Trashy Movie

Andrew Nisker’s film about garbage has lessons for householders, activists – and marketers

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Gold Mag

W hen I was a student coming of drinking age in Van- couver, there was one thing evey wine lover in the city could readily agree on – BC wine was awful. To call it plonk would have given it a European dignity it didn’t deserve. But what a difference a few years, an eco- nomic boom and the right kind of grapes can make. Today the desert hills around Kelowna, centre of the Okanagan Valley wine fraternity, are morticed with high- quality vineyards that regularly reap international awards.

So it was somehow fitting to find myself in Kelowna in June, using elegant Okanagan wine to toast some very grati- fying awards bestowed upon Tertu by the Canadian Council for the Advancement of Education (CCAE) at its annual confer- ence there. I have been guilty before of mentioning that Tertu has won a long list of awards in Canada and the US in its five years of existence, building on a tradition of excellence set by York publications. But this year Tertu received the gold award for Best Magazine from CCAE, the highest national honour in our university field. It was the first such gold for Tertu, though we have received silver for Best Magazine three times before.

There was more in Kelowna. Some may recall that when we exclusively published astronaut and alumnus Steve MacLean’s inspiring account of his space walk in April 2007, University of British Columbia. CCAE proved it. Steve’s space diary

received the silver award in the Best Writing/Article category. He seemed both delighted and bemused when I told him.

And in a kind of hat trick, we also won silver for Best Photography. This was a moody shot leading the April 2007 University section of Chinese pipa player Wendy Zhao, a lecturer in world music in the Faculty of Fine Arts. The picture was taken by freelance photographer KC Armstrong in a shoot directed by Tertu art director James Nixon. The story was conceived by managing editor Michael Todd, who oversees the Universe section.

I expect you’ve heard quite enough of this by now, so I’ll only quickly mention that this spring we also received gold for Best Print Internal Audience Periodical from the Washington-based Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) for the two issues a year in Tertu’s five-issue cycle that circulate mainly on campus. This was a continent-wide award, covering all universities and colleges in the US and Canada. And I won’t mention at all that early in the year we received gold for Visual Design in Print from our CAAE (Ontario and the northeastern US) for our April 2007 cover. You can see all these issues at yorku.ca/tertu and I can shut up and have another glass.

Editor @ YorkU

Sustaining York

P ick up a newspaper or magazine and you won’t get far before you come across an article on alternative energy, fuel-efficient cars or the importance of eating locally. Sustainability is an idea whose time has come. But the drive to go green is nothing new at York. For more than 30 years, the Faculty of Environmental Studies has been exploring the relationships between theory and action with research that includes tropical forest preservation, healthy communities, animal rights, wetland restoration and commu- nity planning.

In 2002, the University made a public commitment to sustainability by signing the global Talloires Declaration – a 10-point plan for incorporating sustainability and environmental literacy in teaching, research, operations and outreach at colleges and universities. Since then, York has worked hard to minimize its ecological footprint, while improving the quality of our campus environment. We’re about halfway towards imple- menting our Energy Management Program at both the Keele and Glendon campuses.

Our goal is to achieve a 25-per-cent reduction in energy costs through initiatives such as energy-efficient lighting; heating, ventilation and air conditioning modifications and upgrades; advanced metering; and optimized use of cogeneration and renewable energy. Once completed, this pro- gram will save 16,545 tonnes of greenhouse gases annually. It will mean more efficient buildings with better air quality and more natural light – an improved environment in which to work and study. And it will save the University more than $5 million in annual energy costs.

But sustainability is not primarily about saving money. It’s about securing a future that provides the kind of opportunities we have enjoyed to others less privileged – and to those yet to come. York has adopted a workplace code of conduct for its trademark licenses and has joined the Fair Labor Association and the Worker Rights Consortium, both based in Washington.

Of course, the best way to build a sustainable community is to involve its members. The York Wise initiative can help you do just that. Visit yorku.ca/yorkwise to learn how the small changes you make will lead to big changes on our campuses and in our communities.

The code outlines the conditions that must be met when licensed goods bearing York’s names and marks are manufactured.

After 18 months in operation, York’s Sustainability Council, with broad representation from across campus including students, will now report to me on ways to better address issues of sustainability on a pan-University level.

The drive to sustainability at York is underpinning infra- structure renewal too. When it’s completed, the York Research Tower in the Archives of Ontario building will create 120,000 square feet of academic and research space, and will meet silver certification standards set by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, an internationally recog- nized green-building rating system.

Perhaps most important to York University – and York Region – is the subway expansion. The extended line will replace nearly 1,400 buses that circle the Common every day, and eliminate their emissions and noise pollution. Moreover, it will help build more livable communities by providing a fast, clean, reliable link between York Region and Toronto while taking considerable pressure off the Yonge subway line.

Mamdouh Shoukr is York’s president and vice-chancellor.

YorkU is tops in Canada. By Berton Woodward

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

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I am a graduate of York University, and I have always been proud of my alma mater. However, I must say that I was disappointed to read the recent article in which you compared York University to other major universities in Canada and the United States. I believe that York University has a unique and important role to play in Canadian higher education.

First, I would like to highlight the University’s commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility. York University has taken numerous steps to reduce its environmental impact, including initiatives such as energy savings programs, waste reduction strategies, and sustainable transportation efforts. These initiatives not only benefit the environment, but also contribute to the overall well-being of the York community.

Second, I would like to mention the University’s focus on research and innovation. York University is home to numerous research institutes and centers, which are dedicated to advancing knowledge in a wide range of fields. These research initiatives not only enhance the academic experience for students, but also contribute to the economic and social development of the region.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the importance of York University’s commitment to diversity and inclusivity. The University is home to a diverse community of students, faculty, and staff, and it has a strong commitment to ensuring that all members of the community feel welcomed and valued.

In conclusion, I believe that York University is a unique and important institution that has a significant impact on the community and the world. I urge all members of the York community to support the University’s efforts to advance knowledge, promote sustainability, and foster diversity and inclusivity.

Yours sincerely,

[Your Name]
In 2007, the CBC declared the canoe to be one of the Seven Wonders of Canada (along with prairie skies, Niagara Falls and Pier 21 in Halifax). But is this cultural icon as “pure” as it appears? Not according to Faculty of Environmental Studies PhD candidate Bruce Erickson. He sees it as carrying a lot of baggage, so to speak, from the relationship between early white fur traders and the native canoe-builders they dealt with.

“The canoe remains a marker of our encounter with the past, one that is often mediated through an idealized image of nature and the native,” says Erickson, whose thesis is titled, Canoe Nation: Wilderness, Race and Masculinity in the Genealogy of a National Icon. “I have always been interested in the meanings and consequences of our leisure choices and how they become a defining feature of our identity as individuals,” he says. “The canoe, for example, is a way to examine how the economy of outdoor recreation – mediated through the history of colonialism in Canada – is central to individuals’ identifications with the nation.”

Erickson argues the canoe has gone from having a major impact on the nation – economically, territorially and politically – to achieving a symbolic role. “But national symbols are never really innocent,” he says. “They’re more than just symbols. This is about the practices of a nation, including the increasing use of space for recreation. My interest is in how the history of the canoe – as a place to assert a particular vision of white masculinity – is played out in the stories we tell about Canada today. Hopefully my research will present some different versions of those stories.”
What They’re Reading

York people reveal what’s on the bedside table

Kalina Grewal
Reference Librarian

I am reading a very funny book which many people, including literary critics, describe as a work of genius. It is John Kennedy Toole’s A Confederacy of Dunces. Ignatius J. Reilly, the main character, is such an anti-hero! He harasses his mother, organizes misguided protests and generally introduces chaos into his very small, but ecclectic, section of New Orleans. To provide a counterpoint to the mayhem of Ignatius’s world, I picked up the Dalai Lama’s How to Expand Love (translated by Jeffrey Hopkins) and Kathleen Jamie’s Findings. There is calm in these books – both authors write clean, clear prose and invite the reader to think deeply about the world and its inhabitants.

Kenton Kroker
Science & Technology Studies professor

More satire. Gary Shreveurt’s Afghanistan reads like Gogol writing in Putin’s Russia. Will Self’s The Book of Dares similarly twists sci-fi. A brilliant premise, a brutal critique, plus an homage to John Wyndham and Frank Herbert. My kids are in on the act, as Lemony Snicket’s merciless assault on children’s lit easily trumps private school children on broomsticks (and similarly twists sci-fi.

The Clara Thomas Archives tops up much-needed storage capacity

The Clara Thomas Archives tops up much-needed storage capacity

Rosenbaum, a psychology professor in York’s Faculty of Health, recently investigated whether one needs to recall past personal experiences in order to make sense of other people’s thoughts and feelings, an ability known as “theory of mind”. A commonly accepted theory is that people rely on their “ autobiographical memory” to figure out the mental states of others. Hence, would amnesiacs who lack autobiographical memory be able to read the thoughts and emotions of people around them?

Rosenbaum and senior scientists at the Rotman Research Institute at Toronto’s Baycrest Centre studied Cochrane and another subject, both near-total amnesiacs due to brain injuries, and compared them with a control group of 14 subjects with no brain damage. A battery of comprehensive tests was administered to the control subjects and the two brain-injury patients to see how well they could reason about the thoughts and feelings of others.

The two amnesiac patients’ scores were indistinguishable from those of the controls. “Our findings defy a long-held theory,” says Rosenbaum. “But, more importantly, we found that even without the ability to recollect the past, a person can still be in tune with others’ feelings and intentions, which can help sustain social relationships.”

I imagine you live in the eternal present, with no memory of the past. Mississauga resident Kent Cochrane is such a man, and his situation has contributed to groundbreaking research by York neuropsychologist Shayna Rosenbaum.

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The Martian Winds

Canadian snow could help us understand Mars

Could studying blowing snow in the Arctic Circle one day help us understand Martian dust storms? Professor Peter Taylor and colleagues in York’s Earth & Space Science Program certainly hope so. Taylor heads up the team studying blowing snow as a segment of the Storm Studies of the Arctic program, funded by the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences and based in Iqaluit, capital of Nunavut.

Precise sensors mounted on a 10-metre tower near the Iqaluit airport measure the size and number of blowing snow particles, along with wind direction and velocity, humidity, temperature and visibility. Other weather stations have been deployed by helicopter in remote locations up to 100 km from Iqaluit. The team is hunting for the precise wind and surface conditions that give rise to blowing snow and reduced visibility. “The data we collect here studying snow should contribute strongly to our basic understanding of how other aeolian [wind] processes work and why Martian dust storms occur,” says Taylor.

Taylor is part of the York-led team of Canadian atmospheric scientists working on NASA’s Phoenix Mission, which touched down on Mars in late May. The team is responsible for the lander’s weather station, which is studying the Martian atmosphere. Phoenix will examine climate at the Red Planet’s northern latitudes, as well as the geological history of water and the potential of the soil to support life.

It’s a long way from the Arctic, but “studying blowing snow should give us important clues to dust on Mars and how it affects the planet’s daily surface temperatures,” says Taylor.
Sustainability
A Big Zero
York course kits turn green

So what’s brewing at York? The brand new Las Nubes Café, now located in the lobby of the Computer Science & Engineering Building on the Keele campus, that’s what. It’s the only coffee kiosk on campus dedicated to selling York’s own brand of certified Fair Trade coffee. The sustainable brew also comes in recyclable paper cups made from post-consumer waste, in the spirit of York’s environmental friendliness.

Las Nubes coffee and café are named after the University’s rainforest reserve in Costa Rica donated by Dr. M. M. (Woody) Fisher in 1998. One dollar from every pound sold at Timothy’s World Coffee outlets across Canada goes to the Fisher Fund for Neotropical Conservation, which supports research projects and conservation activities in the Las Nubes region. Five cents from every cup sold at York’s Las Nubes kiosk goes to the fund as well.

“We don’t believe in another coffee outlet,” says Prof. Howard Daugherty, director of the Las Nubes Program and mastermind behind developing both the Las Nubes brand and the kiosk. “It gives students and others a chance to buy into an exciting York project that is on the forefront of conservation by virtue of a private-sector/public-sector/university partnership. As far as I know, it’s a partnership for sustainability that’s unique in Canada.”

Transit
Doubling Up
Bigger, taller GO buses serve York commuters

Now you can double your fun when you commute to York. How? By taking the new GO double-deckers. GO, the intercity public transit system serving the Greater Toronto Area, debuted the new buses this spring. They’re designed to serve high-volume commuter traffic in the Oakville-Mississauga-York University corridor, which a lot of York students and staff travel.

Twelve new “Enviro 500” models, manufactured by Alexander Dennis Limited, a UK-based company (there are no North American double-decker makers), took to the streets this year. The buses can seat 78 people – 46 on the upper deck, 32 on the lower level – thereby offering 37 per cent more seating capacity than conventional GO 57 seaters. Indirectly this also lessens both commuters’ and GO’s “carbon footprint” since both fuel usage and harmful emissions, per passenger, are reduced.

According to GO, the buses offer exceptional views from the upper level (all the better to see upcoming traffic jams perhaps) and even have reclining seats. They also feature individually adjustable air vents, individual reading lights and 12-volt power outlets for en route essay-writing (or computer games).

All the double-deckers are wheelchair accessible and feature a kneeling capability, along with a powered wheelchair ramp, wide aisles and front door, and low floors.

Double-deckers will run on the Highway 403 and 407 corridor between Oakville GO station and York University. Stops include Square One GO Bus Terminal and Bramalea GO station. GO’s BRT – Bus Rapid Transit Service – makes more than 500 trips every day along the 407 route. Still, some GTA areas cannot be serviced because the highway overpasses are exactly the same height as the buses themselves – 14 feet.

Sometimes the best footprint is no footprint. And this fall York has the distinction of being the first Canadian postsecondary institution to make its courses part of a carbon offset program, by creating course kits that are “carbon neutral”.

When classes begin, thousands of students jam the York University Bookstore to pick up class course kits. These are customized to each individual professor’s course and include such things as a course syllabus, original material that the prof has researched and written, course and lab notes, journal articles, book chapters, and sometimes even complete photocopied books if they are out of print and necessary for students to have. Obviously that adds up to a lot of paper. Or a lot of trees, depending on how you look at it.

So how do you get carbon neutral if you’re using a lot of paper? Well, since using recycled paper is expensive, one way to achieve a zero is to produce kits “on demand” at the campus printer to reduce waste, then donate approximately 10 cents per kit for a tree-planting or other local project to “offset” or reduce a comparable amount of carbon emissions used to produce the kit.

That’s what York is doing, in partnership with the Toronto-based green firm Zerofootprint Inc. The program is part of the University’s Yorkwise initiative to reduce York’s eco-footprint and improve life on campus.

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On occasion, filmmakers may hear reviewers say their work is garbage. It goes with the territory. But Andrew Nisker (BFA ’93) gets it everywhere he goes these days. People who’ve seen his latest film are constantly sending him e-mails or making pointed remarks in video interviews that he records. The comments range from “shocking” and “disgusting” to “curse you, Andrew Nisker.” He proudly puts it all on his Web site for others to see. Revolutionaries, you see, are insured to naysayers and Nisker is determined to start a revolution – several, in fact.

It all started with his growing anger at the state of the environment, which grew stronger after he met activist Bob Hunter of Greenpeace fame while working at Citytv in Toronto early this decade. Nisker, who has asthma, had moved into a Victorian apartment building in an arts neighbourhood in downtown Toronto. After growing up in the air-conditioned comfort of his parents’ suburban home, Nisker had to forego that luxury in his bohemian digs and open the windows. That’s when the smell of the city first hit him. The smog aggravated his lungs and made breathing a chore. “I would see all these cars whipping by – people in their air-conditioned vehicles – and it just started me thinking, whether we really had to live in our pollution.” Then came the Toronto municipal workers’ strike in the roasting summer of 2002, causing a massive pile of refuse to grow in the park he walked by every day on his way to work. As the strike entered its third week and temperatures hit 30-plus degrees, the stink of rotting refuse was one element in what Nisker calls the “perfect
storm” of inspiration that convinced him to make a documenta-
ty film about – you guessed it – trash.

“I started to think about my garbage,” he says, as he lists the
factors that led to his decision to produce “a film that mattered”
after years of doing comedy and lifestyle projects. “The final
thing was the birth of my son and realizing he’s going to inherit
all this, and Daddy’s got to do something for him,” says Nisker.

That something was Garbage! The Revolution Starts at
Home, which was one of the top draws at the
2008 Hot Docs film festival in
Toronto. The film charts three months in the life of the McDonald family, who
agreed to keep their garbage – soiled dia-
pers and all – as the reality plot for Nisker’s
documentary. As the evidence of their dis-
posable lifestyle piles up in the garage –
complete with maggots and an ever-
present stench – Nisker takes the family on
a tour of a landfill site and other stops in
the life cycle of trash. The point is to get
viewers to come to terms with the garbage
they produce in their home. That’s where
the environmental revolution has to start,
as Bob Hunter was fond of saying.

Nisker’s decision to leave his day job in
television for the challenge of being an
independent producer with an activistbent didn’t come easily. Since he gradu-
ated from the Film & Video Program in York’s Faculty of Fine
Arts, he had been writing, editing and producing films for
screen and television. His work was well received: he sold two
of his student projects to the CBC, both of which made money
and won awards. But after a flying start, his career in the film
business settled into a more modest pattern of commissioned
scripts and staff writing jobs for lifestyle documentary pro-
grams. “I wanted to be a director,” he says, “but writing was a
means to an end because I figured there was no way I could
make a film of anyone else’s work – I had to do my own.”

Nisker has an offbeat sense of humour and it shows in the
titles of some of his projects, such as “Loving the In-laws” (2003), a short comedy that won an award in a TV festival in
Los Angeles and is available online. His 1996 script for a Jewish
black comedy, titled “The Shira”, has been picked up by
Broadway Videos of New York, producers of “Saturday Night
Live”, and he has several other works in production, including
his latest film Chemical Nation. One of his favourites is his
1992 mockumentary The Roccoltelli Files, a biographical
comedy about mobsters, which he sold to networks in France
and Germany. Nisker would like to revisit the main character in
a feature film, “because I have fun with the mobster genre.”

In between successes, however, Nisker had his share of
rejections for projects that were turned down as either non-
commercial or too far ahead of their time. In 2003, he came up
with an idea for a reality show where families would compete
against each other to reduce their energy consumption. “I was
told ‘your idea is amazing’ by the president of a major net-
work,” he recalls. But the idea was rejected because it was
“ecology based” and “wouldn’t get ratings.” When Hunter
died of cancer in the spring of 2005, Nisker made the decision
to ignore industry naysayers and produce Garbage! “Bob’s
death was the final push for me,” says Nisker. “I said, you
know, fuck all this rejection, I want to make this film. I can do it
myself. I can shoot, I write, I edit and I’m going to do this. We started production in the fall of 2005.”

Nisker produced Garbage! using money from a development fund, private
investors and his own bank account. Canada’s Super Channel began airing it
this year and the US-based Sundance Channel plans to show it next spring.
Some commercial distribution of the film is handled by other companies, but Nisker
retains right to sell online, and it’s here, as a
part of the business where cultural sover-
eignty is always an issue, that he hopes to
start another revolution: self-distribution.
Through his own company, Take Action Films, Nisker offers the movie for varying fees to people and institutions around the world, so they can hold their own garbage parties. Using a just-in-time supplier to
burn the DVDs and ship them out to customers, he is free to
promote the film by a technique known as “community
building”. His Web site includes detailed instructions and tem-
plates for hosting a screening, encouraging neighbourhoods,
schools and clubs to discuss their relationship with garbage –
and hand out discounted DVDs. Participants must RSVP online
at his site. “We’re building our audience for the next film,” he
says. With customers as far away as Israel, Australia and the US,
Nisker says his fledgling company has sold about 5,000 DVDs
so far and booked over 1,000 screenings since the film was
released in November 2007. He estimates more than 150,000
people have seen it.

This isn’t Nisker’s first foray into the new frontier of digital
marketing. He was recruited by a production company in Cali-
ifornia to develop interactive games – one based on stock car
racing, the other on the wild and wacky world of professional
wrestling. He even spent six months in California developing
social networking content for a mobile phone company.
Through it all, he developed a strategy of using technology –
and an activist’s doggedness – to further his goal of becoming a
director and independent producer who makes socially relevant
films. “I love documentary because I don’t need anyone’s
permission or money,” he says. “The two things that I want to
do are, empower people to help them change the environment, and
empower artists to help them change their situation.

There’s no point in waiting for “the man.”

Nisker offers the movie for varying fees to people and institutions around the world, so they can hold their own garbage parties.
2009 will be a banner year for York as it mounts a community-wide celebration of its first half-century – and the next.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

RAISE THE BANNERS, uncork the wine and light the candles. York celebrates its 50th birthday in 2009 and you’re invited.

The fanfare starts soon. Banners will flutter in a blaze of red and white glory at every entrance to both York campuses. The U50 logo will be on every major sign, every anniversary souvenir, every York letterhead. If you want to find out what’s going on, just check out the 50th anniversary Web site (yorku50.ca) so you can make a date to join the celebration.

Festivities kick off in January and continue well into the fall. Following the release early in 2009 of Glendon Professor Emeritus Michiel Horn’s York University: The Way Must Be Tried, an account of York’s early days, more than 60 initiatives will unfold to mark this significant anniversary. There will be conferences and symposia, concerts and exhibits, open houses and book launches. Many will be clustered around major events, such as the opening of the new Archives of Ontario building in the spring. Some will be individual projects – anthropologist Penny Van Esterik is writing an ethnography of York – but most are large events designed to spotlight York’s academic talent and draw crowds.

Like the 50+50 Symposium starting on Thursday, March 26, five decades to the day after the York University Act received royal assent. Conceived by York film Professor Seth Feldman as “An Interdisciplinary Discussion of Pretty Much Everything”, it will be a heady gathering of world thinkers – teamed with bright lights from York – debating the question: What have we learned in the last 50 years and how will that shape the world in the next 50? York’s biggest lecture theatres are expected to fill with people keen to hear major figures wrestle with teasers like “What’s a nice middle power like you doing in a world like this?” (about Canada’s international relations) and other global themes such as health, sustainability, the acquisition and use of knowledge, technology, the city and culture.

“This symposium will be about things we haven’t thought about yet and things we should be thinking about,” says Judith Cohen, chair of the 50th-anniversary steering committee overseeing the entire year’s celebrations. “It’s about the next big idea. Isn’t that what a university is all about? It’s going to be very exciting.”

Wait, there’s more happening on campus on that birthday weekend in March. York’s Senate will hold a historic meeting on the Thursday. The curtain will rise on a dazzling display of talented Yorkies, staged by Fine Arts Dean Emeritus Phil Silve, for a black-tie event Saturday evening. And on the Sunday, prominent University friends as well as alumni from York’s fundraising powerhouse group, 50 to the Power of 50, will speed-mentor some of York’s most accomplished students.

Then in May, York throws its doors open even wider and invites the neighbours and friends to its first Community Festival. Visitors of all ages can see displays of York’s musical, theatrical and visual art talent and take part in hands-on activities organized by staff and faculty. “The 50th gives York an opportunity to let the world know we’re here and we’re great,” says Cohen. “It is a chance to foster pride among all our grads and to foster awareness in the greater community.”

The Community Festival is one of many anniversary initiatives that is expected to become an annual event, enduring well past 2009 as the legacy of a banner year. “We want to create, then build upon, the 50th-anniversary momentum,” says President & Vice-Chancellor Mamdouh Shoukri.

Organizing the 50th has been “a labour of love” for about 80 people involved in committees, says Cindy Bettcher, U50 anniversary project director. Eighty is nothing compared to the army of volunteers York will need to carry the whole thing off and dozens of faculty, retirees, staff and students have already offered to help. The engines pulling this 2009 birthday train are York’s Marketing & Communications Division and the Office of University Events & Community Relations (UECR), which will manage the signature events and provide support for many others. As UECR executive director Sylvia Zingrone says, “This is an exceptional opportunity to build York’s reputation.”

So count yourself invited. And, yes, there will be cake.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

2009 will be a banner year for York as it mounts a community-wide celebration of its first half-century – and the next.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK
While researching his forthcoming history, York University: The Way Must Be Tried, due in early 2009 as part of York’s 50th anniversary celebrations, University Historian and Glendon Professor Emeritus Michael Harn put out a call to alumni through YorkU for remembrances of their time as students. Among those responding was Deborah Sword (MES ’93), a Calgary conflict management consultant, who had a remarkable tale involving her biological daughter, former York student Beth Lawrence, who now runs a landscape design and organic gardening company in Toronto. YorkU asked the two of them to elaborate.

Deborah Sword: In 1971, about two decades before I attended York, I was an unwed pregnant teenager. It was the typical story – I was feeling unloved at home, my boyfriend was kind to me etc. etc. I gave my daughter up for adoption in Edmonton without ever telling anyone I had been pregnant. Yes, no one noticed. I gained seven pounds and she weighed six of them.

Over time, I sent letters to Alberta Social Services and they sent me a non-identifying, ambiguous letter advising that she was fine and placed with a loving family. It was comforting ... loved. Even so, the sense of loss is so profound that I never had other children, and couldn’t talk about the one I had.

Beth Lawrence: I grew up in a Toronto family with loving parents and three very physical and rambunctious older brothers who all have a killer sense of humour. We can find a way to laugh at anything.

But my family and I were like night and day. The list of my brothers’ food allergies would make you involuntarily reach for an EpiPen. I, on the other hand, don’t have a single ... with nature. My first time on a horse I rode bareback. They have a deeply conservative outlook. I usually vote Green.

Deborah Sword: In the late 1980s, I crossed paths with a young woman who had been adopted, and she spoke of her longing to meet her birth mother. Her story touched me deeply. Although it would have complicated my personal and professional life greatly for anyone to know that I was a birth mom, I registered as being prepared to meet my birth daughter if she wanted.

The years went by without word, and I stopped waiting for the phone to ring. I still checked the crowds, just in case a young woman who looked like me walked past. Eventually, in 1991, I enrolled at York in the Master of Environmental Studies program. Because my area of study, which involved environmental conflict resolution, was of interest to the new BES students, I was asked to guest lecture at one of their classes, which I happily did. Hit the fast-forward button again, please.

Beth Lawrence: I thought about searching for my birth family for a long time before I did it. One day, I was watching “Oprah” and the story was about mother-daughter reunions. I filled out the forms and sent them to the Post-Adoption Registry, assuming I’d have to wait years before hearing anything. I got a phone call within days – my birth mother was already registered.

Deborah Sword: The registry social worker called me out of the clear blue in May, 1995 – my daughter, now 24, wanted to meet me. Imagine my excitement. And imagine our mutual amazement, as we had coffee together for the first time, to discover that she had been in that York BES class to which I had guest lectured!

Despite our never having met since she was three days old, the genes of environmentalism turned out to be so strong that her green interests are identical to mine, and expressed themselves through the Faculty of Environmental Studies.

Beth Lawrence: The first question upon being reunited with a birth parent is very physical: who do I look like, you or my father? Who is my father? What can I do that you can do too? This stage, while still fascinating, is nowhere near as interesting as discovering you have the same values as someone you have never met before.

After engaging in much dialogue and discovery, I have been brought up in the belief that I am a 50-50 split in the debate about nature vs. nurture. Love of travel, the outdoors and camping, reflective contemplation, horses, and a deep caring for the environment all came from my birth mother. So much alike are we that we chose to make helping the planet our life’s work. We both, in the same year yet at different times in our lives, entered the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York. When we did finally meet, although we hadn’t known one another while at York, we knew many of the same people.

Deborah Sword: Since Beth is the daughter of a terrific adoptive mother, I introduce Beth as my DNA, and she reciprocates by calling me Biomom.

Beth Lawrence: Over the last 13 years, in my journey of growing up, I have had the privilege of getting to know not just one mother but two. I have felt so fortunate for their vastly different perspectives of the world, and I have been able to glean the very best from both of these extraordinary women.

Memoirs of York are still welcome. Send to editor@yorku.ca.
York Professor Barrie Wilson’s new book, How Jesus Became Christian, change the world or the face of Christianity or what people believe? Probably not, but that’s OK, because Wilson would be happy if it simply opened a few minds. “There’s lots in the book for people to get riled up about,” says Wilson. “But at the same time I don’t see it as a negative book.”

In Wilson’s view, Jesus, who was a devout Jew, a prophet and a powerful storyteller, had his brand of Christianity hijacked, changed and later peddled by another religious genius named Paul, with help from his excellent writer/PR man Luke the evangelist.

Wilson outlines his take on how Christianity developed in a book that he says “isn’t designed for an academic audience, but for the general reader.” He tackles how the Jewish Jesus became a Gentile Christ? Wilson attributes some of what happened, and the distortions of that earlier faith, to Paul.

“Paul’s movement or brand of Christianity was, I suggest, not rooted in the real teachings and sayings of the historical Jesus (interestingly, Paul never met him) but solely in Paul’s personal mystical vision of Christ,” says Wilson. “Paul established the new religion through anti-Semitic propaganda that ultimately crushed the Jesus movement. In essence, one of the world’s great religions grew and prospered at the cost of another.”

In the book, Wilson investigates the hypothesis that Christianity’s origins are rooted in a colossal cover-up and that the original Jesus movement developed into the Ebionites – an early Jewish/Christian sect. Wilson argues that the original Jesus movement, led by Jesus’ brother James, was eventually overtaken by Paul and his “Christ movement”, which stripped Jesus of his Jewishness and de-emphasized his teachings. Paul catered to the God-fearers of his time, who were gentiles who admired Judaism but were leery of converting. Paul’s Jesus as a denier of Christ, Wilson says, was in stark contrast to the earlier Jesus movement’s Jesus, who was seen as a teacher.

“The book grows out of my interest in some of the puzzles of early Christianity,” says Wilson. “How did the image of Jesus get changed? How did we go from the nice Jewish rabbi and teacher who was talking about the kingdom of God to something that 100 years later was radically different, in which we suddenly find Jesus being talked about as a deity, as part of the Godhead? He’s changed dramatically from a human teacher into a god who is worshipped. I take the fact that Jesus was Jewish seriously. I don’t think a lot of my contemporary scholars do that.”

Paul emerges as the ultimate religious innovator who invented a new religion and propounded it into its eventual prominence. In other words, the Jesus we know through the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles and other accounts is not the historical Jesus but a carefully constructed and embellished one.

“The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls 50 years or so ago opened up a whole new insight into a major Jewish group of first century BC and first century, along with some Gnostic writings found around the same time in Egypt,” says Wilson. “Those finds gave us a new perspective on a different form of Christianity that we didn’t really know much about. It was a form of Christianity that rivalled mainstream Christianity or what became mainstream during the second, third and fourth centuries.”

Wilson, who converted to Judaism after he married his Jewish wife Linda 32 years ago, also investigates the tradition of Christian anti-Semitism and links it to the Jesus cover-up. He says he found that in the texts of the second century, early Christian leaders attacked every aspect of Judaism, vilifying the leaders, trying to rob the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible of its value and denying the Jewish concept of God.

“Everything that the Jewish heritage valued was either being spoken of derogately or else was appropriated by the new Christian movement. And out of this I made an interesting discovery as I wrote the book. I began to see the roots of early Christian anti-Semitism. The early form of Christianity lived in harmony with its neighbours with one minor exception. But when Paul comes on the scene, havoc is created. Everywhere he goes he stirs up trouble. People want to kill him. This man did something differently than Jesus’ early followers said and did. The question is, why?”

For answers to that question readers may have to wait for Wilson’s next book.
ife for Georgiana Uhlyarik (MA ’98) has certainly been a journey, in more ways than one. Born in Communist Romania in the city of Bucharest, she emigrated to Israel at age 12 with her parents. A year later, her family decided to come to Canada. Then another journey – this time both educational and professional – took place from the day Uhlyarik enrolled in York’s MA in Art History Program in 1996 to the day she got a curatorial position at the Art Gallery of Ontario in 2004. Now she is helping to shape the new galleries of Canadian art that will soon open at the AGO as part of architect Frank Gehry’s grand redesign of the 108-year-old institution.

“Like most immigrant stories, there are a series of coincidences that lead to the present,” says Uhlyarik. “We arrived in Montreal from Israel and we knew of two families – one in Montreal and the other in Toronto. When we called them during our first day, the Montreal family was out of town for the weekend and the Toronto family was at home. And this is how we ended up taking the train and living in Toronto ever since!”

It was difficult to be thrown for the second time into a new language and culture. But by the end of high school Uhlyarik felt comfortable in her new world and sought to expand it. Reading what was probably her first copy of NOW magazine, she spotted a classified ad for a community radio station looking for volunteers. “It turned out to be CHRY 105.5 FM at York and I showed up one afternoon after school to offer my time,” she says. She and a recent theatre grad – Beverly Taft (BA Spec. Hons. ’90) – were assigned to cover theatre. “This is how I discovered downtown Toronto – we then lived at Bathurst and Steeles – and how I discovered its thriving cultural scene.”

Uhlyarik says her experience at CHRY, and of the York campus, never quite left her, so, after receiving her honours BA in art history at the University of Toronto, she decided to pursue her MA at York. “I made a very conscious choice when I enrolled at York. I was attracted to their program because it combined academics with internship placements, the professors were art museum practitioners as well as scholars, there were guest lecturers from the museum community, there was an option to specialize in Canadian art history, and there were opportunities to teach, do independent research and forge a career in galleries and museums that opened up multiple possibilities and paths,” she says. “It was the ideal academic environment for me and I attribute my ability to pursue my interests professionally and my success to date to the professors and program offered in the Graduate Program in Art History at York.”

But Uhlyarik’s journey didn’t end there. As with much of her life story she again made a fortuitous contact at York that would eventually lead to her current position as curatorial assistant, Canadian. “At the end of my second semester at York, there was an addition to the schedule. During May-June 1997 Matthew Teitelbaum, who was then chief curator at the AGO, taught Negotiations in the Cultural Landscape: The Politics of Art,” says Uhlyarik. “I enrolled. The course dealt with the practical realities of art history – namely curating through case studies of front page headline art controversies. Richard Serra, Mapplethorpe, etc. In addition, the course was taught at the AGO, which meant that we had access to the behind-the-scenes...
of the gallery, we met the staff, and we toured the vaults. We
could see the inner workings.”

Uhlyarik approached Teitelbaum (now AGO director)
about an internship that related directly to her MA thesis. “He
said yes – in retrospect I don’t think I gave him much of a
choice. It was then that I realized that one way or another I
must become a curator at the AGO. Matthew ended up being
one of my thesis supervisors, along with Prof. Joyce Zemans,
my mentor and supporter since my early days at York. The
opportunities that York creates for its students, the encourage-
ment from its professors, the rigour and breadth of its pro-
grams, I credit for my accomplishments and my contribution to
the Canadian team at the AGO.”

Uhlyarik says she’s loved the visual arts for as long as she can
remember. “Not as a maker at all,” she says. “But as an audience
member. Being a viewer seemed the most mysterious and most
powerful of all. I thought that if I could understand art then
everything would make sense.” But Uhlyarik does come by her
artistic leanings from a nurture, rather than nature, angle.
“Almost everyone in my family drew or painted,” she says.
Though she doesn’t do so herself, she has her own family of
budding artists: her two young twin boys. As she says. “One of
my boys draws on everything and the other makes up stories
about everything. They are part of everything I do and I some-
times think my house is one big ‘installation’.” The first artwork
they remember seeing was a video installation of a man
jumping endlessly, and now anyone named Emily that they
meet they think is Emily Carr.”

The Art Gallery of Ontario’s

work: by michael todd

The Art Gallery of Ontario’s current makeover by world
renowned architect Frank Gehry continues apace with the
grand opening projected for Nov. 14, 2008. As Gehry’s
architectural innovation will shed new light on how gallery-
goers experience art, so too will York grad Georgiana
Uhlyarik’s ideas for the transformation of the Canadian galleries that
house the AGO’s permanent collection of Canadian artists. The curatorial
assistant is confident that the reinvented Canadian wing will reframe how
we view Canadian artists’ works, both well- and lesser-known.

Uhlyarik points out that the new Canadian galleries (their size has
increased 164 per cent in the new design) are thematic rather than chrono-
logical. There are three major themes: Myth, Memory and Power. “Key
principles that guided us in the installation were the inclusion of women
artists and First Nations as well as presenting historical work together with
recent work – mostly before 1980,” says Uhlyarik. “We also try to show-
case living artists and recent acquisitions and we work very closely with
interpretive planners to make sure the visitor experience is paramount.”

Work in Progress

An exclusive peek at the AGO’s new galleries.

BY MICHAEL T O D D

This page and opposite,
scenes from the Canadian galleries and the exterior of the new AGO
W
one, it not for the Sex Pistols, York education Professor Stephen Gaetz (MA ’85, PhD ’90) might not be crusading for an end to homelessness today. When the punk band burst upon the music scene in the late 1970s, it opened a tantalizing window on a defiant youth subculture that Gaetz, then a bored suburban Calgary student, found irresistible. His life changed forever when an anthropology prof at the University of Calgary let him write an essay about the band. Anthropology, the young Gaetz realized, could take him in unusual directions. East to York University, first, where he expanded that essay into an MA thesis on punk rock, then across the Atlantic to do research for a PhD on marginalized young people in urban Ireland. “I knew from The Pogues and other British punk bands that Ireland had an interesting youth culture,” says Gaetz.

On the gritty streets of Cork, Gaetz came face to face with the urban outlaws the Sex Pistols and The Pogues sang about. When he arrived in 1987, Ireland was an economic basket case, not the Celtic Tiger it is now. Cork reeled from the closure of its Ford plant and unemployment was high at 17 per cent – 60 per cent in public housing estates. The joyriding car thieves – and future subjects of his doctoral thesis – he hung out with wanted to know if he had a swimming pool like other “Americans” they saw on TV.

Cork cured Gaetz of a few biases. On one harrowing day he interviewed a young tough called Seamus. “I grow up I’m going to raise my kids on welfare.” The truth beneath the sarcasm was that Seamus was profoundly depressed, hated not being able to work and was bored out of his mind. “That was a big lesson for me: You have to understand where people are at,” says Gaetz. “How you think about them affects how you work with them. They can tell when you’re being disrespectful.”

Seventeen years later, Gaetz returned to Cork and bumped into Seamus. The once surly, rudderless lad was a skilled operator at a chemical plant and coaching a local soccer team. “It was so affirming to know that all the young people we think are pathological losers who belong in jail, if they get a chance to work and feel included, become successful and contribute back to their community. It’s all about respect.”

Back in Canada, Gaetz finished his PhD at York, then left academia to help street kids. For seven years, he worked as a health promoter for the fledgling Shout Clinic, serving homeless youth in downtown Toronto. He also did some useful and groundbreaking research. Based on his study of oral health, Shout set up Canada’s first free dental service for street youth. His research with Bill O’Grady, a University of Guelph sociologist, on the kids’ money-making strategies led to the development of an innovative training program. The same study bolstered a campaign protesting then-premier Mike Harris’s Safe Streets Act, which banned “aggressive” panhandling and sewage-gleaning. “Shout was an exciting place to be,” remembers Gaetz. “It leapt into a leadership role in Canada.”

So has he. A researcher at heart, Gaetz left front-line service to join York’s Faculty of Education in 2000. Since then the professor and associate dean has done more myth-busting studies with Guelph’s O’Grady. They found that remaining people in jail without bail produces homelessness, that squeegee kids and panhandlers would prefer real jobs, and that homeless people are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of crimes.

But, Gaetz wondered, who benefited from this research? Homelessness has worsened in Canada over the past 15 years, yet governments make no plans to end it and community-based agencies respond to it haphazardly. Research is fragmented among many disciplines and hard to find. “There has been no glue sticking it all together,” says Gaetz. “This has become my thing. How do we mobilize research that will have an impact on solutions to homelessness?”

In 2005, the man with a mission invited front-line workers, government policy-makers and former homeless people to help organize the first national conference on homelessness in Canada. It was a major success. “People were clear,” says Gaetz. “They said, ‘we need better access to research, we need to make research matter and we need to create stronger networks.’” So Gaetz, again collaborating with stakeholders, created and last year launched a comprehensive Web site. The Homeless Hub is the world’s first virtual research library, information exchange and networking centre on homelessness in Canada.

In May, Gaetz received a whopping $2.1-million grant from the federal Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to build a Canadian Homeless Research Network over the next seven years. The knowledge cluster will involve 15 researchers – six from York – at four Canadian universities and 13 partners, including municipalities and service providers from across the country.

Thanks to a 47-year-old punk rock fan, York now leads the charge to make homelessness research matter in Canada. “We’ve tried to bring people together for a conversation,” says Gaetz. “Now, that conversation will happen.”

York’s Stephen Gaetz helps explode myths about the homeless.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK  PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS YOUNG

Home Truths

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If Karolyn Smardz Frost hadn’t persuaded the Toronto District School Board to let her dig up the playground at Sackville Street Public School as an archeological education project in 1985, the world wouldn’t be any the wiser about Thornton Blackburn. The “colored” cab owner listed in Toronto’s 1856 street directory would have remained as invisible as the foundations of his little house buried beneath the schoolyard. And Frost, who teaches history at York, may never have spent the next 20 years digging up this fugitive slave’s past and writing her award-winning I’ve Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad.

When she started, the young archeologist with a master’s degree in classics had only the barest of facts, gleaned from gravestones and an 1888 Toronto Telegram interview: Blackburn was born in Maysville, Kentucky, started Toronto’s first cab company, died and was buried in Toronto with his wife Lucie and mother Sibby. Frost would soon discover how hard it would be to piece together the arc of this man’s life. Illiterate and ill-dressed, he left no descendants or letters. “I was searching for a 19-year-old man known mainly by his first name who had been owned by Kentucky slaveholders called Smith and Brown,” says Frost.

For years, she clocked tens of thousands of kilometres driving around Ontario and south to Kentucky, Michigan and Virginia, combing through deeds, wills, birth and death registries, newspapers and court records in libraries, municipal offices, churches and cemeteries. She interviewed descendants of slaves in Canada and of slave owners in the United States. She visited places where Thornton lived and worked, funding her forays with donations from private foundations and historical societies. But by painstaking bit, she assembled Thornton’s life story. Along the way, Frost went back to university. “I earned a PhD in American history just so I could write this book.”

From the opening scene, Glory Land tells a gripping tale. On July 3, 1831, Thornton and his beautiful wife Lucie, dressed in their Sunday best and carrying forged identity documents, waited for the ferry to take them on the first leg of their escape north to freedom. Caught and jailed in Detroit two years later, they sparked that city’s first race riot when friends rallied to rescue them, then rowed them to safety in Upper Canada. Their infuriated owners filed for extradition without success. Not long afterwards, Thornton Risked his only return to the US – to steal his mother Sibby out of bondage. For more than 50 years, the Blackburns flourished in Toronto and used their wealth to help refugees like themselves start anew in a free land.

Glory Land is the first biography of an escaped slave based on original research, rather than a first-hand account. The title comes from a verse in the Negro spiritual Do Lord. “Glory land” suggested heaven but came to mean Canada for freedom-seeking slaves before the American Civil War ended slavery in 1865. The Blackburns were among 30,000 American blacks who escaped to Canada, but whose story would surely have been lost without what The New York Times Book Review called Frost’s “heroic research”.

For Canadians, the book is an eye-opener. Canada’s legal rationale for receiving refugees was first articulated to protect Thornton and Lucie Blackburn from extradition in 1833. “Every refugee has benefited from that decision,” says Frost, former executive director of the Ontario Historical Society. “It’s a piece of history every Canadian child should know.” And who knew that Thornton was such an important terminus on the Underground Railroad, a lively centre of abolitionist debate where an un schooled Thornton could work with The Globe editor George Brown on antislavery committees? Or that blacks, more than whites, formed the network that spirited fugitive slaves to safety? “This book is an attempt to set the record straight about the Underground Railroad,” says Frost.

Glory Land won the 2007 Governor General’s Award for Non-Fiction. Hailed for historical depth, the book also reads with “the breathtaking urgency of a thriller,” wrote The Boston Globe. At its heart beats a love story. Thornton and Lucie were newlyweds who plotted their escape in haste before Lucie’s new owner could sell her down the river at the fancy-girl auctions. “I hope and pray this enthralling – and true – story will go to film,” says Frost.

Meanwhile, hooked on resurrecting lost tales, she is hard at work on Steel Away Home, a book about a lifelong friendship between a Southern belle and her black maid after the latter escaped to freedom during a trip to Niagara Falls. Still, Frost is not about to say farewell anytime soon to the Blackburhns. Though busy teaching African Canadian history in York’s Atkinson Faculty of Liberal & Professional Studies and involved with York’s Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African Peoples, she accepts all speaking invitations, from scholars in Cape Town, South Africa, to history buffs in Belleville, Ontario. “I put too much effort into this to let it go.”

Frost still wonders what Thornton and Lucie looked like. She’s just waiting for the day when someone comes up to her after a talk and says, “My family knew the Blackburns. Would you like to see a photo?” That would be hitting pay dirt for the archeologist who dug up a remarkable story that could have remained buried forever beneath the trampled playground of Sackville Street Public School.
As a member of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Roger Pulwarty (BSc Spec. Hons. ’86) is York’s first alumnus to become a Nobel Laureate. It’s a recognition he shares with hundreds of others on the panel, where he was a high-ranking lead author, and with former US vice-president and environmental advocate Al Gore, who was named co-winner of the prize. Since the release of the panel’s report – which finally pushed world opinion on climate change beyond the death knell – Pulwarty, a climate scientist for the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and director of the National Integrated Drought Information System in Boulder, Colo., has given testimony before the US Congress and flown all over the world responding to the rapidly growing appetite for cold, hard facts on climate change and its impact.

His latest project is helping to establish a US National Climate Service – an information service to support decision-making in response to climate variability and change – that will publish authoritative information on global and regional trends and on adaptation measures. The data will be used by planners to understand, predict and manage the impact of global warming for groups as diverse as farmers, salmon fisheries and ski resort owners, and, most critically, for countries with shared water resources, such as Canada and the US. “It’s like a weather service but longer-term,” Pulwarty says. “Instead of ‘should I take my umbrella today’, it’s more like ‘will there be snow to ski on in 10 years’.”

As gigs go, being the pianist for “Canadian Idol” is a pretty good one. Just ask Mark Lalama (BFA ’87), who entered his sixth season with the top-rated CTV reality show this past summer. Performing and working with the young Idol singers keeps the singer/multi-instrumentalist fresh and provides a break from writing, producing and recording music for other artists, as well as for film and television. “I need the balance of both,” he says. “If I do too much of one, I miss the other.”

During the show’s intense three-month production season, Lalama leaves his home and multi-suite recording studio in Fenwick, Ont., just outside his native Welland, to live in Toronto. He and vocal coach Debra Byrd spend an hour with each contestant, helping them “connect” with their chosen song, and Lalama also plays in the Idol house band. In the off-season, he plays with his own world-famous band Accordion Crimes. He says he enjoyed the “great environment” in the Music Department of York’s Faculty of Fine Arts, where he won an Oscar Peterson bursary. He also completed class on occasion so he could rush downtown for a recording session. With the Idol season just concluded, Lalama will head back to the studio to get re-balanced, writing and recording with some of Canada’s top talent.
Survivors of remote airplane crashes, diabetics and those suffering from degenerative eye conditions are among the many who could benefit from research being done at York University—by undergraduate students. The students work as interns with faculty members, graduate students and other researchers, thanks to innovative scholarships.

“Getting introduced to research early on is a key motivator for young scholars,” says Stan Shapson, vice-president, research & innovation. “These awards help create tomorrow’s research leaders.”

Students become full members of their respective teams, conduct independent research, publish papers and attend conferences, all while completing their bachelor degrees.

“I don’t think I would have applied for a master’s before this experience,” says Giulia Uguccioni, a former Dr. James Wu Research Intern. Uguccioni, 23, has had a similar positive experience. In his fourth year of a computer engineering degree, the Mary and Hubert Lynch Research Intern says his experience has encouraged him to consider graduate studies. He is working on a project to develop an advanced navigation system that will help helicopter search & rescue missions reduce their search time and increase their probability of success.

Many undergraduate researchers were volunteers first. “When I was volunteering in the physics lab it was great, but in the back of my mind I was always worrying about how I was going to pay for tuition,” says Dominik Swierad, 21. “These scholarships take that worry away and let me focus on my work.” The awards are renewable until the student’s graduation.

In 2007, Swierad, a computer engineering student, received a Lynch Internship and began working on virtual reality projects. Using the immersive visual environment at York, easily imagined as a precursor to Star Trek’s holodeck, Swierad helps with several studies on how visual defects can affect everyday tasks such as driving and locating objects in a room. These experiments promise to help with the diagnosis, management and treatment of glaucoma and other visual conditions.

Based on the tremendous success of these initial internships, York University is working to establish additional awards for students of all disciplines. Donors at all giving levels can help. For more information, contact Jennifer Clark, associate director of development and chief development officer, research & innovation, for the York University Foundation, at 416-650-8210 or clarkj@yorkfoundation.yorku.ca.
Taking the Work out of Networking

How to turn strangers into connections

As an alumni association, it can provide you with a powerful network. But while attending an alumni event may be a great first step to plugging into this network, many people don’t know how to turn a room full of strangers into a bunch of friends and contacts.

“We organize alumni events constantly — whether it’s York Day at the Rogers Cup tennis tournament or an Alumni Theatre Night to see Avenue Q,” says James Allan, York’s director, alumni. “And although it is that one of the main reason is they come out to connect with other grads and meet new people. But talking to strangers can be a scary thing — and so people can find these events daunting.”

Luckily, networking is like many other social phobias — the main thing to fear is the fear itself. “The first thing I say to our nervous networkers is that they’re in good company,” says Allan. “The kind of people who come out to alumni events are typically happy to engage. All someone has to do is make the first move — and staff from the Alumni Office are always on hand to make introductions.

“Secondly,” an alumni event may look like a room full of strangers — but it’s not. They’re all York grads, which means you’ve already got a lot in common and plenty to talk about — the classes you took, the people you met, your most memorable York experiences.”

But is this small talk, or is it networking? Lynne Wyman, CEO of Maryland-based Contact Count and a networking consultant who advises the York Alumni Office, says networking is just goal-oriented small talk — and it works best when it’s friendly and genorous.

“Networking is about helping others fulfill their personal and professional goals, and about inviting them to help you fulfill yours,” she says. “And while small talk can be a great place to start, we all know that conversation is much more interesting when it’s actually about something.

“So when you’re at an alumni event, try talking to people about what’s going on in your life — it will help them understand who you are and what you’re good at. And you can even invite them to help you with your current projects, whether it’s finding a great hotel in Paris or looking for a new job,” Wyman suggests. “Don’t forget that networking must be mutually beneficial. So, make sure you really listen to the people you meet. And when someone is talking to mentions an interest or a challenge, try suggesting a book, a contact or a Web site that could help. You’ll make connections — and even better, you’ll probably make friends.”

“Networking is a tool that you can use to your advantage, but it’s a skill that needs to be learned and practiced,” says Allan. “It’s not something that you can do once and expect the benefits to continue. You need to continue networking and building relationships in order to be successful.”

But how do you get started? Here are a few tips from an expert on the subject:

1. Be prepared. Always have a current resume and business card with you when you attend a networking event.

2. Do your homework. Research the companies and people you will be meeting at the event, and have a list of questions ready to ask.

3. Be positive. Even if you don’t meet anyone interesting, think of it as a valuable opportunity to practice your networking skills.

4. Follow up. After the event, send a thank-you note to everyone you met, and keep in touch with them through email or phone calls.

Networking is a crucial skill for anyone looking to advance their career. By following these tips, you can become a master networker and increase your chances of success.
1999
Mendoza-Wong, Maria (BA Hons. Glendon) married Garnet Wong in 2008 and they have two boys. She previously worked for EMD NeoBiotics and is currently a freelance makeup artist.

Niaraki, Eva (née Tekeli-Nejadis) (BA Spec. Hons. '94, MSc Spec. Hons. '96) is a senior lawyer with Toronto with the Ministry of Community and Social Services, ITT as such she is also a lead analyst. She lives in Markham with her husband and their two daughters and is working on establishing a restaurant with her husband.

Rula, Jorge (BA Abitibi) attended Brock University in St. Catharines, ON, after graduation to pursue his bachelor of education degree. He now works as a part-time teacher with adult students and enjoys painting in his spare time.

Tabet, Cyril (BAS Abitibi) recently launched Rise Up, an association that organizes mass-marching wallwalks to support educational programs for destitute children.

2000
Ball, Stephen John (BA Hons. Winters) recently had his first novel, Headline, published through University and is currently preparing his second. Stephen also works at TD Canada Trust and lives in London, Ont., with his family.

Hay, Marcus (BA Hons. '97; MScMcLaughlin, LLB) graduated from the University of Waterloo's Master’s in Corporate Taxation Program in October 2007 and subsequently accepted the position of vice-president, investor and product graduate, in the Structured Arbitrage Group at TD Securities in New York City.

2001
Engil, Aiki (BA Hons. Glendon) has worked for Manulife Financial for five years and has taken up a new position in the Development Product Development Department. She was recently married in Toronto, married to Presbyterian Church, and she operates a home-based business with her husband, enabling them to travel frequently.

Perryman-McKern, Crystal Alisha (BA Hons. Glendon) works as a women’s advocate and coordinator for Milton Neighbourhood Services and Interlink Place Shelter. She also works as a writer, performs as a poet and is the founder of Milton Moms. She and her husband of nine years, Kevin McK, have four children. She plans to run for Mississauga city council in 2010.

2002
Kien, Grant (BA Hons. '99; MA, MA) is finishing his PhD in communications research at the University of Illinois. Soon after accepting a faculty position with the Department of Communication at California State University East Bay, he was appointed graduate program director. A graduate of York/Ryerson Joint Graduate Program in Communication & Culture, Grant welcomes contact from York alumni in the San Francisco Bay Area.

2003
Filmer, Paula (BEd) lives in the United States and has completed her MA in curriculum and ESL instruction through the University of Chicago. Gordana, Marguerite (BA Vaster, BEd) works as a grade three primary teacher with the York Region District School Board.

2004
Reijndam, Janus (BA Abitibi) is pursuing an MBA at DePaul University in the UK. He previously worked as a trader and investment analyst with Credit Suisse Central of Ontario.

2005
Appleton, Genevieve S. (MA) and her husband both make films and teach in the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at Bilkent University in Ankara, Turkey. Their two-year-old son speaks both English and Turkish and is beginning to speak French.

Chapman, Richelle (BA Hons. Winters) recently started her own graphic design company, Concept Design Solutions. She says the Bachelor of Design program at York taught her a great deal and was the perfect foundation for entering the design industry.

2006
Barnes, Christine (BA Bethune) has lived and worked as an ESL teacher at Japan’s top English conversation school, AEON Corp., in Osaka. Currently she teaches first-year college English at Seneca College. She has an est on the design and management of new real estate.

Crepe, Alvaro (BA Abitibi) works in Calgary for Fluor, a global engineering, procurement, and construction company in his spare time, he trains in a variety of mixed martial arts and keeps abreast of business theory and application.

2007
Grant, Judith (PhD) recently wrote her first book, Charting Women’s Journeys - From Addiction to Recovery, published by Lexington Press. After teaching for six years in the United States, she now teaches in the Faculty of Criminology, Justice & Political Studies and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology.

2008
Bagplia, Weasa (BSc Spec. Hons. Bethune) works for Ro/Mac while pursuing her Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM) designation. Weasa is involved in both residential and commercial real estate.

Kissin, Mathieu (BA Glendon) completed his MA in December 2007 at the Université du Montréal. He recently started second year at the Faculty of Law at McGill University in Montreal.

McFarlane, David Anthony (BSc Bethune) recently made the transition to property management in the social housing sector after a number of years in telecommunications.

2009
Anvari, Shams (BA Hons. '04), described as a brilliant sociologist and an exceptional human being, died at 23 after being struck by a car in April, 2009. He had received the Top Student Award as an undergraduate at Simon Fraser University, which renamed it the Anvari Anvari Top Student Award. York’s Department of Sociology has set up a memorial scholarship fund.

Lombardo, Richard (BA Hons. Bethune) recently had his first novel, Iron Man, published while pursuing his Certified Commercial Investment Member (CCIM) designation. Lombardo is involved in both residential and commercial real estate.

2010
Grant, Judith (PhD) recently wrote her first book, Charting Women’s Journeys - From Addiction to Recovery, published by Lexington Press. After teaching for six years in the United States, she now teaches in the Faculty of Criminology, Justice & Political Studies and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology.

In Memoriam
Anvari, Shams (BA Hons. '04), described as a brilliant sociologist and an exceptional human being, died at 23 after being struck by a car in April, 2009. He had received the Top Student Award as an undergraduate at Simon Fraser University, which renamed it the Anvari Anvari Top Student Award. York’s Department of Sociology has set up a memorial scholarship fund.

Langford, George Kenneth (LLB '13), lawyer, military officer and activist, died on May 8 at 90. He worked with the Canadian Paraplegic Association and in 1961 became managing director. In 1967, he helped found the Canadian Wheelchair Sports Association to re-introduce sports and recreation into the lives of people who had sustained spinal cord injuries.

Moens, Peter, a York Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus in biology, died of cancer on April 28 at 64. During a career at York, which began in the early 1960s, he became an internationally respected leader in the field of reproductive cell biology. Elected to the Royal Society of Canada in 1978, he continued his teaching and research until 2007.

Mohr, Johann (Hans), professor emeritus in York’s Double Hall Law School and a lead in its move toward interdisciplinary, died April 11 at 80. A sociologist and political researcher, he was one of the first social scientists appointed to a full-time position on any Canadian law faculty. Joining Osgoode in 1969, he also served on the Law Reform Commission of Canada and as president of the Vanier Institute of the Family.

Silottl, Donald, eminent mathematician, died unexpectedly on April 2, 2009. He came to York in 1966 from New York to head the Mathematics Department and also served as acting chair of the Computer Science Department from 1966 to 1973. An internationally recognized expert on group theory, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1982.
Teaching overseas seemed like a great idea – until I got there. BY THOMAS KLASSEN

Lost in Translation

WHY? WHY? The question pounded fiercely in my head as the airplane’s engines droned. Why was I on a 13-hour flight from Toronto to Seoul, South Korea, with my wife and two-month-old twins? And why would we not return home to Canada for 14 months?

A year earlier, studying Korean public policy and teaching in Korea had seemed like a wonderful way to learn, meet new people and return to Canada with a fresh perspective.

Touching down in Seoul, with a dozen pieces of luggage, two car seats and a double stroller, reality set in. Our new home was a city of 18 million people, who were all strangers and whose language I did not speak.

Still, making my first close friend was easy: the GPS navigation system in our car. Unable to read street signs in Seoul, only this device allowed me to go shopping to buy the 20 diapers our twins needed per day. Without it I was lost in the city’s convoluted streets, expressways, many bridges, hills and tunnels. However, unable to program the Korean-language system, I could only drive to places which I – or more correctly the car – had previously visited.

Like many friendships, ours was tested early when one day, some distance from our home, the screen flashed a red message. Even without understanding the language, it was obvious that the machine was as lost as I. After prayers to the heavens, or at least the satellite in synchronous orbit 35,000 kilometres above, contact was finally re-established and I reached home. Never had I been so relieved to reach sanctuary. Suffering from shock, I refused to step outside our apartment for a week.

A few times, even the GPS, cell phone and maps failed to take me to my destination. For one lunch appointment, I never found the restaurant where I was to meet colleagues. I knew I was close and had followed all the directions, asked (as best I could) for assistance from passers-by, but to this day, its location remains a mystery to me.

Other tasks became adventures as well. Taking our twins for a stroll always meant being stopped by folks on the street and,

Thomas Klassen is a political science professor at York. In 2006-2007, he was a visiting professor at Yonsei University in Seoul.