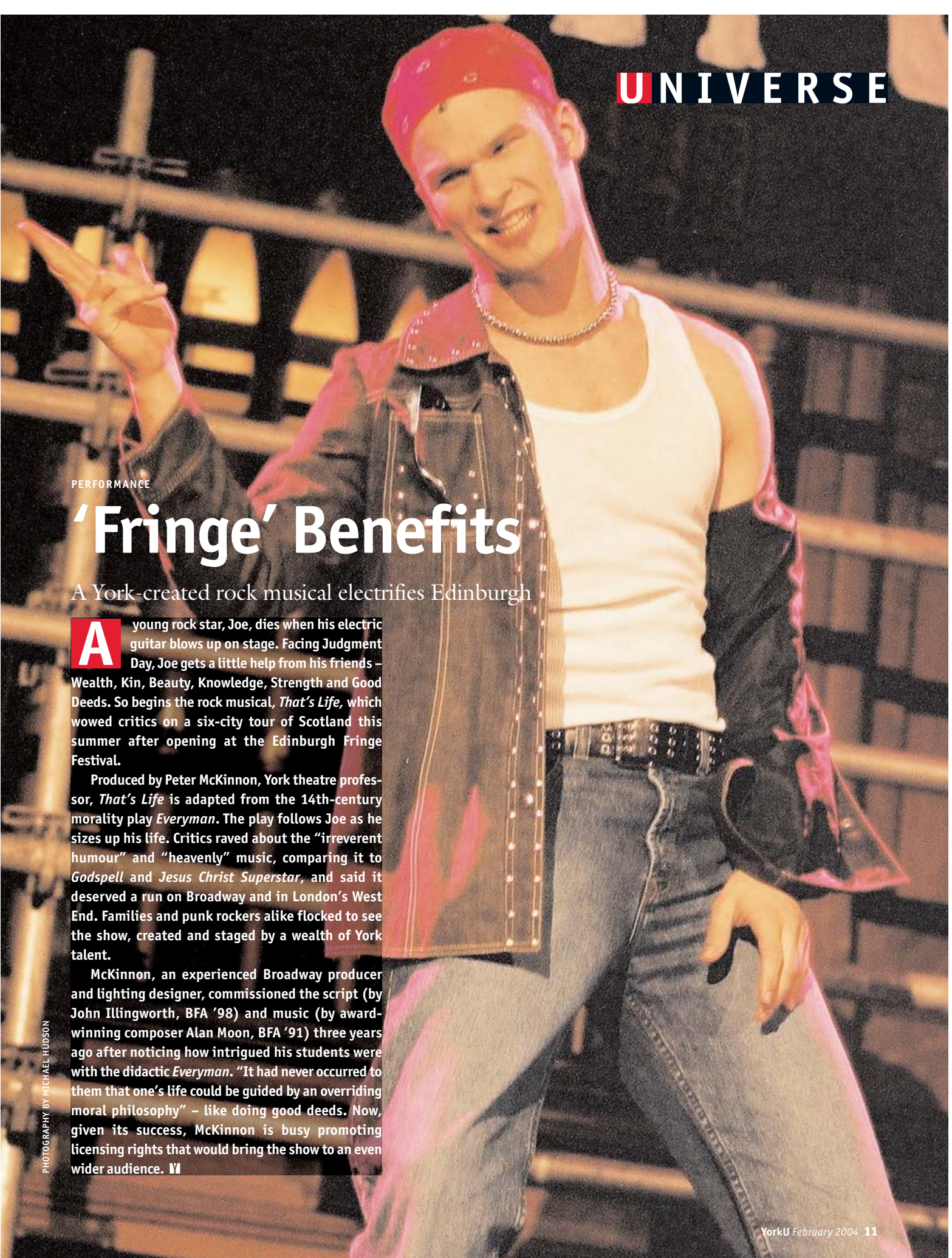
## 'Fringe' Benefits

A York-created rock musical electrifies Edinburgh

**A** young rock star, Joe, dies when his electric guitar blows up on stage. Facing Judgment Day, Joe gets a little help from his friends – Wealth, Kin, Beauty, Knowledge, Strength and Good Deeds. So begins the rock musical, *That's Life*, which wowed critics on a six-city tour of Scotland this summer after opening at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Produced by Peter McKinnon, York theatre professor, *That's Life* is adapted from the 14th-century morality play *Everyman*. The play follows Joe as he sizes up his life. Critics raved about the "irreverent humour" and "heavenly" music, comparing it to *Godspell* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and said it deserved a run on Broadway and in London's West End. Families and punk rockers alike flocked to see the show, created and staged by a wealth of York talent.

McKinnon, an experienced Broadway producer and lighting designer, commissioned the script (by John Illingworth, BFA '98) and music (by award-winning composer Alan Moon, BFA '91) three years ago after noticing how intrigued his students were with the didactic *Everyman*. "It had never occurred to them that one's life could be guided by an overriding moral philosophy" – like doing good deeds. Now, given its success, McKinnon is busy promoting licensing rights that would bring the show to an even wider audience. ■





janet van de graaff

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDSAY LOZON

**Meet four York grads who dish up some serious comedy.** BY MICHAEL TODD

**I**T'S A COMPLEX BUSINESS, making people laugh. "Comedy is about giving the powerless power," offers Mark Breslin, the York grad (BA '73) who founded the Yuk Yuk's comedy club chain. "A lot of its function is to penetrate the opacity of language, because language can reveal or conceal."

Hmm. Sounds a bit like a university – only funnier. Ask Breslin where comedy is headed. "I can only tell you where it's been," he says. "If I knew where it was going I wouldn't tell you anyway. I'd try to make money from it."

But seriously, folks. Breslin, who started Yuk Yuk's in 1976, says that around that time there was a paradigm shift. "The baby boomers were starting to come into power. They'd been raised in the counterculture and they had new power as consumers and producers. I

think that's when comics stopped working in suits and telling jokes in the old way. Now it was uncensored. We used to lose one-third of our audience every night at Yuk Yuk's. Now we never do. Audiences are a lot more sophisticated. It's not that comedy has got tamer. It's that audiences have caught up."

Certainly the four York grads profiled here are part of that new paradigm. None of them started out with the goal of becoming comics per se – Janet Van De Graaff thought she'd be playing Shakespeare, Russell Roy worked in a telecommunications firm, Mike Nahrgang spent a number of years acting with Vanier College Productions, and Gerry Donoghue was a high-school teacher. But all of them share certain similarities, starting with a realization that they were funny, they could make people laugh – and they didn't fit into a stereotyped, straight and narrow career path.

**J**

**"I got in lots of trouble for goofing around in Grade 7."**

**JANET VAN DE GRAAFF** is really two-faced. Actually, make that four- or five-faced. But that's OK, it's all part of the job. Over the last few years, Van De Graaff's comedic alter egos have included the likes of Martha Stewart, the "annoying woman from that McCain's commercial", Barbara Walters, Rosie Rodriguez and Diane Sawyer, among others.

If you don't recognize Van De Graaff's name, you might recognize her face from the Royal Canadian Air Farce (check out her one-minute skit on the Farce's Web site where she plays the female component of a sports announcer tag team who go "tongue to tongue in a reporting frenzy").

Van De Graaff didn't set out to be a comic, she says, but she was always a bit of a class clown. "For sure, I got in lots of trouble for goofing around in Grade 7. I think I was kind of acting out some stress at home. That's what they say makes for comedy, having a sense of humour about these painful bits in life."

A native of Chicago, Van De Graaff met then-York theatre professor Neil Freeman, an expert in Shakespearean text analysis, at a master class in the US. "I wanted to learn from him, so it was really a case of following him to York," she says. In 1990, she got her York MFA in theatre. "After I was done I was convinced I'd be heading straight for Stratford. Unfortunately, Stratford didn't seem to think so." Instead, Van De Graaff ended up doing improv at Second City. And the rest was comedy history.

After a year or two with Second City's touring group, Van De Graaff joined its Main Stage cast and wrote and performed five revues there, two of which received Dora nominations. She's also worked the Toronto Fringe Festival, Theatre Passe Muraille as well as playing Yvonne, the bubbly co-host of WTN's (now WN's) "Go Girl!". One of her latest success stories was winning a 2002 Canadian Comedy Award for her work on the hit series "History Bites" (where she played Martha Stewart et al.) as best female improviser.

"I never wanted to do standup," says Van De Graaff. "It's very scary. Improv is collaborative and it keeps you fresh. And the best thing about it is, you never have to worry about forgetting your lines."



**gerry dee**



**“My act is perfect for television. I’ve got my eye on sitcoms.”**

**G**

**GERRY DONOGHUE, OR GERRY DEE** as he’s now known on stage, is that rare thing in life – a clean comic. Avoiding being a potty mouth isn’t out of any big moral considerations, says Dee, “It’s just that dirty comedy isn’t my thing. It isn’t me.” But Dee’s no saint. “Sure I swear, just not on stage.”

Dee, who got his BA in kinesiology in 1992, is seeing more and more stages these days, a good thing in the competitive world of standup. He says he loved his time at York (he was a don in residence at Bethune College). “York was a great experience for me,” he says. “The people, the courses I took – all of it.”

Now the former high-school teacher of nine years has made the jump, quit his job in Toronto and moved to Los Angeles. “I’m giving myself a year to make it,” he says. While Dee is continuing to do standup both in the US and Canada, he’s set his sights on getting into film or the TV market. “My act is perfect for television. I’ve got my eye on sitcoms.”

Dee is a relative newcomer to the comedy scene. In 1999 he won “Toronto’s Funniest Comic With A Day Job” contest and was featured comic in the 1999 Just For Laughs International Comedy Festival held in Montreal. In 2001 he taped his own “Comedy Now” special and in 2002 was featured at the Halifax Comedy Festival, televised on CBC.

Born in Toronto, he grew up the son of Scottish parents in an Italian neighbourhood. “My dad’s a really funny guy,” he says. “I base a lot of my material on him and on my teaching days and my life in general, but I try to stay away from the usual comic fare of sex, dating and stuff like that. It’s all been done by other comics. It would be hard to put a fresh stamp on it.”

He took the comic plunge as a result of a dare by his students. “They said, ‘Hey, you’re a really funny guy, why don’t you try out on an amateur night for standup?’ I said, ‘OK, before the year’s out I’ll do it.’ And I did. I totally bombed the first night. But I got the bug. By the fifth time I was getting the hang of it. Then I won a bunch of competitions. And now here I am in LA!”

**PHOTOGRAPH BY GEOFF GEORGE**



**“My dad was a chicken-feed salesman so we moved around a lot.”**

**M**

**MIKE NAHRGANG'S** got the kind of face a camera loves, which is why you may have spotted him on anything from a recent series of Chrysler commercials (as the spousal stand-in) to small parts in flicks like *The Tuxedo*, starring Jackie Chan, or *Men With Brooms*. He's also appeared on a number of shows on the Comedy Network. But Nahrgang's steady gig these days is mainly with Second City's touring company. "I've never been much for standup," says Nahrgang. "Although I've done it. I'm more of a writer, more into improv."

Nug (he got the name in Grade 5 and it stuck) Nahrgang is a true small-town guy who's making it big these days in the Toronto comedy scene. Born in Kitchener, he has lived in Elmira, Newton, Milverton, Clinton, Waterloo, Bamberg and Wellesley. He settled down in the Big Smoke after finishing his joint degree (BA '93) in the York/Seneca College School of Communication Arts program.

"My dad was a chicken-feed salesman so we moved around a lot," says Nahrgang. "I really came to York on a whim, because I thought being in Toronto would be cool." Nahrgang honed a lot of his comedic skills on campus when he got involved in Vanier College Productions (he's still director of Vanier's improv company at York) and he learned the biz from the inside out by doing nine years' worth of set construction, sound engineering, costume and lighting design and promotion for VCP.

Nahrgang is also part of the four-member "sketch mercenaries" troupe The Minnesota Wrecking Crew, named after one of his favourite pro wrestling tag teams and made up entirely of Vanier veterans. The Crew (John Catucci, Josh Glover, Ron Sparks and Nahrgang) won as best sketch troupe at September's Canadian Comedy Awards and walked away with the comedy equivalent of an Oscar. "We got a Beaver," says Nahrgang. "How Canadian is that?"

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDSAY LOZON



mike 'nug' nahrgang





russell roy

**“I’ll give a speech on failure with things like the ‘7 Keys to Procrastination’.”**



**USSELL ROY** got his taste for comedy when he was 12 and heard a Richard Pryor record. “It was the filthiest, dirtiest thing I’d ever listened to,” he says. “I loved it.”

But it wouldn’t be until later that Roy would walk out of his office at a telecommunications company and join the ranks of the funny guys for keeps. Roy never had his eye directly on a career in comedy. He enrolled at York in political science and ended up in liberal studies. Working on his degree part-time, he got a BA in 1998 with a business major and a theatre minor.

Roy has done standup since 1995, but these days he’s doing less of that in favour of better-paid work as a “corporate impostor,” an area he has carved out pretty well by himself. It means he gets hired by companies to satirize the very white-collar *kultur* he slaved in during his days in sales and account management. So what’s his shtick?

“Well, I’ll show up at an annual general meeting, for instance, and give out mock awards – like the ass-kissing award, you know? I’ll name the nominees for that and then recount all the attributes that Bob Smith demonstrated to be the ultimate winner. People will come up to me afterwards, even the people I roast, and say, ‘You know, that was very funny and I’m glad someone said it.’

“One of my favourite things is promoting myself as the ‘motivational’ speaker,” he says. “Except in this case I’ll give a speech on failure with things like the ‘7 Keys to Procrastination’. It’s basically a rap on how to fail.”

Having an eye for the absurd is critical to any good comic, says Roy. Are some people innately funny? “Yes, I think so. The guy who fixes my car, for instance, and the three guys who help him? They’re the funniest people I know. Whenever I go there we have a blast. That’s true intuitive comedy.” And humans have an innate need to laugh, he adds. “Comedy is tribal.” ■

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDSAY LOZON



## SPACES

Imagine a university classroom that's always open, spans the globe and is accessible from afar. Welcome to the new Technology Enhanced Learning Building. BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICK REID

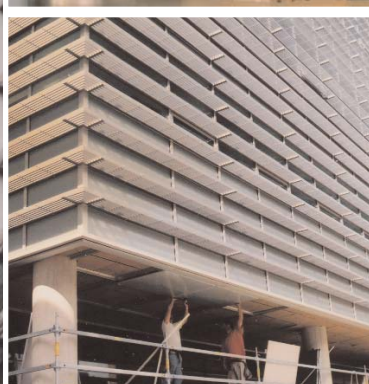
**W**ALK THROUGH THE NEW Technology Enhanced Learning Building and you're surrounded by light. It spills in from high glass walls, falls warmly over acres of honey-coloured maple and casts shadows across the pale limestone floor – all contrasted against brushed stainless steel detailing. This is a technology building? Right. And that's the point.

The technology's here, but it's invisible. Ready to be accessed around the clock or whenever needed by profs or students. It's a building that never sleeps, even if its users have to. So, no ugly cables, no monitors mounted on black brackets. Instead, it's all very quiet, understated, clean and subdued.

Known to all as TEL, this ultra-connected building is an \$84-million, York University/Seneca College joint project. The \$46.9 million it got from Ontario's SuperBuild program was

the largest single grant awarded from that fund, created to help colleges and universities prepare for the double cohort's arrival in 2003. TEL's finishing touches were put in place this past fall. It now offers students from both York and Seneca programs in math, education, design, information technology, applied science, business, health studies, communications and multimedia. The hope is that TEL will combine the best of both worlds – York's theoretical teachings with Seneca's hands-on approach to applied education.

Its academic users are taking full advantage of its innovations. York Fine Arts design Professor David Scadding says all the new media is perfect for his courses in the York/Sheridan Joint Program in Design, housed entirely in the building. "Designers are advocates of change and pursuing fresh directions," says Scadding. "We've always embraced new technology." This building may hug back. ■



### A BIG PANE

A four-storey atrium is the central feature of TEL's design and runs the length of the building. Starting on the second floor, it reaches up to skylights that provide an abundance of natural light and allow for good airflow. Skylights have automatic shades, and special glass ensures temperatures remain comfortable even on sunny days.

### BEST OF BOTH

TEL features both wired and wireless technologies. Even the phone system is Internet-based. Flexible work spaces and wireless technology mean it is easy to adapt to programs' changing needs.

### DROPPING IN

There are 5,500 drops, approximately 500 km of category 6 cable (top-of-the-line communication link cable) and 12 data rooms.

### WE NEVER CLOSE

TEL features innovative lecture halls, seminar rooms, video conferencing rooms and experimental classrooms with 24-hour access to distance learning and the Internet.

### GO WITH THE FLOW

Special building design makes TEL environmentally sensitive as fresh air flows into lower levels. As it naturally warms, air rises into the open atrium. This reduces the need for energy-consuming, forced-airflow systems. And TEL's 27 air handling units will keep everyone comfortable and breathing easy.

### INSIDE STORY

The five-storey building, designed by Moriyma & Teshima Architects, contains 360,000 square feet. Of that, 54 per cent goes to York, 46 per cent to Seneca College. Four thousand students – 2,000 from each institution – will use the building, which houses 31 classrooms, 42 computer labs and three resource centres.

### ON THE SAFE SIDE

With all of TEL's high-end computers, labs and public spaces to relax in, building and student security is a must. TEL has a sophisticated system of keyless entry for offices and labs as well as 23 security cameras that monitor such areas as lounges, basement classrooms and corridors.

# Cool, Calm & Connected



## RESEARCH

**York's Diane Michelangeli and Peter Taylor are part of a grand Mars adventure – the quest to detect early signs of life on the red planet.** BY DAVID FULLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF GEORGE

**F**IND ADVENTURE, TRAVEL THE WORLD. It may sound like a recruiting poster, but for York researchers Diane Michelangeli and Peter Taylor, it's the answer to the question, "So, why did you become a weather scientist?"

"I wanted to become an astronaut," Michelangeli explains over the clatter of dinner dishes and children's voices. "But I realized one day when I was car sick, that was not good for an astronaut. So I decided to specialize in science and get a job at NASA." After receiving her PhD in planetary science and geochemistry from the California Institute of Technology in 1988, Michelangeli spent two years doing post-doctoral research on Mars at the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Ames Research Center. Then she headed home to Canada to start a family and a job with an environmental consulting firm researching earth's atmosphere.

With an interest in aviation and intellectual adventure in mind, Peter Taylor took his doctorate in applied mathematics at Bristol University in his native England, graduating in 1967. Travel came later: a perfect hill in Scotland's Outer Hebrides, windswept Sable Island on Canada's east coast and a cottage research station at Grand Bend, Ontario, home of some of the best – that is to say worst – weather in Canada. Next up is a trip to the Arctic to study blowing snow.

But for both Michelangeli and Taylor, the greatest travel adventure will begin late in 2007. That's when NASA launches the Mars Scout mission and its package of Canadian technology designed to study the Martian environment for signs of water, an essential ingredient for life forms past and present. The Canadian component was developed under the leadership of York Professor Emeritus Allan Carswell, chairman of Optech Inc., the Toronto firm that won the contract, along with Brampton, Ont.-based MD Robotics, to provide instruments for the meteorological package on the Phoenix lander. Michelangeli and Taylor's work as mission scientists will give others an idea of what to expect when the landing module sets down on the red planet's north polar plains in the spring of 2008.

Given Mars' dust storms and 80-degree temperature variance between night and day, there will be no shortage of challenges for the "met" team as it works up detailed specifications for the meteorological instrumentation. After Phoenix arrives on the planet, the team will offer advice on how best to survey the Martian atmosphere using Optech's laser-based

light-detecting and ranging (lidar) technology. Once collected, data on temperature, pressure, atmospheric dust particles and water vapour will be fed into computer models developed in York's Department of Earth & Atmospheric Science in the Faculty of Pure & Applied Science. The planetary modelling that will be used to analyze the data was developed within York's Centre for Research in Earth & Space Science (CRESS).

Their part of the Mars Scout project, like most of the mission's other components, has one purpose: to find signs of the conditions for life on the solar system's most earth-like planet. The mission slogan, says Taylor, is simple and to the point. "They told us, 'follow the water'." To do that, he will employ knowledge of wind flow patterns in earth's boundary layer gained from years of research at the Canadian Meteorological Service and at York, where he has taught for the past 15 years.

Michelangeli's research into the formation of particulate matter in earth's atmosphere will help reveal how water vapour molecules combine with Mars' fine dust particles to form ice crystals that collect on the planet surface. The York team's interdisciplinary research efforts – which combine math, chemistry, physics and earth science – will give NASA valuable information on the existence and extent of this crucial element.

Searching the Martian atmosphere for signs of life may occupy a good deal of their working lives, but for both researchers attending to signs of life at home keeps them thoroughly grounded. Michelangeli, who has a 10-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son, admits to once squeezing in some rink-side work on her laptop computer only to hear the words, "Mom, watch me!" The lame reply, "I am, I saw everything you did," quickly put thoughts of Martian dust clouds on hold.

Taylor, who has a 10-year-old son at home as well as five grandchildren, met his wife at the meteorological service, where she still works, so weather is never far from his thoughts. During this sabbatical year, Taylor has some time for reading and his duties as co-editor of the international journal *Boundary-Layer Meteorology*.

The colleagues will have some time to spare when the Scout begins its six-month space journey to Mars. Only when the data begin flowing back to earth for analysis will their amazing Martian weather quest resume. Then, if they find what they are looking for, who knows what adventures lie ahead? Perhaps a forecast of partly dusty skies and possible ice precipitation – mixed with early signs of life. ■







“BRAVA, BRAVA”: Catherine Robbin

## Change of Key

Renowned opera diva Catherine Robbin has brought her golden voice to York. BY MARTHA TANCOCK

PHOTOGRAPH BY GEOFF GEORGE

**L**AST SPRING, mezzo-soprano Catherine Robbin celebrated a 30-year career with a farewell concert at CBC’s Glenn Gould Studio in Toronto, bowed graciously to roars of “Brava, brava!”, vanished into the wings – and emerged into a new life teaching classical vocal performance at York.

The concert was sold out months in advance. Fans such as Tafelmusik flutist Elissa Poole publicly mourned the departure of the velvety-voiced diva, one of Canada’s best-known and internationally renowned mezzo sopranos. In a rhapsodic tribute in *The Globe & Mail*, Poole wrote that Robbin has the “ability to find the emotional centre of a piece of music.” Poole also beheld the singer’s last performance as mezzo solo in Handel’s *Messiah* – “tears streaming down her face in the final ‘Amen’ chorus” – with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. It was a telling detail: Handel’s oratorio had launched, and later sealed, her professional singing career. “I liked to perform almost everything by Handel,” says Robbin, sitting in her office in York’s Winters College. “It felt like coming home to sleep in my own bed.”

As a child growing up in Toronto, Robbin never imagined life as a professional singer. Like her Irish father, she sang around the house, in the car, whenever anyone asked. When her Brownie leader suggested the little soprano get training, her Newfoundland-born mother considered the idea novel. The musical household didn’t even own a piano, recalls Robbin. “No one in my family had formal musical training.”

During her teens, Robbin sang in choirs and played the leads in school musicals. “Singing was just something I did to entertain myself. I never saw it as a career option. I never knew anybody who made a living at it.” If she hadn’t auditioned for the Mendelssohn Choir during first-year university, she might have become a teacher of the deaf, capitalizing on her flair for languages and communication. But the choir’s conductor, the late Elmer Iseler, invited her to join his elite chamber choir ensemble, the Festival Singers of Canada, instead. “I couldn’t believe it,” she recalls. “This meant I was going to get to travel

to Europe, across Canada. It lifted me right out of my life.” She quit her studies. “I thought I’d do it for a year, then return to university.” But one year turned into five as she leapfrogged back and forth across the Atlantic, working in Toronto to pay for lessons in London. At 21, she made her professional debut singing the mezzo solo in the *Messiah* with the St. Catharine’s Symphony. It was 1972.

In the intervening years, she married, finished her BA, raised two daughters, hired an agent and seduced audiences with her interpretations of Baroque and Romantic lieder and oratorios. She won major international prizes, performed with every major Canadian orchestra and choir and appeared with leading conductors and pianists throughout Europe and North America. And many of her recordings – from Handel and Mozart to Berlioz and Mahler – bear the stamp of prestigious awards.

At 52, Robbin said goodbye to it all while still, by all accounts, at the top of her form. “I wouldn’t say I’m not going to miss that kind of life,” she admits. “I loved it. It was intense. There were great rewards, and there were great costs. I met wonderful people and I left a marriage behind. My children grew up knowing they had to make allowances for their mother.” More often than she would have liked, she said good night over the phone. Now remarried, with one daughter in university and the other in high school, Robbin aims to stay closer to home.

At York, where she taught part-time for three years before joining the full-time faculty in July, Robbin is creating opportunities for her students to perform, to see concerts, to think critically. In March 2002, she directed them in Henry Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*, the first opera ever produced by students at York. Last spring, she directed “Le Salon de Chant,” a concert featuring 15 young singers performing arias and art songs by Mozart, Fauré, Puccini and Satie. She still performs – but not for money. Now “my passion is teaching one on one.” This year, she is coaching 11 lucky students, preparing them for solo performances as songbirds, choristers, teachers and coaches on life’s musical stage. Hallelujah. ■



## GIFTS

Karim Lakhani and his family are elevating the study of Islam with York's help. BY MARTHA TANCOCK

**L**AST SEPTEMBER, Toronto's Lakhani family officially opened the doors to the Noor Cultural Centre. The wealthy hoteliers, relative newcomers to Canada, had been dreaming of such a place for 10 years. Here, finally, in the luminous interior of the renovated building in Don Mills, was a centre where Muslims – and those of other faiths – could learn about Islam and Islamic culture. It is not a mosque, though the space feels holy; it is a \$6-million hub for education and dialogue, where scholars can speak, singers and dancers can perform, and the community can come. There is nothing like it in Canada.

The Lakhani's aim is evident in the centre's name, Noor, which means "light of God", and in a single Koranic verse inscribed, like a mantra, in 28 spots within the building: "Oh, Mankind, behold. We have created you all out of a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another."

"This is what Noor is striving to achieve – bringing people together and talking," says Karim Lakhani, who helped his parents, Hassanali, 82, and Noorbanu, 75, fulfill their vision. After a long search, they bought the former Japanese-Canadian Cultural Centre, built in 1963, and hired the original architect, Raymond Moriyama, to convert it into a Muslim cultural centre. The symbolism was not lost on Karim. "From our perspective, our use of the building is similar to that of the Japanese. The centre was their way of planting roots again," he says, referring to the period after the Second World War. "Noor is a symbol that we've become part of the community, too." Though "9/11 hasn't had any impact on our thinking," says Karim, "I feel our contribution now, after 9/11, is probably more relevant."

A centre found, the Lakhani's turned to York University to kickstart the business of educating Muslims – and anyone else who is interested – about Islam and Islamic culture. To Karim, a member of the York University Foundation Board of Directors, York represented Canada's dynamic multicultural mosaic and would make an ideal partner. With a \$500,000 pledge from the Lakhani's, York created the Noor Fellowship in

Islamic Studies and appointed humanities Professor Amila Buturovic to hold it for the next three years. The fellowship will bolster Islamic studies at the University and allow Buturovic to develop programs, plan lecture series and organize events in collaboration with the centre. Within weeks of the centre's opening, she had booked eminent Islamic and Judaic scholars to deliver lectures – about such topics as Jewish, Christian and Islamic mysticism, and the Sufi path – first at the Noor centre and then at York.

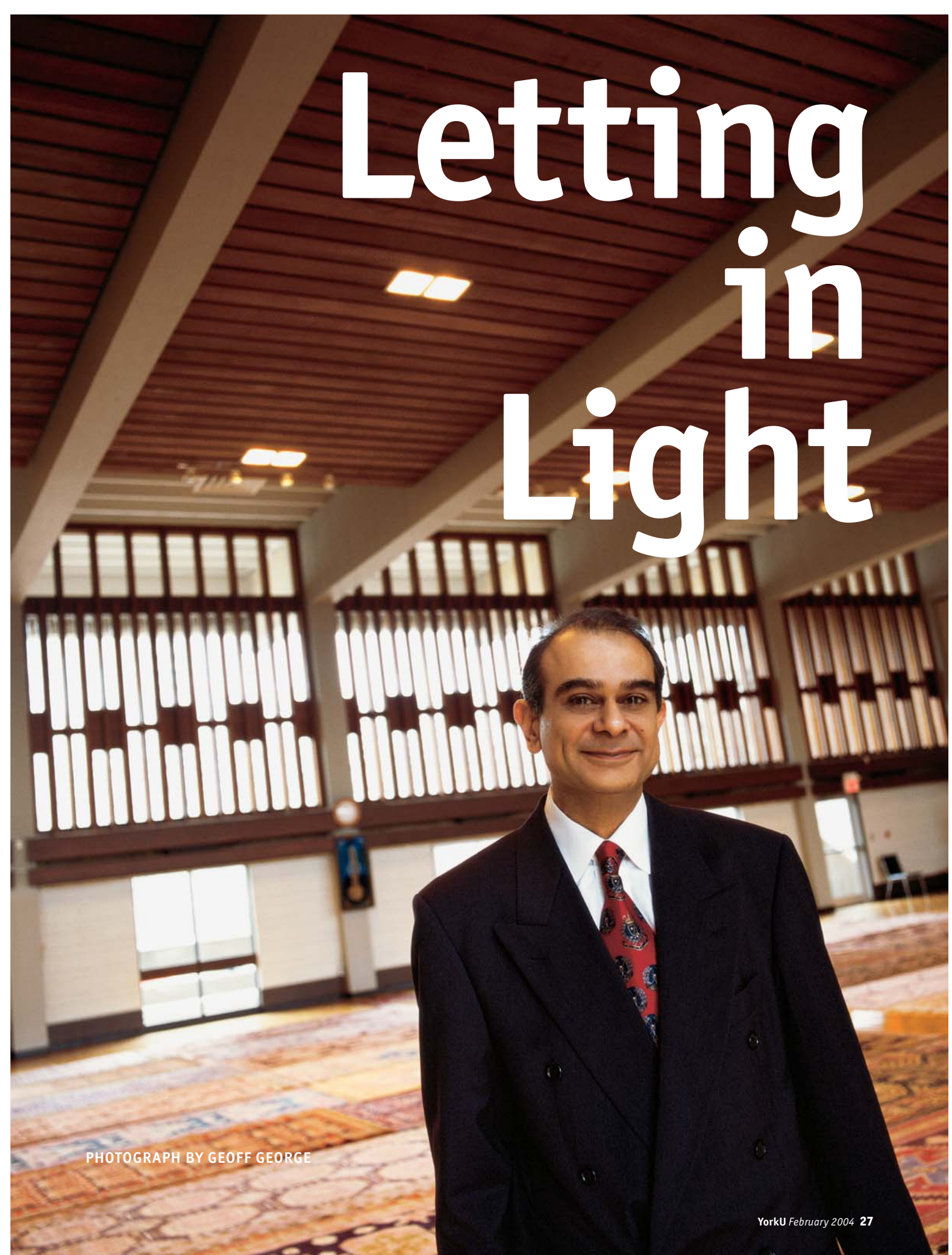
"The Noor centre is not just about the study of Islam," Karim Lakhani says. "It is also about the study of Christianity and Judaism and other faiths." Like his father, who is a devout Muslim and a self-educated scholar of the world's religions, Karim advocates interfaith acceptance. He is on the board of governors of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews. "We're all striving for the same thing," he says. "If you believe in God, the basics are the same and what you are looking to achieve is the same. It's what's in between that might be a little different. But somehow that little bit of difference seems to be a big bridge to cross."

The Lakhani's know about bridges to cross. After two generations in Kenya, the family was forced to flee East Africa in 1972 when Ugandan dictator Idi Amin threatened to expel all Asians. They moved to Britain, where Karim, the youngest among three brothers and a sister, attended boarding school and university while his parents struggled to establish a family hospitality business there. Karim never felt he belonged in either place. "You could be living in a country and be a citizen of a country but for some reason – your ethnic background, the colour of your skin, your religion – you are treated as an outsider."

Canada is different, says Karim, who immigrated in 1984, then lured his remaining family across the Atlantic to start anew in North America four years later. Now they own and operate three hotels and a golf club. "I found Canada to be the most accepting," he says. "Except for First Nations people, we're all immigrants. Perhaps that's why people are able to live together and work together." The Lakhani's aim to keep it that way through education and cultural dialogue. The Noor Fellowship, says Karim, is "just the beginning." ■

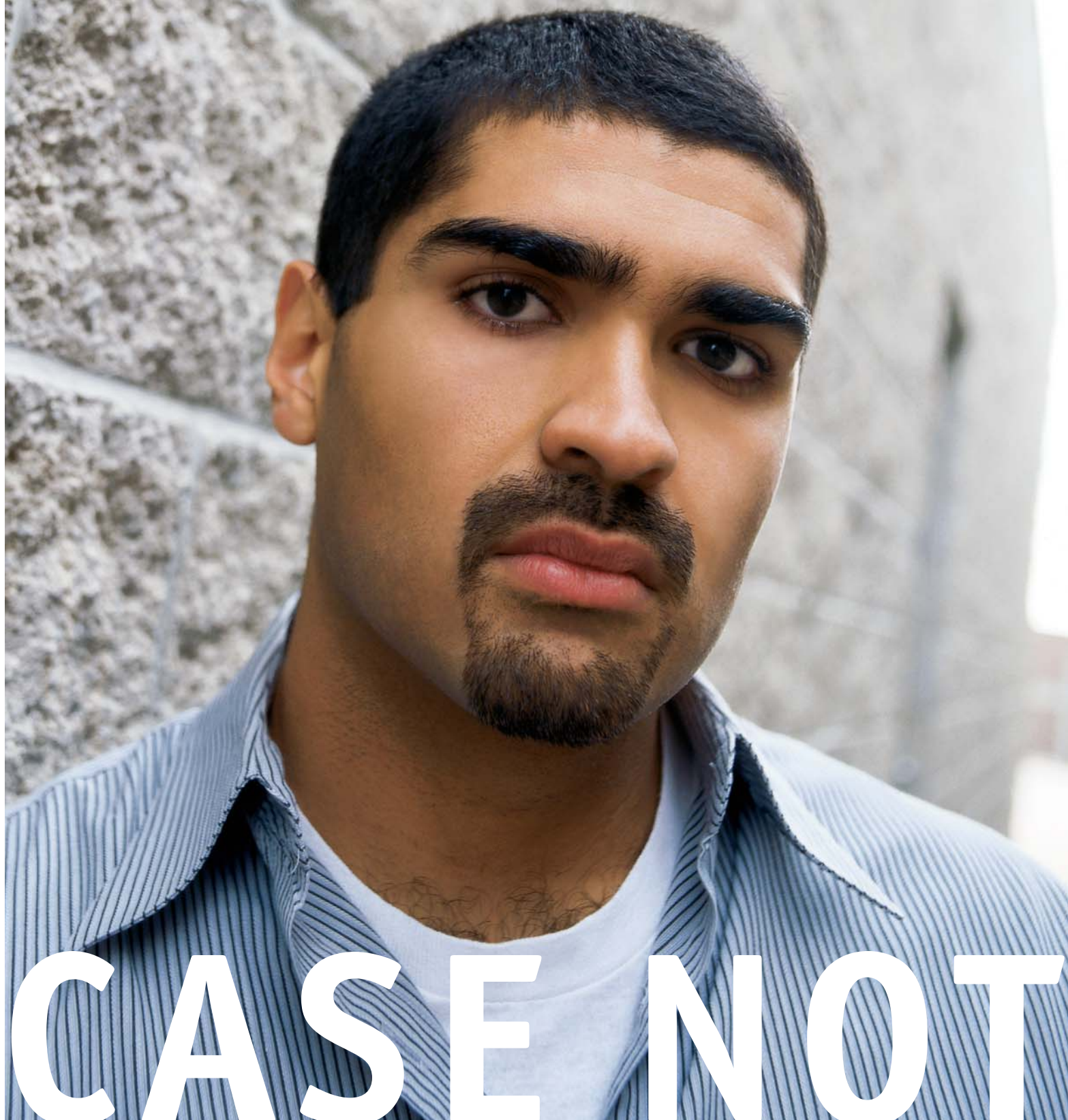
"NOOR IS A SYMBOL": Karim Lakhani

# Letting in Light



PHOTOGRAPH BY GEOFF GEORGE





# CASE NOT CLOSED

What happens to people jailed for crimes they didn't commit?  
Ask the students in Osgoode Hall Law School's Innocence Project  
– they're devoted to freeing the wrongly convicted. **BY MICHAEL TODD**

**I**F YOU'RE AN AVERAGE LAW-ABIDING CITIZEN, you may feel secure in the belief that the justice system is fair, rarely makes mistakes and, even if it did, would be sufficiently failsafe to prevent miscarriages of justice. If so, think again. Dianne Martin, an Osgoode Hall Law School professor and co-founder of Osgoode's Innocence Project, would be the first to disabuse you of such notions. "We're all rather smug about the legal system," Martin says. "We believe we have a low crime rate, that whodunnit homicides are rare in Canada and that much of our crime is understandable and solvable." But according to Martin, who has spent many years as a criminal lawyer herself, wrongful convictions aren't as rare as one might think. Enter the Innocence Project.

The second such project in the world was started at York in 1997 by Martin and her Osgoode colleague, Professor Alan Young. Barry Scheck, who founded the original Innocence Project at Yeshiva University's Cardozo School of Law in New York, was looking for Canadian law schools that might be interested in starting similar initiatives. Osgoode responded. Martin and Young were, at the time, the only profs on staff who had criminal law practice experience. Together they met with Scheck and came up with a pilot program to investigate cases of wrongful conviction. The time was right. Canadians knew about David Milgaard, Donald Marshall and Guy Paul Morin. And those were only three of a then-estimated 200 viable claims of wrongful conviction in Canada.

Now, every week for three hours, a group of the best young legal minds in Canada gathers around a table in an Osgoode classroom. Up to 10 law students work for credit under professors' supervision. Everyone wins – there's legal aid for those who need it and real-world experience for Osgoode law students like Paul Jebely. He says the "number one" thing the project has given him is perspective – and a loss of his own innocence about the workings of the legal system. "You realize the truth can be bent, that cops will lie on the stand, and that you can be thought guilty by proxy."

Select cases are reinvestigated and, where appropriate or possible, new scientific tests such as DNA analysis are conducted. When the team thinks a case for innocence has been made, they seek a pardon, a new trial, compensation or other remedy. It's rarely easy. Says Martin, "There's tremendous pressure to believe that we do policing and criminal prosecution well. It's the 'we've-got-the-suspect-and-that-should-be-the-

end-of-it' scenario. Reopening a court decision is tremendously difficult."

One of the first cases for which York's Innocence Project could claim victory was that of Gary Staples. He was convicted in 1971 of the murder of a taxicab driver in 1969. Staples served 22 months in prison before being acquitted in a second trial. He wanted an apology (he was free when the project took up his case). The Hamilton police refused. "They said we had to produce the real killer," Martin says.

On the strength of a memo unearthed in 2001 by two Osgoode students at a Hamilton police station, Staples sued the city's police for \$6 million. The force, he said, had suppressed witness statements that would have eliminated him as a suspect in the murder 30 years earlier. For years he endured suspicion (he'd gotten off on a technicality). Finally, because of the new evidence, he had a chance to clear his name. In late 2002, Hamilton police issued an apology and settled with Staples for an undisclosed amount.

According to Martin, it has really been DNA testing that's opened the floodgates for re-examing cases where the accused has claimed innocence. In the US, the Cardozo school has gained exoneration for more than 100 wrongfully convicted people based on DNA evidence. Across the US, Canada and Britain, the tally now stands at 400 recognized cases of wrongful conviction thanks to DNA testing. Even so, the Osgoode team usually focuses on evidence rather than relying on DNA.

**THE EXPERIENCE SECOND- AND THIRD-YEAR LAW STUDENTS** get working with the Innocence Project might look good on a resume, but the program is really more about giving students a chance to act on their idealism, says Martin. "They see it as a chance to make a difference, to work on something important. It teaches them humility, too. They get to see first-hand the tears and the victim's families. It's a remarkable experience."

For Jebely, involvement in the project is a way to give something back. "The law is not a perfect entity," he says. "There always has to be someone to advocate for those people who can't do it for themselves. We're their last 'faint hope'. That's a pretty big responsibility for a second-year law student."

Fellow second-year law student Kirsten Edwards can't say enough about the experience she's had. "To be part of the Innocence Project is the main reason I chose to come to York," says Edwards, formerly an English major at Carleton University.

**EVERYONE WINS:** Law student Paul Jebely

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF GEORGE**





**IDEALISM:** Osgoode's Dianne Martin

Edwards, who admits to being a “crime TV addict”, said the thought of being involved with researching real crime cases appealed to her. The reality, though, is that it’s a lot of work – most of it not of the TV glam variety. “Right now I’ve got four boxes of court documents sitting on the floor of my office. It’s sometimes a lot of slog work, but the payoff is you know you’re working for justice. I have a genuine concern about rights – I feel that everyone should have a right to justice regardless of race. That isn’t always the case.”

Last summer Edwards worked on a particularly high-profile case – that of Romeo Phillion. Phillion served 31 years for the murder of an Ottawa firefighter. His long incarceration was in large part due to his refusal to admit guilt before a parole board. In this case, as in others, the project looked for help from an experienced lawyer as a mentor to the students, once the team felt certain of the prisoner’s innocence.

They got that help from James Lockyer, a Toronto-based lawyer with the Association for the Defence of the Wrongfully Convicted, the group of volunteer lawyers who won freedom

for Marshall, Milgaard and Morin. Together they prepared an application last May under section 690 of the Criminal Code, asking the justice minister to review Phillion’s conviction. Section 690 allows prisoners to apply for such a review if they can produce new evidence. The minister reviewed the case and appointed Nova Scotia lawyer John Briggs to recommend a response. Chris Sherrin, the project’s current co-director, hopes a decision will come in early spring. But meanwhile, in a landmark decision that made national headlines, Justice David Watt of the Superior Court of Ontario released Phillion on bail on July 21. He is free for the first time in 31 years because of Lockyer and Osgoode’s Innocence Project.

People like Gary Staples and Romeo Phillion are – ultimately – more than just names in the media. They are lives lived behind bars. The cases Osgoode’s project deals with are about those lives, as well as those of the people outside who are attached to them – partners, children, families. At the end of the day, the real reward for students is witnessing the forgiveness of victims by a system whose quest for justice can sometimes be criminal. ■

# YORK PEOPLE

**Heather Campbell**

Social marketer, mental health advocate

## Stigma Fighter

ACADEMIC FASHIONS COME AND GO, and when Heather Campbell came to York a degree in sociology was definitely not a hot choice among her peers. “No one was taking sociology,” she says. “Everyone was into psych. It was, ‘what are you going to do with a degree in sociology?’”

Campbell has answered the question. What she did with her sociology major (BA '92) was get herself a great job as campaign manager for the “We All Belong Campaign”, fighting the stigma of mental illness in northern Ontario towns and villages like Moosonee, Moose Factory, Peawanuk and Attawapiskat. “It’s the perfect use of my social marketing skills and degree in soc,” says Campbell, who is based in Sudbury. Her campaign partners include the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Northeast Mental Health Centre.

Campbell says changing how people view mental illness is “a tough sell,” but “what I learned at York about groups and group behaviour has been invaluable.” ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF GEORGE





## Kilt Trip

Scientist, Scottish dancer  
**Tony Szeto**

TONY SZETO, WHO'S ETHNIC CHINESE, never dreamed he'd find himself donning sporran and ghillies (soft leather shoes), or taking up Scottish country dancing. But now there isn't much that would keep Szeto, a York professor of earth science, out of a kilt and off the dance floor. About the only thing he hasn't mastered is a brogue.

"I never felt out of place," says Szeto, who was invited by a friend to come out and try it one night. "I loved it from the beginning even though, obviously, I'm a little short on Celtic heritage." Szeto, who favours a Mackenzie tartan because that's what the tailor had available ("I also happen to live on Major Mackenzie Avenue"), has been kicking up his heels for 15 years now. His feet never sleep. "I'm always working at perfecting it. I'm a scientist after all." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HORST HERGET



## Santee Smith

Mohawk, choreographer,  
National Ballet-trained dancer

## Celebrating Mother Earth

IT HAS BEEN THREE YEARS in the making, and this summer it will finally reach fruition. In June, Santee Smith, a York MA student in dance, will present her tour de force dance/music piece, *Kaha:wi*, at Toronto's Harbourfront and at the Canada Dance Festival at Ottawa's National Arts Centre. A Mohawk who grew up on the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ont., Smith trained for six years with the National Ballet School, and is dedicated to advancing indigenous culture.

*Kaha:wi* means "She Carries" in Iroquois. Pronounced "Gah-ha'-wee", it's a work that explores Iroquoian culture and aesthetics expressed through contemporary music and dance. It follows the life cycles of three generations of women in her family, from the death of her grandmother *Kaha:wi*, to the birth of her own daughter, *Semiah Kaha:wi*. Music from more than 35 Iroquoian singers, songwriters and musicians has been commissioned for the one-hour work. "As a Haudenosaunee [Iroquois] person," says Smith, "I believe that song and dance were gifts given to us by the Creator, to celebrate our lives on Mother Earth." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEOFF GEORGE





## News:

### The Virtual Mentor

Check out York's high-tech Career CyberGuide online

**T**HIS PAST FALL, York University's Career Centre launched its ground-breaking Career CyberGuide, a unique form of mentoring for York graduates and students. Traditional mentorships establish a one-on-one relationship in which a senior, trusted adviser provides advice and coaching to a junior colleague. Volunteer alumni provide this type of mentoring for students or recent graduates of several York faculties (see next item). But the Career CyberGuide (at [www.yorku.ca/careers](http://www.yorku.ca/careers)) presents a remarkable opportunity to participate in an online mentoring program.

Designed to take advantage of impressive new technology, Career CyberGuide provides what amounts to a virtual mentorship through video, audio and text. Five essential elements in job-hunting are covered: The Job Search; Networking; The Resume; The Cover Letter; and The Interview. Users can attend virtual workshops given by employers, York graduates and current York employees, available around the clock.

These are just the begin-

ning. New topics will be added several times each year, on everything from successful interviewing skills to how to impress the boss at lunch.

The development of this pilot project was a true collaboration of the Career Centre team, who involved campus recruiters and career/skills advisers in these complex presentations. The project was produced and edited by Carolyn Steele, career development coordinator for the Career Centre. "The Career CyberGuide," she says, "is an extraordinary multimedia resource to provide students with cutting-edge job search information when they need it, not when we are scheduling it. Finding a great job has never been easier."

Mediasite Live, the technology behind the Career CyberGuide, captures a presentation and allows the user to navigate, print and interact with streaming media. Says Kelly Parke, a multimedia designer at York's Instructional Technology Centre, "York University was one of the test developers of the software and is the first institution in the world to use this technology."

### The Atkinson Connection

**A**MONG FACULTIES running face-to-face mentorship programs is the Atkinson Faculty of Liberal & Professional Studies – and if you're an Atkinson alum, they'd love to hear from you. Their Student-Alumni Mentorship Program provides Atkinson grads with a meaningful way to reconnect with current students and share their experience and knowledge with the next generation. The pilot program, begun in the fall, generated so much interest that Atkinson plans to have a winter round of mentor-student matches, as well as expand the program in fall 2004.

An Atkinson alumnus who gets involved will be matched to a student who indicates similar professional and career interests or areas of development. The two choose the frequency, location and mode of communications based on their schedules and mutual goals. At the end of the mentorship period (usually September to April), alums will have an opportunity to evaluate the mentorship

experience and provide input to the program.

To make the connection, visit [www.atkinson.yorku.ca/Alumni/mentor](http://www.atkinson.yorku.ca/Alumni/mentor), telephone 416-736-5220, or e-mail [mentorship@atkinson.yorku.ca](mailto:mentorship@atkinson.yorku.ca).

### Coming Up

**Y**ORK IS U, the student alumni organization, will mount two of its biggest events of the year in coming weeks. The internationally acclaimed Multicultural Week, celebrating diversity at York, will be held Feb 2-5. All are welcome. Alumni are also encouraged to help mark York's Birthday (March 26) by wearing red. It will be celebrated on campus on March 25 with a full day of activities, including giveaways and a cake-cutting. For details on all events, see [www.yorkisu.ca](http://www.yorkisu.ca).

### On the Map

**T**HE YORK Geography Alumni Association (YGAA) newsletter, *Contour Lines*, goes out to geography graduates by mail and e-mail. If you would like to receive *Contour Lines* or participate in the YGAA, contact [geogalum@yorku.ca](mailto:geogalum@yorku.ca) or 416-736-2100, ext. 77453. ■

## Class Notes:

**1964**

**McNeely, Roger** (BA Glendon) is happily retired since 1999, after three years in business and 32 years as a high-school teacher of economics and history with the Toronto District School Board. He and his wife Mary (née Wilkinson, BA '65) live in Scarborough, ON.

**1968**

**Sykes, Bob** (BA Vanier) is a manager/associate broker at Century 21 Heritage Group in Newmarket, ON.

**1969**

**Martin, Irene** (née Bennell, BA Founders) is an Episcopal priest, a writer and a fisher. She and her husband Kent have fished for salmon in the Pacific Northwest for more than two decades. Irene's book, *Sea Fire: Tales of Jesus and Fishing* (Crossroad Publishing, NY, 2003), is the result of years of observation of her own commercial fishing in Alaska and Washington, her study of archaeology and marine anthropology, and her reflection on the fishing culture in the New Testament. In 2000 she received the Washington Governor's Heritage Award for her work in preserving local and regional history.

**1969**



**1974**

**Howe, Nicholas** (BA Winters) teaches in the English Dept. at the University of California, Berkeley.

**Keddy, Paul** (BSc Spec. Hons. McLaughlin), a Canadian scholar

who currently holds the Schlieder Endowed Chair for Environmental Studies at Southeastern Louisiana University, was recently selected by the Institute for Scientific Information in Philadelphia as one of the top 100 most-cited researchers in ecology and the environment.

**Stecky, Eugene** (BA Winters) is a double-bass instructor at the Chilliwack Academy of Music in British Columbia.

**1981**

**Valley, Linda** (BA Hons., BEd McLaughlin) is a special education resource teacher with the York Region District School Board, ON.

**1982**

**Urbanc, Marcel** (BA '78 Stong, BAS Atkinson) is a chartered accountant in Toronto.

**1983**

**Vincent, Thomas** (LLB Osgoode) joined the legal services unit at Indian & Northern Affairs Canada headquarters in Hull, Quebec, in July 2002.

**1987**

**Peters, Kai** (BA Glendon) was recently appointed CEO of Ashridge, a leading business school in Hertfordshire, England. Previously, he served as director of MBA Programs at the Rotterdam School of Management (RSM), Erasmus University, the Netherlands, then as dean of RSM.

**1988**

**Winstanley, Brenda** (BFA Spec. Hons. Stong) is manager of human resources at Paramount Canada's Wonderland in Vaughan, ON.

**1991**

**Burdo, Michael H.** (BSW Hons. Atkinson) is a youth and family counsellor in Ottawa.

**Chattel, Brian** (BEd) is a sales representative for C-21 B.J. Roth Realty Ltd., and is also an occasional teacher with Simcoe County District School Board, ON.

**McBean, Francesca** (née Facchini, BA Vanier) married David (LLB '93

**1987**

Kai Peters



Osgoode) on August 31, 2002. Francesca is currently working with the Ministry of the Attorney General's Victim/Witness Assistance Program, and David works at the Immigration & Refugee Board.

**1992**

**Chan, Kwok-Lan Edith** (BA Spec. Hons. Calumet) is an assistant librarian at the University of Hong Kong.

**Wenske, Catherine** (BA Hons. Glendon) began her own translation company in January 2003, Comprende Translation Services in Ontario.

**1995**

**Knight, W. Andy** (PhD) is a professor of international relations in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta. He was awarded the prestigious McCalla Research Professorship 2003-2004 for his research on children & armed conflict. He is the editor of the academic journal *Global Governance* and author of a number of books.

**1996**

**Belec, Danielle** (MA) is the director and owner of Second Wind Pilates Plus, a movement therapy studio and certification school in Mississauga, ON.

**Cameron, Cara** (BEd, BFA Spec. Hons. McLaughlin) is a teacher with the Peel District School Board, ON. She is currently on maternity leave after the birth of her 3rd child, Anne Elizabeth, born March 23, 2003.

**Gurushanta, Sunil W.** (BA Bethune) is the senior business analyst for GM of Canada Ltd. in Oshawa, ON.

**1997**

**Maglieri, Maria** (BA '88, BA Hons. Vanier) lives in Ontario and is a stay at home mom with an 8-year-old and a 10-month-old.

**1998**

**Bengel, Diana** (BA Spec. Hons. Stong) is an international teacher in Kuwait.

**1999**

**Cherkassky, Yakov** (BSc Spec. Hons. Bethune) works at The Weather Network developing interactive television products and helping with the Web site.

**2001**

**Pizzonia, John** (BA Stong) is the CEO at Coats by Mary Ellen in Toronto.

**2003**

**Robillard, Lucie** (BAS Atkinson) is the collection manager with Royal LePage in Toronto.



My encounter with a street person. BY DIANE BAKER MASON

# A Simple Hug

**I** didn't expect at the end of exams to be in the embrace of a street person, but that's how it worked out. Perhaps, despite all the spare change I'd dumped in his cardboard tray (with its neatly-printed sign, "Homeless, jobless, please help"), I felt I owed him something. Even a hug.

I was taking the Ontario Bar Admission Course last summer at Osgoode Hall downtown – a gruelling exercise. I was miserable. But every day, on my way in, I would pass the ratman. In the old days he'd be called a vagrant: a man about 60, bearded,

## He was also the patriarch

who set up a station at the southeast corner of Osgoode Hall. He hung from the wrought-iron fence a tinny-sounding portable radio and a couple of small canvas duffle bags. At his feet were the sign, and the tray.

He was also the patriarch of a family of a dozen domestic rats – piebald, grey, white, brown – each creatively christened with names like "Mickey" and "Fontino". He would line them up like trained parrots on his extended arm, and set two others on his shoulders; they would lean over and lick his moustache on the command, "kiss kiss". No doubt many would be horrified, but I've been fond of small animals since my hamster-owning girlhood. Soon I was talking to the ratman daily. The rats often weren't awake at 8:30am – lazing about instead in the bag – but Manfred the ratman was always there, listening to the AM news. By lunch, he'd have roused his rats and lined them up on his arms. Tourists took his picture. He seemed perfectly happy.

But I wondered about him. I suppose I wanted to help, beyond giving him change. It would take advocacy, intervention, and the filing of applications. It seemed obscenely intrusive. Would you ask any other stranger/acquaintance the sort of questions "helping" might involve? Questions like: Where do you sleep? Do you have family? A drinking problem? Mental health issues? Even I couldn't bring myself to that level of meddling.

But on the Friday before end of term, I arrived to discover

Diane Baker Mason (BA '96, LLB '03) is the author of *Last Summer at Barebones* and the best-selling novel version of *Men With Brooms*.

him sagging with misery, clutching his arm to his chest, the rats dozing in their bag. He had dislocated his collarbone. He'd been to the hospital, but after a three-hour wait, he left. I resolved to take him there myself at lunch, but by then, things had gone from bad to worse. Someone had stolen his radio and the duffle bag – with all his rats. He couldn't go to the hospital now, he said. He had to wait for the



police whom, he said, were off on "rat patrol." He was doing his damndest to be upbeat, but was obviously distressed.

By Monday, he still hadn't had the bone reset. The cops had found the duffle bag

(ratless). I insisted on taking him to hospital after class, but when I returned, he was lying on the grass, refusing to go yet. He said he needed clean clothes first. He assured me he didn't need help.

On the last day of class, I was dismayed to see that Manfred's arm was still untended, and I was about to launch into a serious nag when he told me his news. One of the rats had come home. It had run up onto his chest as he lay on the grass. It was now asleep in the duffle bag. Somehow, in all that traffic and bustle, with a city block intervening, it made its way back to him.

But I had to leave. I made him promise to go to the hospital. "Yes, mother," he said. I also offered my hand. He bowed and kissed it. But then he straightened, looked me in the eye, and said, "C'mere."

I hesitated. He wasn't exactly well-groomed, but I would have hugged anyone else with whom I'd been so friendly for weeks. So, cautious of his shoulder, I hugged him. It was a perfectly normal hug except, of course, for the dirt. We let each other go, and said goodbye.

The Queen streetcar passed him as I rode it home. There he was, with his one rat on his good shoulder, waving at the tour bus, chatting with another woman with whom he'd also made friends. I hoped he'd get to hospital. I hoped he'd be okay.

In a big city like this, what's a little dirt between friends? ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN MAKINSON/REPORTAGE