Farouk Jiwa turns rural Africans into honey-making entrepreneurs

PLUS
New Chancellor Roy McMurtry
Bilingualism and the Brain
The Oscars, John Lennon and ‘Sir Jerry’
A valuable kiss. by Berton Woodward

It has been a rewarding first year. by Mamdouh Shoukri

Baroque is Back…What They’re Reading…The Limits of Charisma…Let’s Talk About Sex…The New Literacy…Bloggin’ Mamas…Do No Evil

How Farouk Jiwa helps African subsistence farmers improve their lives. by Michael Todd

Members of York’s new “50 to the Power of 50” group of prominent alumni offer quick – very quick – life lessons to students. by David Fuller

Guiding Lights: Remembering those who made a difference. by Michael Todd

York’s distinguished new chancellor is keen to help students. by Martha Tancock

Psychologist Ellen Bialystok finds bilingualism can put off Alzheimer’s. by Martha Tancock

Are bilinguals better at using cell phones while driving? by Michael Todd

York and the Azrieli Foundation team up to publish Holocaust memoirs. by Martha Tancock

Biochemist Gerald Audette is at the cutting edge of work with cellular proteins. by David Fuller

How lawyer Jerry Levitan turned his Beatles experience at 14 into an Oscar-nominated short – and heady times in Hollywood. by David Fuller

Teacher and author Shernett Martin...art appraiser Charlotte McGhee

The library space race.

Shared passions...Class Notes

How I track the decline of the songbirds. by Bridget Stutchbury
Lost Kiss

In 1965, a York University official gave my aunt a kiss – and thereby hangs a great tale. It highlights how important the work of many unsung – or not loudly sung – groups can be in supporting a university.

Anyone remember the ‘$5k’? It was a time of dramatic social change with a great soundtrack – and in Canada, of countless Centennial projects. In the suburbs of Toronto, the University Women’s Club of North York was casting about for ways to do for their project in the run-up to Canada’s 100th anniversary in 1967. My aunt, Janet Berton, was the president in 1964-1965, and she and her committee decided to raise money for books at York University, which was just then preparing to move to its new Keele campus in North York. Their target was $5,000.

On Jan. 27, 1965, Wilfred Sanders, York’s director of information & development, met with Janet and the committee to receive a ceremonial first cheque of $137.50. A Toronto Star photographer was on hand, possibly spurred by the fact that Janet’s husband was Pierre Berton, author, TV personality and former Star columnist. The Sanders gave Janet a peck on the cheek, the camera flashed, and the club went on to raise the full $5,000, which it presented to the University on May 31, 1967.

Strangely, the original $5,000 cheque went astray at York, and the club replaced it that October. Perhaps it’s a clue to what happened next.

Absolutely nothing happened – until the early 21st century, when a York librarian got wind that there might have been a major gift to the library that officials were unaware of. The librarian began an archival search, and eventually found the Star’s picture of Sanders busying my aunt, along with a newspaper account of the gift. But no one at York was able to place it – until finance officials confirmed that, indeed, a trust fund had been established at the time but details were lacking. The newspaper clippings, not least the kiss, sealed the deal.

And what a deal. University Librarian Cynthia Archer announced in 2003 that the club’s newly rediscovered Centenary Book Endowment of $5,000 was now worth $700,000, thanks to the wonders of compound interest. This amounted to nearly 10 per cent of the York University Libraries’ total endowment.

In fact, this is just a portion of the support the club has been providing to York over the years, without great fanfare. According to club archivist Barbara McNutt, its scholarships and bursaries for York students have amounted to $53,700 since 1963. The club’s focus has long been female students, and it was a big supporter of the Women’s Studies program when it was launched at York. All of that seems worthy of a kiss to me.

Send letters, submissions, comments and ideas to editor@yorku.ca.
York’s new harpsichord looks as good as it sounds. Hand-made by Montreal craftsman Yves Beaupré, it had its debut onstage in the depths of winter but likely warmed the hearts of those hearing it for the first time. It was played in a concert of Baroque works by York Music Professor Stephanie Martin, a specialist in the period. “Interest in Baroque music has experienced a renaissance in the last 25 years,” she says. “I think we rediscover periodically how wonderful this music is, and we want to recreate it the way it would have sounded.”

The instrument doesn’t have a huge dynamic range, unlike a piano. Partly that’s because it’s much smaller than a concert grand. Pianos were developed to fill big halls with sound, says Martin. “The harpsichord is really made for small, intimate spaces. In the 17th century people made music at home.”

The strings of a harpsichord are plucked (in the early days using a bird quill, but now using plastic), not struck with felt hammers as in a piano. York’s “Flemish Style” harpsichord, which cost in the range of $17,000–$20,000, was commissioned by the Music Department in the Faculty of Fine Arts to support a burgeoning interest in Baroque performance. It’s based on a (still playable!) original made in 1624 and now housed in a museum in Colmar, France. Many different woods go into its making, says Beaupré. “We use pear, ebony, bodily spruce, oak, poplar and basswood.” Beaupré’s wife, Daniele Forget, did the ornate hand-painted decoration on the soundboard.

Though an old instrument, modern musicians like The Rolling Stones have used the harpsichord in their music, and modern and avant-garde composers such as Francis Poulenc and Philip Glass have written concertos for it. “It’s an instrument with a warm, delicate sound and it’s portable, which is probably why it was popular among musicians and audiences more than three centuries ago,” says Martin.

YORK'S SUMMER 2008

MUSIC

Baroque is Back

An elegant harpsichord comes to York

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

MUSIC MAKERS: Martin and student Ian Uhlir
t may seem paradoxical in today’s personality-driven world, but two York researchers have found that having too much "charisma" can sometimes hinder a team leader’s performance and even have a destructive effect on the team itself. Business literature has commonly characterized “charismatic” or “transformational” leadership as a superior style of leadership, says Len Karakowsky, a professor of human resources management, but too much may be a liability, he’s found.

He and colleague Igor Kotlyar examined leadership styles to learn which are the most effective in generating “productive conflict” among team members while minimizing negative interpersonal conflict. “Although there’s a lot known and written about the positive impact of transformational leadership on follower performance, much less is understood about the impact of transformational leadership on performance in a work team context,” says Karakowsky.

Often charismatic leaders’ great strength is that they are good at promoting constructive debate leading to strong management decisions by the team. Karakowsky says they do this by appealing to individual team members’ self-concept, but this can be a double-edged sword.

The passionate style of charismatic leaders can often inspire group members to become more emotionally involved in the group’s interactions, he says. Involving the self-concept means that group members ... battles can come to overshadow constructive, task-oriented debates and so the decision process ultimately deteriorates.

Karakowsky and Kotlyar’s study found that a less flamboyant, no-frills leader can become more emotionally involved in the group’s interactions, he says. Involving the self-concept means that group members ... battles can come to overshadow constructive, task-oriented debates and so the decision process ultimately deteriorates.

The Limits of Charisma
Sometimes too much of it can be a leadership problem

More young female teens are vulnerable to HIV than ever before, according to Sarah Flicker, professor in York’s Faculty of Environmental Studies. Flicker recently completed the Toronto Teen Survey, involving a diverse range of 1,200 young people aged 13-18 drawn from 100 different Toronto communities. The survey’s aim was to gather information from youth on assets, gaps and barriers that currently exist in sex education and public services and use that information to develop a city-wide strategy to increase positive sexual health outcomes for diverse Toronto youth, says Flicker.

A key element in the data gathering was to get teens talking to teens. Initially 12 young people aged 13-17 were recruited to form an advisory committee to assist in the survey design. Later, 20 similarly aged teens were given 10 weeks of training in how to facilitate survey workshop sessions with their peers and provide peer education on prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections. The 1,200 teens surveyed participated in 90 workshops. They submitted anonymous written questions to be answered by the workshop facilitators. Questions were coded based on topic and analyzed to identify common themes and areas for exploration. Researchers found a high proportion related to sex acts and behaviours, sexual readiness and pregnancy.

Doing research on adolescent sexual health isn’t easy. “There are all kinds of barriers to working with youth,” says Flicker. “Many people don’t want to admit that their teens are sexually active. So the first hurdle is just getting over the fact that teens are sexual beings and we need to figure out ways to support them. I think one of the reasons our survey was so successful is that it involved teens as real partners at every step.”

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When we talk about literacy, most of us think of reading and writing. But there’s a new kind of literacy—the information kind. Luckily for students, York University Libraries (YUL) is on top of the trend.

To get the most out of their university experience, students need to be “information literate,” says Sophie Bury, acting chair, YUL Information Literacy Committee. “Students researching a paper need to find ways to navigate a vast and daunting array of information resources,” she says. Those resources include scholarly books, journal articles and credible Web sites, among others.

“Information literacy builds on traditional literacy,” says Bury. “We’re awash now in information every day in every context and in an information economy, information literacy ... in the marketplace. What were once just library skills have taken on a broader significance as information competencies.”

Bury notes that YUL often gets requests for library instruction sessions from frustrated faculty who complain students don’t move much beyond the free Web when doing term paper research. “We now play a role in teaching students when and how to use Internet resources like Wikipedia effectively, while also guiding them through the process of research using virtual and print collections and scholarly sources available through York,” Bury says.

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“Information literacy builds on traditional literacy,” says Bury. “We’re awash now in information every day in every context and in an information economy, information literacy is one of those indispensable ‘soft skills’ that add to your value in the marketplace. What were once just library skills have taken on a broader significance as information competencies.”

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Two of the Web’s major attributes – confession and anonymity – fit perfectly into the venue of what has become known as “mommy blogs”. May Friedman, a doctoral student in women’s studies at York, is researching mothering and infertility blogs to see what she can learn about what’s on mothers’ and would-be mothers’ minds. “In 1976, Adrienne Rich wrote, ‘We know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood’,” notes Friedman, who says blogs are the perfect way for women to overcome shame and isolation – especially infertile women. The “mamaphere” has become a good place to take the pulse of what Rich was talking about, Friedman says. “Mommy blogs are simultaneously celebrated and reviled. But they’ve become a critical component of cyberspace. It’s a cultural phenomenon. Yet, so far, there’s been little consensus on their purpose or possible implications. Are they just mothering narratives or are they ‘transgressive’? Are they redefining motherhood and mothering as a contested, messy and variegated enterprise? No one yet knows.” Friedman plans to use postmodern feminism, mothering theory and life writing theory to do a critical discourse analysis of mothering weblogs as a way to explore and consider the implications of motherhood in the Internet era.

Do No Evil

A Schulich team wins big in a competition to fight poverty

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Farouk Jiwa helps African subsistence farmers improve their lives through small, eco-friendly businesses like beekeeping. By Michael Todd
Photography by Georgina Goodwin

SWEET SUCCESS

Imagine a honey of an idea as rewarding monetarily as it is socially. Farouk Jiwa did. The York grad (MES ’03), who is a native Kenyan, has spent the years since his York graduation making a remarkable contribution to his former country through Honey Care Africa. HCA helps subsistence farmers improve their livelihoods by introducing them to sustainable beekeeping. The company ensures that the rural farmers – half of whom are women – access the capital they need for start-ups as well as training and a guaranteed market for the honey at Fair Trade prices.

Although Jiwa now calls Canada home, he travels frequently to Kenya and other parts of the world, setting up and attending to the honey and other sustainable, micro-financed businesses he’s helped establish. His work involves principles that relate directly to his time at York, which included gaining a graduate diploma in business & the environment offered jointly by the Faculty of Environmental Studies and the Schulich School of Business. As early as 2005, Jiwa was recognized as One to Watch by York’s annual Bryden Alumni Awards. Now he is one of 50 prominent alumni who are part of the new “50 to the Power of 50” group supporting York’s $200 million fundraising campaign (see following story). The bees have generated a lot of buzz.

“The decision to promote honey production as a micro-enterprise at the local community level was driven by a number of factors,” says Jiwa. “From the market perspective, there was clearly a demand for honey both locally and within the wider region. At the time, my partners and I couldn’t understand why a tropical country like Kenya was importing honey all the way from Australia and the US and yet we had a much more lush and vibrant flora. I was particularly keen on finding an income-generating activity that could be undertaken by
Honey Care has expanded sales to Tanzania, the US and Europe.

**With a strong foothold in Kenya’s market, Honey Care has expanded sales to Tanzania, the US and Europe.**

**Honey Care comes by its entrepreneurship skills naturally, it seems.** “My father was a serial entrepreneur and my mother a school teacher. Between them, they ensured that my brother and I not only got a sound education but that we were well-grounded and had a clear sense of the important values in life.” As a fourth-generation Asian Kenyan and part of the first post-independence generation, he says, “I was fortunate to grow up in a strong, stable and cohesive community environment. From a very early age, this gave me a very good understanding of the power of community and a sense of just what can be achieved when people come together and work towards a common goal.”

HCA was launched in 2000 and, as part of his master’s degree at York, Jiwia continued to work on elaborating his innovative business model. The initiative got a tremendous boost from its first significant project, worth $50,000, with the Danish government’s international development agency, Danida. HCA manufactured the widely used Langstroth hives and distributed them to small farmers who typically worked large plots of land.

In the early days Jiwia distributed 100 of the hives he’d made to 25 families in eastern Kenya. The result was highly successful. “Our first harvest was a mere 300 kgs of honey and collectively made only $500,” he notes. “However, that proved our model worked and gave us, the farmers and others the confidence to continue. We haven’t looked back since.” According to HCA, the company captured 27 percent of the domestic honey market in Kenya within its first four years, outgrowing a network of 5,000 beekeepers who earned between US$200 and $250 a year, often double their previous earnings. That market share is now close to 40 percent and there are nearly 9,000 households across Eastern Africa involved with HCA.

Honey Care’s business strategy has been to put the smallholder farmers at the centre of the business and to build a “Kenya first” marketing approach, says Jiwia. This involves focusing on the needs of the rural farmers to encourage them to start honey production, and to first serve the considerable demand for honey in major Kenya hotels, retail outlets and local industries before pursuing the export market. Now, with a strong foothold in Kenya’s domestic market, Honey Care has expanded honey sales to neighboring Tanzania, the US and Europe. Although the recent political turbulence in Kenya caused some temporary problems for HCA, says Jiwia, the decline of honey bees noted in some parts of the world has not affected East Africa.

HCA’s success has received international recognition. In 2003 it won the prestigious Equator Prize from the United Nations Development Program along with several other awards for social entrepreneurship. The Equator Prize recognizes innovative community partnerships that reduce poverty through conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Jiwia was also recognized as one of the “Most Outstanding Social Entrepreneurs” by the Schwab Foundation at the World Economic Forum in 2005 and received a World Business Award from the Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum.

In 2006, Jiwia hosted CARE Canada as director of CARE Enterprise Partners, a social venture capital unit that seeks lasting solutions to poverty through market-based approaches designed to unleash entrepreneurship in emerging economies. His most recent initiative with CARE Canada was a partnership with Trade Facilitation Office Canada to support Gone Rural, an innovative social venture based in Swaziland, to successfully find a market for its products in Canada. Gone Rural seeks to improve the lives of rural women who use traditional skills to create attractive bowls, placemats and other high-quality household items in home-based businesses. This joint initiative won the 2007 Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters International Cooperation Award for Excellence.

“Growing up in a country where more than half the population lives in poverty earning less than $1 a day, where so much human potential goes unrealized because people are struggling to meet basic needs, and a country where getting an education is a privilege rather than a right, I was determined to use the opportunity I had been given to get a university education to try and make some contribution towards addressing these enormous challenges,” says Jiwia.

“A sense of empathy is a very strong driver for what I do. I always try to remember that had circumstances been a little different, I could very well be one of the millions of people living below the poverty line. I therefore try my level best to provide the encouragement, advice and support to others that I would have wanted them to provide to me if I was in their shoes, and in a way that doesn’t take away their pride.”

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**Cover**

 Members of York’s new “50 to the Power of 50” alumni group offer quick life lessons to students.

By David Fuller  Photography by Gary Beechey

**Speed Mentoring**

Getting career advice from mentors like former lieutenant-governor Lincoln Alexander or top banker Bill Hatanaka was already a rare opportunity for a lucky group of students at the launch of York’s “50 to the Power of 50” group of promi-

nent alumni. But these were life lessons on steroids, delivered at a set of tables in the elegant CBC Lobby of York’s Axcan-

lade East Building on March 26, one year before York’s 50th birthday. You’ve heard of speed dating? This was speed mentoring.

As emcee Barbara Budd (BA ’74) of CBC Radio’s “As It Happens” kept time with a bell, students moved from table to table every five minutes to soak up wisdom...
Guiding Lights

Three members of York’s ‘50 to the Power of 50’ alumni group remember those who made a difference.

BY MICHAEL TODD | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

Isabel Bassett (MA ’73)

A longtime broadcaster and a former politician, Bassett was chair and CEO of TVOntario/TFO from 1999 until 2005. Previously she served as minister of citizenship, culture and recreation in Ontario’s Conservative government. She received an honorary doctorate from York in 2001.

“Little did I realize back in the ’70s, as a young mother of three taking an MA at York in Canadian studies, that my professor in Canadian lit, Clara Thomas, would have a significant influence on my life. She encouraged me to turn my research on 19th-century Canadian women into a book. I would never have done this without her support. I wouldn’t even have thought I could write a book back then, surrounded as I was with small kids.

“But I only had to look at Clara to see it could be done, as she was not only committed to her career but had a busy family life with her husband and two sons. Writing that first book opened up my world – for which I am forever grateful. It also encouraged me to take those first steps toward a broader intellectual life.”
Katherine Govier (MA '72)

Govier is author of eight novels and three short story collections, and editor of two collections of travel essays. She won the Toronto Book Award in 1992 and has been a visiting lecturer in creative writing at York.

"Margaret Atwood gave a reading at the University of Alberta when I was a student. It was 1970. She worked full-time as a writer in Canada: she proved you could do it. I moved east, ... I was at a party when Writers’ Union Director Alma Lee said, ‘Someone would like to meet you.’ It was Margaret Atwood.

“She said she was a fan of my column in Toronto Life. (That particular one was about trying to get men to do the housework. Or was it about buying men’s underwear?) When she heard I was writing fiction, she offered to read it. We met at her farm, and sat together in a barn while she made comments. Later she asked me to be on a committee of the Writers’ Trust. It is important to contribute. She has continued to be there, in our community of writers, for all of our benefit.”

Matt Dusk (BFA Spec. Hons. ’02)

Jazz vocalist and songwriter Dusk was awarded an Oscar Peterson Scholarship at York and graduated with an honours degree in music. Since his first commercial release, Two Shots, in 2004, he has released two more albums.

“I wasn’t originally enrolled in music at York – I was in economics and had a terrible time. After that year I had decided I was going to follow my dad into the family business, but my mother encouraged me to follow my love of singing and apply to the jazz studies program. I was accepted – to my amazement.

“One of my mentors was John Gittins, who ran the program. When he heard my audition he said, ‘You’ve got a great voice, Matt, but you can’t sing jazz worth jack shit!’ He introduced me to jazz pianist Bob Fenton (who was adjunct faculty and has since passed away). Fenton was one of York’s best kept secrets. He was from Detroit and he’d played with all the jazz legends – Zoot Sims, Chet Baker, Nina Simone. He lent me recordings, brought me over to his house to jam for hours, taught me phrasing and how to sing jazz. He was absolutely unfussish with his time and experience. If not for him, I’d never be where I am today.”
50 to the Power of 50
All are leaders in their chosen professions and proud York University alumni. Together they are 50 to the Power of 50, an extraordinary group of ambassadors helping York celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2009 and supporting our landmark fundraising campaign.

York to the Power of 50
York’s 50th anniversary campaign has now reached more than $150 million—three-quarters of the way to our $200 million campaign goal. The success of York to the Power of 50 will help York achieve its vision to become a leading international centre for interdisciplinary research and teaching.

www.yorku.ca/foundation
contact@yorkfoundation.yorku.ca
416 650 8210

50 extraordinary alumni. 50 remarkable years.
The 50th Group — helping celebrate 50 years of achievement at York University.

IVAN FECAN
50TH GROUP CHAIR

Lincoln M. Alexander, C.C., Q.C.
LLB ’53, LL.D ’90
Former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario
Photo by Al Gilbert, CM

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Broadcast executive, journalist and former Chair & CEO, TVOntario

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Chief Executive Officer, Harbourfront Centre

Rudolph P. Bratty, Q.C.
LLB ’77
Senior Partner, Bratty & Partners

Mark Breslin
BA ’73
CEO and Founder, York Yk’s International

Debra L. Brown
BFA Honors ’78
Choreographer, Cirque du Soleil and more

Barbara L. Budd
BA ’74
Radio Co-Host, ‘As it Happens’ CBC

Rita M. Burak
BA ’72
Former Chair, Hydro One Inc. and former Secretary of the Cabinet, Government of Ontario

Joel S. Cohen
MBA ’92
Writer and Producer, ‘The Simpsons’

William A. Dimma, C.M.
MBA ’69, LL.D ’98
Chairman, Home Capital Group

Matt Dusk
BA Honors ’02
Juno nominated singer and actor

William R. Fatt
BA ’74
CEO, Fairmont Raffles Hotels International Inc.

Ivan Fecan
BA ’01
President and CEO, CTV/Telemedia and CEO, CTV Inc, 50th Group Chair

Margot Franssen, O.C.
BA ’79
Founder, The Body Shop Canada

Jian Ghomeshi
BA ’95
Broadcaster, CBC Radio and TV

Mitchell S. Goldhar
BA ’85
President & CEO, SmartCentres

Katherine M. Govier
MA ’72
Author and Past President, PEN Canada and Past Chair, Writers’ Trust

Edward L. Greenspan,
Q.C.
Senior Partner, Greenspan, White LLP

Ethel Harris
MA ’73
The Milton and Ethel Harris Research Initiative

Chantal Hébert
BA ’76
President, The Milton and Ethel Harris Research Initiative

Chantal Hébert
BA ’76
Journalist and Political Commentator

Jay Hennick
BA ’78
Founder & CEO, FirstService Corporation

Jennifer Ivey Bannock
BA ’76
Director, Ivory Foundation

Ellis Jacob
BA ’76
President and CEO, Cineplex Entertainment

Farouk Jiwaji
BA Honors ’03
CEO, Toronto Advertising Agency, CARE Canada

Colleen Johnston
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Chief Executive Officer, Chiefswood Investors Ltd.

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Chief of Police, York Regional Police Force

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Special Partner, Birch Hill Equity Partners

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Rudolph P. Bratty,
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Senior Lawyer/Partner, Ruby & Edward

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Rhodes Scholar and Author

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Rachel A. McAdams
BA Honors ’01
Actor

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Chairman, President and CEO, US Gold

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Their homes, Kopperson applied for a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation – “and Windfall grew out of that.” Starting with an idea to help people reduce energy use in with his new partner Violet Chew, he sees a very different business life than he initially envisioned: “I’m part of a new breed of social entrepreneurs. Those basic business skills I learned at York? I’m applying them in ways I never imagined.”

Ecology Centre, a non-profit that provides individuals, communities and governments with solutions to ... fell off the tree, and I thought, there’s a lesson here: If you take care of things and leave nature alone, it provides.”

Now, as Kopperson makes plans to build a straw-bale house and his environmental efforts don’t stop at Canada’s border. As high commissioner to Britain in the late 1980s, McMurtry chaired the Commonwealth Heads of Government Committee on South Africa, which played a role in ending apartheid. And there’s his mother, Elizabeth, the day she graduated in 1980 from York with a BA in history. She was 67 and had taken one course a year for 15 years, not for the degree but “for the pure joy of it.”

For the first 17 years after he graduated from Osgoode Hall Law School in 1958, McMurtry was a trial lawyer, like his prominent father Roy Sr., and busy raising six children: “Politics was only a hobby.” But as legal counsel for the Progressive Conservatives, he “realized the enormous potential for politicians to make a contribution.” In 1972 he launched an unsuccessful bid for a federal seat and might never have run again had his former football teammate, Ontario premier Bill Davis, not come courting. Two years later McMurtry won Toronto’s Eglinton riding and catapulted directly into David’s cabinet as attorney general.

“Probably the most important decision I ever made was to agree to enter the political world,” says McMurtry. Over the next 10 years, he presided over a particularly rigorous period of law reform, introduced a bilingual justice system and launched community legal clinics. As a red Tory, his concern for the less advantaged was homogenous. His father often defended underdogs and battled at the racsim and anti-Semitism that pervaded Toronto society in the 1930s and 1940s. Both parents drummed into their three sons the old-fashioned concept of “noblesse oblige” – with privilege comes responsibility.

The young McMurtry took it to heart. A lifetime of community service began when the University of Toronto history major volunteered with Frontier College, a national literacy organization. For two summers, he toiled in the Rockies alongside immigrant railway workers by day and taught them English by night. He is still involved with agencies that help released prisoners, fatherless children, seniors without housing, and people who can’t afford lawyers.

While in the west with Frontier College, McMurtry fell under the spell of majestic Mount Robson and began to paint. His office walls are now filled with “happy memories” on canvas of world travels with wife, Ria, and he often donates paintings to charity auctions. “One of the best decisions I ever made was not to take up golf,” he says.

His windowsills are also crowded with photos, mementoes of a “very interesting and very working life.” There’s one of Oscar Peterson (once a friend), one of countless honours – including an honorary degree from York in 1991 and the Order of Ontario this year – that he has received over his lifetime.

Soon McMurtry will deliver his reports to the premier and wrap up his work for the mayor. After his May installation at York – succeeding the equally distinguished Peter deCarteret Cory, former federal Supreme Court justice – McMurtry will don cap and gown in June as the University’s 12th chancellor, dispatching graduating students into the world he occupies, full of opportunities to do good – and do more.
It's hard to believe now, but up to the 1960s research suggested that bilingualism made you stupid. Now we know the opposite is true—thanks in no small part to psychologist Ellen Bialystok. The distinguished research professor in York's Faculty of Health has made a career of proving that bilingualism makes you sharper. Speaking two languages is like going to "brain gym". It forces the brain to choose between one language and another and, in so doing, stays limber. From cradle to grave, it turns out.

Bialystok's pioneering work has made her a world authority on the subject. Every time she publishes a new study, she's tied up for days talking to reporters around the world. Especially in the last few years.

Early on, much of Bialystok's research focused on children. Under some conditions, she found, bilingual children learn to read faster and score higher in some kinds of cognitive tasks than their monolingual peers. Now, as she examines how bilingualism affects cognitive aging, baby boomers entering their sunset years are taking note. Last year, Bialystok published a high-profile study that found lifelong bilingualism can delay symptoms of dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, by four years.

"To a person, journalists wanted to know if there were implications for dementia," remembers Bialystok. Last year, she came up with that answer. Lifelong use of two languages can delay the onset of symptoms of dementia by four years. She and her research team at the Baycrest Centre's Rotman Research Institute in Toronto examined the diagnostic records of 154 patients with cognitive complaints and determined that 71 was the average age that dementia set in for one-language speakers and 75 for two-language speakers.

Next question: Can bilingualism prevent dementia and Alzheimer's? No, says Bialystok, but it can reduce the rate of the natural decline of a person's executive processes—a set of cognitive abilities responsible for things like prioritizing tasks and focusing attention—after age 60. "A bilingual person with dementia or Alzheimer's can maintain better cognitive performance longer because bilingualism gives you a cognitive reserve, like a reserve fuel tank," she says. Bialystok is 59, when mild cognitive impairment—forgetting things—typically sets in for everybody. She's not bilingual either. However, she's quick to point out other ways to build your cognitive reserve—learning, reading, exercising (very important), socializing, solving cryptic crosswords. She does them all. She expects to keep digging into that cognitive reserve. "It's a very exciting field."

Psychologist Ellen Bialystok finds bilingualism can put off Alzheimer's.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

Nimble Minds

Psychologist Ellen Bialystok finds bilingualism can put off Alzheimer's.
Are bilingual people better at using cell phones while driving? BY MICHAEL TODD

In 2005, a study for Canada’s Traffic Injury Research Foundation estimated the number of driver-placed cell phone calls at 4.3 million, raising concern over the increased risk for collisions due to driver distraction. Indeed, who hasn’t cursed a driver gabbing away on a cell phone while seemingly paying no attention to the road? It’s the modern equivalent of attention deficit disorder.

Cell phones have been shown to be more detrimental to driver performance than other distractions, such as tuning a radio or talking to passengers while on the move. This isn’t because of the physical problem of trying to steer and talk at the same time, however. Rather it’s because drivers are paying more attention to the content of telephone conversations and less to road conditions around them, says Jason Telner, a York PhD student in psychology. Telner is researching the relationship between bilingualism, cell phone usage while driving, and driver performance.

Telner notes that researchers such as York psychologist Ellen Bialystok (previous story) have shown that bilingual people appear to possess cognitive and performance advantages in attention-demanding, multi-tasking laboratory situations compared to monolinguals. Bialystok’s findings attributed this performance advantage to their more developed cognitive executive functions which they use to manage two languages simultaneously.

But until Telner’s experiments, no one had tested whether bilinguals might also have increased immunity to driving performance impairments because of their cognitive advantages. In other words, can bilinguals more safely talk on the phone while driving, compared to monolinguals?

“At this research has relevance to large multicultural cities in Canada such as Toronto, as well as Quebec, that have a high percentage of residents who are bilingual,” says Telner. He notes that in Quebec alone 40 per cent of the population is able to speak at least two languages fluently, according to Statistics Canada.

To test whether bilingual people are better drivers while using cell phones, Telner conducted a series of experiments at York’s Driving Lab under the direction of David Wiesenthal, a professor in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Health. Telner tested 35 monolinguals and 47 bilinguals. Their performance was evaluated in a virtual driving environment using a computer driving-simulation program which measured a series of safety benchmarks including speed and lane deviation. The experiment consisted of driving conditions without a cell phone, and driving conditions with a hands-free cell phone where participants were engaged in simulated conversations in English.

“We found bilingual participants were better able to handle the extra task of speaking over a cell phone when driving, compared to monolinguals, relative to their own driving performance without a cell phone,” says Telner. The bilinguals’ level of safe driving did decline, but not nearly as much.

The research, Telner adds, is only the beginning of investigating the role bilingualism plays in minimizing the driving impairments caused by distraction from speaking over a cell phone while driving. The increased attention capacity – and ability to better manage cognitive resources in situations with multiple tasks – may be the means by which bilinguals are able to handle the extra task of speaking on a cell phone when driving, he suggests.

“The implications of these findings are that perhaps regions that have a high number of bilinguals – such as Quebec – will not need to adopt policies that prohibit the use of cellular telephones while driving or using other mobile devices such as BlackBerries, GPS systems, iPods etc.,” says Telner. He even points the possibility that driven in these regions should receive auto insurance reductions compared to regions with low numbers of bilinguals. However, he notes, “Many more research studies would need to be conducted before any existing policies can be changed or any new policies considered.”

York University congratulates SSHRC on funding 30 years of York research that makes a difference.

York researchers break down traditional boundaries and bring together thinkers from across disciplines to tackle real-world issues. By leading innovative collaborations with partners like the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), our researchers are creating solutions to societal challenges facing Canada and the world. Currently, SSHRC-funded research at York ranges from children’s health and bullying to business ethics, and from homelessness and refugee studies to the global impact of slavery and the African Diaspora.

Knowledge is most beneficial when created together with those who apply it. York’s groundbreaking Knowledge Mobilization initiative connects university researchers, policy makers and community leaders across Canada, benefitting citizens in areas such as health services, human rights, violence, aging, and global health.

To learn more about how York’s approach to research is redefining university research in Canada, visit www.research.yorku.ca
Marguerite is 72 now, among the youngest Holocaust survivors still living. “So there is an urgency to collect as many testimonies as we can,” says Sara R. Horowitz, chair of the series’ editorial board and director of York’s Centre for Jewish Studies, which works with the foundation to produce the memoirs. “That first-person voice – the voice of memory – is very different from a historian’s account.”

As they grow older, those who felt they had no listeners to stories they desperately wanted to tell now feel compelled to leave a record. David Azrieli did – and that inspired the prominent Montreal architect and developer to help others do the same.

Azrieli was 17 when the Germans invaded Poland in 1939. He and his brothers fled to Russia, but when the Germans followed close behind, he made his escape on foot through Uzbekistan and Iran and finally to British-run Palestine. “I was never in prison and I was never in a camp,” says Azrieli. But he lost his parents, his sister, one brother and his extended family. Fifty years later he and his daughters retraced part of his route and 10 years after that he produced his memoir One Step Ahead. “My daughters were never satisfied that I had told them the whole story. I wrote my memoir because I wanted them to know.”

“When we read about the Holocaust and see where prejudice can lead, these memoirs act as antidotes to prejudice,” says Horowitz. They also “anchor the voice against Holocaust deniers.”

Like the diary of Anne Frank, the memoirs are vivid, compelling accounts of how people reacted to daily degradation and deprivation under German occupation.

Horowitz, a scholar of Holocaust literature, says Jews sacrificed and risked much to keep diaries. “People would give up on sleep when they were tired and trade in food to get candles and paper and pens. Under the Nazis, it was illegal to keep diaries, so that compulsion to keep a record was quite extraordinary. These memoirs are a continuation of that.”

They are also a “very Canadian story,” she says. Like other immigrants, European Jews “came here disadvantaged. They came without possessions. Many came alone. They were really starting from zero. They built lives here. Most Canadians would find this contiguous with their own stories.”

The accounts tend to be understated, adds Horowitz. “People don’t see themselves as heroes. They see themselves as ordinary people getting on with life. They contend with feelings of loss and bereavement, but they move ahead. If we didn’t print their memoirs, we wouldn’t understand that resilience.”

At the October launch of the publishing project, Azrieli said, “One story at a time brings a different dimension to the tragedy that befell our people. Writing the stories has liberated the survivors. We were a free people in a free society, but still we felt we couldn’t talk about it for many years. We are free at last to tell our stories. We are alive and our enemies were defeated.”

Since the Azrieli Foundation, headed by Azrieli’s daughter Naomi, put out the call, 200 manuscripts – in English, but also in Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, French and Yiddish – have flooded in from across Canada. Eight will be published every year and distributed free to schools, public libraries and anyone who asks. Each book features an artistic cover, family photographs, an introduction to provide historical context, and maps. “It was very important to us that the memoirs be of very high quality and look enticing to read,” says Horowitz. “The idea is to educate, not to turn a dollar.” The project could go on for years. “There’s no definite terminus. We will keep on publishing as many of them as we can.” For many reasons.

MARGUERITE ELISAI QURDUS has never forgotten the day the Gestapo arrested her Jewish father, a Ukrainian immigrant furrier in Paris, and sent him to sure death in Auschwitz concentration camp. It was 1942 and she was six. Her worried mother put Marguerite and younger sister Henriette in the protective care of a Catholic agency, then waved goodbye.

When the war ended, the children were reunited with their remarried mother and resumed life in Paris. In the 1960s, Marguerite immigrated to Canada with her husband and, like so many Holocaust survivors, rarely talked about those dark times.

Years later, she returned to Paris for a last glimpse of the about-to-be-demolished building where the family had lived above her father’s shop. The visit unleashed a flood of memories, and Marguerite, an artist, spent the next year feverishly painting. Only then was she able to write what she wouldn’t speak.

The result is Cachée, one of five memoirs published in the first Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs. The series was launched last fall as a joint project of the Montreal-based Azrieli Foundation and York University to preserve and share the memoirs of those who survived the Nazi genocide of European Jews during the Second World War and made new lives in Canada.

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Biochemist Gerald Audette is at the cutting edge – sometimes literally – of work with cellular proteins.

BY DAVID FULLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON


Once scientists understand how proteins work, he explains, drugs can be developed to suppress or modify a protein’s function and reduce cell damage from cruder, less discriminating drug compounds. The process can also help speed up the development of therapeutic drugs by eliminating a lot of trial and error. “By having a structure to guide our design, it allows us to rapidly zero in on what kinds of compounds we need to synthesize. Instead of screening 100,000 compounds, you’re now screening a hundred,” he says.

Like any mechanic with a creative flair, however, Audette wasn’t content to leave the proteins the way he found them. He wanted to customize a few to see what would happen. As a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Alberta, he once suggested cutting a tail-like section off one protein, to see if it would help with a related problem of producing enough sample for study. The result was a classic “eureka!” moment when he discovered the section rapidly began growing longer, much longer, after being cut. That set him on his second research path – developing biological nano “wires” or tubing that could replace carbon filaments used in the manufacture of nanotechnology. “Everything nano has carbon nanotubes in some variety or other,” Audette explains. “The problem is, as we branch out into more biological applications for these things, we’re finding that carbon nanotubes, which are made of soot, induce cell death – they are toxic. Our system is completely biological in origin.”

His passion for science came naturally to Audette. As a boy in St. Albert, Alta., he helped his mother, a nurse, do blood-group testing. His father has a PhD in analytical chemistry and Audette got all his new equipment installed, he can settle in to some serious tinkering in his tiny garage. 

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E doesn’t wear coveralls or skin his knuckles reeling on lug nuts, but you could call Gerald Audette a kind of high-end mechanic. He spends hours taking sophisticated machines apart to see how they work. The difference between Audette, a professor in York’s Faculty of Science & Engineering, and those in the automotive fraternity is the size of the mechanisms they work on: his are microscopic – and alive. Welcome to the world of biomaterials, where lean protein machines are the stars inside your body’s cells, meeting, greeting and passing on DNA in an endless dance that few have ever seen close up.

Using a process called X-ray crystallography, Audette and his lab team are making detailed studies of how proteins, the engines of cellular processes, work and how that might point the way to new methods of treating disease. By understanding the physical structure of proteins, Audette says, researchers can learn about processes such as how bacteria transfer DNA to other cells. Then they can design more specific drug treatments for cancer or the new superbug bacteria and viruses. “You need to know the nuts and bolts of what’s going on,” Audette explains, looking through his collection of 3D protein portraits.

Audette’s research was the basis for a successful $1.6-million joint application to the Canada Foundation for Innovation with York biology professor and fellow crystallographer Vivian Saridakis, whose study of a specific protein and its biological function requires the same equipment. The two found out in June last year that their proposal for an X-ray diffractometer, the first one at York, and a cryocooling system to keep their crystal samples safely chilling at -180 °C had been accepted. “This brings us onto a level playing field with other researchers,” Audette explains.

The method he and Saridakis use involves purifying a protein so it can be turned into a crystal that will reveal its component parts when X-rayed. By combining visual clues from the resulting images with computer models of protein structure, Audette can locate the individual pieces of hardware on each protein and discover how it physically transfers DNA to adjacent cells. “It’s like building a 3D puzzle and the image is our guide,” says Audette.

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How lawyer Jerry Levitan turned his experience at 14 with John Lennon into an Oscar-nominated short — and heady times in Hollywood.

BY DAVID FULLER ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY KC ARMSTRONG

EREDS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IMPORTANT to Jerry Levitan (BA ’76, LLB ’79). As a child whose parents survived the Holocaust, he dreamed about Superman and sticking up for people. As a teen in high school, he worshipped the Beatles and especially John Lennon, the loveable cynic of the band who was speaking out against the Vietnam War and singing Give Peace a Chance. Like millions of ’60s kids, the 14-year-old was a devoted fan desperate to show his hero how much he admired him. Unlike most of them, however, Levitan managed to meet Lennon and speak to him in person. It was a life-altering decision that would lead, 39 years later, to an Academy Award nomination and his own moment in the glare of celebrity.

On May 26, 1969, Levitan found his idol and wife Yoko Ono in their room at Toronto’s King Edward Hotel during their “bed-in for peace” tour of Canada. Posing as a reporter — but fooling no one — Levitan asked Lennon for an interview and, to his delight, received an immediate yes. He returned that evening to record a 40-minute discussion about the Beatles and Lennon’s anti-war message, and take pictures. Afterwards, he couldn’t wait to tell his classmates, “I met John Lennon.” But exaltation turned to anguish when no one believed him until, weeks later, he got his film back from the lab. Worse still, Levitan almost lost the most important artifact: the audio tape. After lending it to Toronto’s CHUM radio for that night’s news as compensation for the use of their recorder, he fought for weeks to get it back and did, but only after standing in the station’s lobby and screaming for it. Levitan’s encounter with the Walrus, as Lennon calls himself in the 1967 Beatles song I Am the Walrus, is a story he’s recounted many times since. He calls it a defining moment in his life.

In the years that followed, though, Levitan tired of telling the tale and kept the tape and photos in a drawer, while he concentrated on his studies in York’s Faculty of Arts and Osgoode Hall Law School. After graduating from Osgoode in 1979, he became, in his words, “a cowboy litigator”, working at a large Bay Street firm where he mounted a successful Supreme Court challenge to Ontario’s Sunday shopping law. In 1990 he opened his own practice, where he later argued the Ontario teachers’ libel suit against premier Mike Harris and, in 1998, defended a group of Kingsville, Ont., high-school students who had been strip-searched by school officials. Like Superman with a Lennonesque penchant for controversy, Levitan fought for his clients and was getting noticed.

But professional notoriety came at the expense of his personal life. After his second marriage ended in divorce, he suffered a breakdown and took a sabbatical to nurture his creative side. He turned to music, writing songs for his two-year-old daughter, and became the children’s entertainer Sir Jerry. He even did some acting. It was during this personal renaissance that Levitan decided it was time to do something “quirky and off the wall” with the Lennon tape. “For decades people had been trying to talk me into selling my material, doing documentaries, doing films,” he says. “I got sick of it. Ultimately, I thought, I’m just going to do something for myself and end it.” He decided to make his own movie about “his story” and began a search for a young artist to make a short film. Through friends, he met animator Josh Raskin, who introduced him to illustrator James Braithwaite. “The first drawing I saw from James,” says Levitan, “I thought, Oh my God, the guy’s got the aesthetic of John Lennon, he gets the ’60s in a twisted, contemporary way. That sold me right away.”

With $35,000 of his own money and $20,000 from CTV’s BravoFACT (Foundation to Assist Canadian Talent), Levitan, with Raskin as director, produced a five-minute animated film, titled I Met the Walrus, in about 13 months. “When it was finished, I said, OK, I’m happy and that was it,” he says. “I had no intention or pretense to submit it to film festivals.”

But Raskin and Braithwaite and the folks at BravoFACT were keen to try, and entered Walrus in the Brooklyn Film Festival. Other entries — and then invitations — followed for events in Canada, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates, France and the US, including the prestigious Sundance Film Festival and the American Film Institute’s AFI Fest. Curiously, the Toronto International Film Festival, citing stiff competition, turned the film down, although they later named it one of the top 10 Canadian short films of 2007. I Met the Walrus started to win recognition and awards. At the Toronto Film Festival, it won the Audience Award and the award for Best Canadian Short. It played at the Los Angeles Film Festival, as well as the Sundance and New York festivals. It was nominated for an Academy Award, the first documentary to do so. It is now in permanent collection in the Library of Congress.

“I think the film is a bit of a love letter to the Sixties,” says Levitan. “It’s a small piece of art.”

For Levitan, making I Met the Walrus was a way to honor the memory of the idols he had so admired in his youth. “I identify with the Walrus,” he says. “He’s a very complex character and I love the idea of the boy who’sin the wrong place at the wrong time. I think that happens to every kid in the world.”

As a teenager, Levitan had been doing what the Walrus was doing: trying to speak out against the establishment. “It feels like a full circle,” he says. “The film reminds me that if you believe in something, you should speak up.”
It took almost 30 years but Shernett Martin (BA ’95) says she finally came to terms with the fact that she has a painful, life-threatening disease. She did it by writing My Friend Chantal Has Sickle Cell Disease, a hardcover children’s picture book she and her husband published last year about the incurable blood disorder. “I always wanted to be a journalist in school and I love to write,” says the 37-year-old teacher-librarian in Toronto’s Jane-Finch community. It was there, at Stilecroft Public School, that she met fellow alumna Laura Martin (BEd ’06 and no relation), a teacher-candidate with fine arts training who offered to illustrate “Chantal’s” story. Shernett’s teaching career began in her native Jamaica, where a student in her class died from the disease. That set her thinking about all the help she’s had from others, especially her mother. “She heard years of me asking ‘why me’ and finally said to me, we can’t say ‘why you?’” Shernett, who has been in a coma, had hip replacement surgery and suffered a heart attack as recently as December, is determined to beat the odds posed by the disease, which get tougher in middle age. “I won’t let it define me,” she says.

YORKPEOPLE

In the Blood

Shernett Martin
Teacher, author

FILM

At 14: Levitan, as depicted in I Met the Walrus

the LA Film Festival, the buzz about being short-listed for an Oscar became serious. When the film won Best Animated Short at the Los Angeles Film Festival, pundits began touting it as a sure-fire nominee for Best Animated Short Film – and Levitan’s little project dragged him into the maw of the beast known as Hollywood. “That’s when things started to get out of control,” he says as he recounts a Tolkienesque tale of Oscar lust and media frenzy. “People went crazy, behaved poorly – people close to me,” he says. “They were appropriating my story.” It was an insanely busy time with hundreds of requests for interviews from major US networks and international print media – all of which were managed skillfully by CTV’s media department at the behest of CEO Ivan Fecan, a fellow York graduate.

Then came an urgent demand for a copy of I Met the Walrus from the producers of the official Oscar promotional film. Levitan held out, wanting Ono’s approval first. His response touched off a crisis that threatened to ruin what had become a glorious tribute to his hero. At a screening of the film the week before the Oscars, in Osgoode’s Mooit Court, Levitan arrived late, blaming that day’s snowstorm. What really delayed him was a three-hour harangue from officials in Hollywood who accused him of pulling a stunt to promote his vanity project. Not only did the slight offend Levitan’s sense of purpose in making the film, but their insistence that he forego approval threatened to put him in bad graces with Lennon’s fiercely protective widow, who had just met for the second time at an event in Las Vegas a month earlier. (She had squeezed his hands emotionally, remembering the bed-in with John. At the same heady event, he was addressed as “Sir Jerry”, with a grin, by Sir Paul McCartney.)

Talking to Hollywood that day, “I was thinking, I wish I hadn’t done this,” he says. “I told them, I don’t want to end my story with ‘I’ve pissed off Yoko Ono.’” After the post-screening lunch at Osgoode, Levitan got a return call at a Keele campus parking lot from Ono’s lawyer, saying she was aware he had handled everything with great integrity and he could do whatever he wanted. The clip made it into the promotional film to the relief of Academy executives.

When I Met the Walrus didn’t win the Oscar (it went to Peter and the Wolf), Levitan reverted to character as the audacious teen who stuck into Lennon’s hotel 39 years ago. With the credits rolling on the big screen at the Kodak Theatre, he stopped Jack Nicholson, the reigning king of Hollywood, and introduced himself as an “Oscar loser.” Nicholson kibitzed with him and planted a dramatic consolation kiss on Levitan’s girlfriend, dancer Anisa Tejpar. Then it was off to Elton John’s charity party to enjoy the afterglow of his almost-Oscar moment.

The following day, when the media calls stopped, Levitan could only reflect on his experience – about why he made the original decision that began “his story” and about the sequel, where he lived for a moment in the clamour that Lennon endured for years and that finally killed him in 1980. “I wanted my hero to know who I was,” Levitan says. “I wanted him to know how much I loved him – and for him to like me. And I accomplished all those things. Now I understand it.”

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KC ARMSTRONG
Charlotte McGhee
Art appraiser

ONE DAY, CHARLOTTE MCGHEE (BA ’98) glanced around a friend’s parlor and noticed a rare art nouveau-style Handel lamp perched on the piano. “Did you know that lamp’s worth $18,000?” the 32-year-old art appraiser asked. Her stunned friend gingerly shifted the lamp to a safer spot. His was the kind of you’re-kidding reaction McGhee hopes the camera catches when she tells owners their heirloom portraits or garage-sale landscapes are worth thousands on the CBC’s “Canadian Antiques Roadshow.”

Young, stylish and female, McGhee breaks the stereotype of the middle-aged, bow-tied, British-accented antiques expert. But she couldn’t have found a more suitable career. At York, she studied visual arts, then switched to cultural studies. “I decided I wanted a career in art rather than a career as an artist,” she says. After a year teaching English in Prague, she spied a Toronto ad for an assistant appraiser and sensed her destiny. Eight years later, McGhee hung out her own shingle – M&G Appraisals – in Driftla, Ont., an art and antiques generalist keen to specialize in “red-hot” Canadian art. Insurance appraisals pay the mortgage, but nothing beats an auction for heart-stopping windfalls – like the time last-minute bids on eBay soared to $1,500 for a watercolour she bought for $45. “We all want to get rich,” says McGhee.

CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Latest data on York to the Power of 50, York University’s 50th anniversary fundraising campaign:

Target: $200 million
Current level: Over $150 million
Time since launch: 19 months
Priorities for support: Pioneering research and programs; student awards and scholarships; Chairs and professorships; infrastructure.

York Libraries seeks support for more study spots for students

York Libraries’ vision for the future includes hundreds of new study spaces, comfortable couches and enhanced access to special collections. Ultimately, it’s about creating spaces that best reflect the way students learn, research and excel. “Today’s students require two types of spaces – active spaces for collaborative learning and quiet spaces for individual study,” says University Librarian Cynthia Archer. “At Scott Library we are striving to provide students with both.”

Scott is already one of the busiest academic libraries in the country, but it must keep pace with York’s population growth. For comparison, the University of Western Ontario has one seat in the libraries for every seven students, while at York, 17 students vie for each place to study. Correcting this is a priority. Last fall, 200 quiet study spaces were added to the third floor of Scott thanks to a generous gift from its namesake’s legacy, the W.P. Scott Charitable Foundation. It has hoped these types of renovations can be duplicated on both the fourth and fifth floors, providing an additional 230 spaces.

On the second floor, funding would create a Learning Commons, a space dedicated to collaborative and active learning, complete with multimedia meeting rooms, comfortable seating for group work, and access to writing centre counselling and other academic services. “These types of spaces are being developed by many universities,” explains Archer. “Engaging students in the learning process now means more than textbooks; it requires us to rethink the diversity of spaces and resources we make available. That’s what a learning commons is all about.” The University of Massachusetts opened its learning commons in 2005, and 79 per cent of students report visiting either daily or more than once a week.

Rethinking the diversity of spaces and resources also means involving the online environment. A recent commitment of $1 million from the Scott family will create the W.P. Scott Chair in E-Librarianship, placing York on the cutting-edge of innovation in our digital age.

York is pursuing other fundraising priorities for its six libraries, including renovations to Glendon’s Frost Library and to existing archive and special collections space within Scott. These renovations will ensure York has the first-class libraries required for a leading international institution for interdisciplinary research and teaching.

The ambitions of York Libraries are supported by the fundraising efforts of the York University Foundation and its York to the Power of 50 campaign. One of the campaign’s four fundraising priorities is infrastructure, which includes new learning spaces. Donors at all giving levels can help. For more information, contact Tanling Yeung, chief development officer, York Libraries, York University Foundation at 416-650-8210 or tyeung@yorkfoundation.yorku.ca.

The Space Race

York Libraries seeks support for more study spots for students

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But “York in New York” and YUBAC aren’t the only groups getting active recently. The last year has seen a flurry of activity in alumni groups, with new branches established in Calgary, Ottawa and Israel, and volunteers coming forward in Hong Kong and Vancouver. The groups in Ottawa and New York have already hosted their inaugural events and the others will be launching shortly.

At the same time, a number of groups for grads with a variety of interests have been gathering steam. YUBAC, the McLaughlin College Alumni Chapter, the York is U Alumni Chapter and the Masters in Environmental Studies at York Planning Alumni Chapter (MPAC) have all been hosting events this past year and helping alumni foster their own personal interests.

“We’re thrilled to see so many York grads coming forward to work together,” says Allan. “We know that our community is filled with passionate people and it’s great to see that one of their passions is York!”

For more information about alumni groups – or to find out how to start one – contact Lindsay Reid in the Alumni Office at reidl@yorku.ca or 416-736-2100, ext. 33732.

News:

Nominations Open for 2008 Brydens

The alumni of York University distinguish themselves by redefining what it means to succeed. Each year, York celebrates alumni who have attained extraordinary achievements and made remarkable contributions to York and to their communities by presenting them with these Bryden Alumni Awards:

- OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION AWARD
- PINNACLE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD
- REDEFINE THE POSSIBLE AWARD
- ONE-TO-WATCH AWARD
- LOCAL HERO AWARD

If you know a great York grad who is making a difference in the world, visit the Bryden Awards nomination Web site to download a nomination form, at yorku.ca/alumni/bryden. The nomination deadline is June 13, 2008.

Looking for Talent? Hire a York Student

The Career Centre has launched a job posting system to reach York’s talented students.

If you or someone you know is looking to hire a York student, the new system lets you:

- post a variety of opportunities including: part-time, full-time, on-campus, summer, internship and volunteer positions;
- manage student applications electronically;
- collect application documents – for example, batch resumés – and download or view them online.

The system is free, quick and easy to use. See it at yorku.ca/careers/employers.
1970: Carol Factor and son
Firm in the Niagara Peninsula.
1975
Kotsuff, Lawrence (MA) recently joined Fusion Homes as vice-president of planning & development, currently building homes in south-western Ontario.
1978
Hawkins, Sandra (NES) shifted careers from social science policy researcher with the federal government to interdisciplinary visual and media artist in 1993. Her paintings, videos, and installation artworks are shown across Canada and internationally. Located in Ottawa, she teaches workshops and is the author of several books.
1979
Doughton, John (BA ’72 Vanier, MA) works as a learning and teaching consultant at Centennial College in Toronto and runs a micro-mini press, Sixth Floor, which produces pocket-sized books. His fifth poetry collection, tentatively titled “Time Slip”, will be published by Guernica Editions within a year.
1980
Thorp, Veronica (NES) has worked as a freelance science/environment writer for the last 15 years in Hobart, Tasmania, in her native Australia. Her interests include coastal care (re-vegetating the local bushland) and converting her lawn into an ornamental kitchen garden.
1983
Fax, John P. (MES) has lived in Zurich for the last 14 years working in investor relations with ABB, a large power and automation technology firm. He lives with his oldest daughter while his son is studying in Toronto and his youngest daughter studies in the UK.
1984
Lance Goddard published a book of poetry, Life Story. In a diverse family that includes seven nationalities, Margaret has six grandchildren, one granddaughter, six great-granddaughters and one great-grandson.
1983
Di gasoline, Cynthia (BA Spec., Hons. Stang) has taught remarriageable art, craft and kids cooking classes from her home in Picton, Ont., and she currently teaches art through the local community college. Cynthia is happily married and has two teenage children.
1972: John A. Martin (BA McLaughlin) was recognized as Outstanding Professional fundraiser for 2007 by the Association of Fundraising Professionals Minnesota Chapter for his longstanding personal and professional commitment to philanthropy. The tennis enthusiast and avid volunteer is married and has four children. He summers in Toronto and lives most of the year in Hilton Head, SC.
1973
Shuman, Bia (BA Vanier) recently retired as senior producer of “Saturday Night at the Movies” for TVO-Ontario. She continues to contribute to CBC Radio One’s “The Sunday Edition”, discussing all things cinematic with host Michael Enright.
1974
McVanel, Sharon (BA McLaughlin) and husband Brian McVanel (BA Spec., Hons. ’73 Winter) own and operate McVanel Communications Inc., a marketing and graphic design firm in the Niagara Peninsula.
1979
Doughton, John (BA ’72 Vanier, MA) retired after 31 years of teaching business and psychology for the Toronto District School Board. She now runs a UPS store in Stouffville, Ont., with her husband and their two children. Her son Aaron will graduate from York next year with a computer science degree at which time Carol plans to return to York and renew her studies.
1984
Fox, John P. (NES) recently joined Fusion Homes as vice-president of planning & development, currently building homes in south-western Ontario.
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Class Notes:

1994: Andy Knight (BA Hons. Vanier) was recently named country leader for IBM Canada’s corporate citizen-ship and social responsibility programs, based in Markham, Ont. He has spent the last 18 years working with special needs students.

1993: Linda Van Duynhoven (BA Winters) is department head of special education, business and computers in a Mississauga secondary school in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. He has spent the last 18 years working with special needs students.

1992: Don Angiulo, Lori (BA Hons. Vanier) completed a post-graduate jour-nalism diploma at Humber College in 1996 and now works as a TV news reporter on CHCH News Morning Live in Hamilton-Halton-Niagara. Her husband David Pighin (BA ’91, Atkinson) is manager of budget & corporate analysis at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. They’ve been married for 7 years and live in Etobicoke with their newborn baby boy Alexios Pighin.

1991: Friendly, David (MES ’76, MBA) recently moved to Lunenburg, NS. As he slowly wars into retirement, David continues to consult on emer-gency response management and safety management systems auditing.

1990: Gupta, Ravinder (BAS Hon. Atkinson) has worked as a tax auditor for Canada Revenue Agency since 1993 at its Mississauga office. She lives in Brampton, Ont., with her husband and their two children.

1989: Keith, Alan (MBA) is vice-president of 20/20 Skills, an international Internet-based human resources assessment & consulting firm based in New York.

1988: Lam, Herman (PhD) now runs his own consulting business in Toronto, after 18 years of service with Glaxo-SmithKline. He also serves as presi-dent of the Calibration & Validation Group, a non-profit scientific organ-isation which focuses on validation and pharmaceutical analysis.

1987: Irene Borins Ash (BA Calumet) has been a tax auditor for the Swedish Internal Revenue Service, corporate taxation area, since 1999. He lives near Stockholm.

1986: Van Duynhoven (BA ’91 Varier) and they have four children.

1985: Friendly, David (MES ’76, MBA) recently moved to Lunenburg, NS. As he slowly wars into retirement, David continues to consult on emer-gency response management and safety management systems auditing.

1984: Vadera, Peter (BA Calumet) has been a tax auditor for the Swedish Internal Revenue Service, corporate taxation area, since 1999. He lives near Stockholm.

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James, Angela (BES Hons. Bethune) lives in New Plymouth, New Zealand, working as a project manager for a local government and loving it. She is married with sons aged 7, 4 and 2.

Morse, Michael (MFA ’87, MA ’90, PhD) teaches in the Cultural Studies Program at Trent University in Peterborough, Ont. He is active in the jazz and creative improvisation music scenes, and composes for diverse artistic collaborations. He has one son and one daughter.

Temple-Smith, Joyce (BA Atkinson) has worked as executive director of Malton Neighbourhood Services, a United Way multi-service community agency in Mississauga, Ont., since 1998. She recently obtained five years of funding to provide after-school programming for “at-risk” youth as well as three other youth groups.

Wolk, Neal (BA Hons. Vanier) works as a transmission operator for Corus Entertainment. He will celebrate his first anniversary with wife Debbie this year. They live in Thornhill, Ont.

Dewan, Rajeev (LLB) is a listing director at the Dubai International Financial Exchange in the United Arab Emirates.

D’Amico, Jennifer (BA Hons. Bethune) has worked at Downsview Services to Seniors for the past 15 years, in various capacities developing community-based programs and services for seniors and disabled adults in the west portion of North York. Jennifer is married and has three children.

Meek, Chanda (MES) is working on her PhD at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, trying to understand the resilience of social-ecological systems in Arctic Alaska.

Tripodi, Stefano (BSc Spec. Hons. Bethune) is a partner with the Toronto law firm of Hackett Simpson Tripodi LLP, where he practices civil litigation with a focus on entertainment and employment law.

Garant, Pamela (BA Hons. Founders, BEd) teaches high school history and social science at All Saints Catholic Secondary School in Whitby, Ont.

Hackel, Deborah (BA Hons. ’97 Glendon, BEd) has returned to teaching with the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board after her maternity leave. Her son Duncan will celebrate his first birthday in May.

Taylor, Jason (MES) was recently named executive director of the Utah Society for Environmental Education in Salt Lake City, the only non-profit dedicated to promoting environmental education in the State of Utah.

Teeluck-Molnar, Mala (née Teeluck) (LLB) will celebrate her first wedding anniversary in September.

Webb, Michael (BSc Spec. Hons. Stang) and his wife will celebrate their daughter’s second birthday in September.

Olson, Sheri (BA Hons. Founders) works for a major computer company in Markham, Ont. She is also a founder and agent for the live entertainment company, BluSoul.

Johnson, Casey (BA Founders) is owner of StoneCastle Communications, a PR & media relations consulting and creative services company in Dundas, Ont. She also created the comic “T-Duck & Dillon”, and is author of the recently published The e-Entity (Universe Inc., 2007).

Miller, Sandy (BA Hons. Calumet) moved to Halifax after graduation, where she resided for six and a half years working in several group homes and small option homes. After completing further studies, she relocated to Brampton, Ont.

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Cauchard, Sandra (BA Hons. McLaughlin) was married in August 2006. She is a vocational rehabilitation consultant for NRS Inc. in Barrie, Ont., helping injured workers return to work.

Kung, Grace (BFA Spec. Hons. McLaughlin) played the lead role in A Nanking Winter, at Toronto’s Nightwood Theatre earlier this year.

Leonio, Rizza (BBA Spec. Hons. Calumet) successfully completed the last requirement for the CGA designation exam and has since joined the TSA Group in Toronto as a Financial Analyst.
2007: Franca Miraglia

Handed movement training, in healthy and stroke-patient populations.

2006: Michelle Aguilar

will celebrate her first wedding anniversary in September. An account manager, she has worked at the music publishing company, sire, in Toronto since graduation.

Gross, Dev (BBA) was recently appointed president of Paperless Intelligence Inc., a document management and document workflow solutions provider based in Toronto.

2004: Jordan, Brianne (BA Spec. Hons. Stong) will celebrate her first wedding anniversary with husband Peter in September.

2005: Bridsahn, John (BA Spec. Hons. Vanier) is working towards his master’s in public ethics at Saint Paul University in Ottawa. Upon completion he is considering doctoral studies in ethics.

Champagne, Yuan (EMBA) is managing director of the Carbon Reduction Fund, launched in Toronto in 2007. The non-profit fund’s mission is to source and develop high-quality carbon offsets for organizations.

Duy, Desmond (BA Hons. Stong) married his college sweetheart last October at Holy Name of Mary Roman Catholic Church in Almonte, Ont.

Silva, Joseph (BA Hons. Founders, BE) has returned to Toronto to work with the Ontario Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal, after working in Ottawa with the federal government’s Department of Finance.

Smith, Allison (BA Spec. Hons. ‘U3, Stong, M5) is a PhD student at the University of Waterloo investigating brain activity and behavioural changes associated with two handed movement training, in healthy and stroke-patient populations.

2007: Aguiar, Michelle (BA Hons. Stong) will celebrate her first wedding anniversary in September. An account manager, she has worked at the music publishing company, sire, in Toronto since graduation.

Baran, Michael (BA Spec. Hons. McLaughlin) is a full-time magician and is founder & creative director of Mega Magic. He recently finished a two-month tour across China and was featured on the Comedy Network’s “Keys to the JID” in Nov. 2007. He was part of a group of York magicians featured in Howl! Summer 2006 (howl.ca/york).

Gausamer, Matthew (BA Hons. Glendon) currently studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. He hopes to soon teach English and history at the secondary school level.

Medrattta, Rahul (BHS Spec. Hons.) is working towards his MSc in comparative social policy at the University of Oxford, UK.

Mirasgilla, Franco (MFA) serves as associate director of the Paperweights Gold of Canada’s national council in Toronto. She has written several full-length plays, including Platinum Train Club, which was produced for a three-week off-off-Broadway run in 2005, and Last Days of Innocence, recently presented by Toronto’s Theatre Passe Muraille in March-April.

Pawlowski, Bartosz (BA Spec. Hons. Winter) has been invited to study cinematography at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, where he will graduate with an MFA in 2009.

2002: Ashraf, Mousum (BA Stong) will celebrate his first wedding anniversary in November and is excited about his post-York transition to working full-time in Toronto.

Channer, Christine (BA Glendon) was recently promoted to executive assistant to two vice-presidents at CI Investments, Toronto. She plans to return to York for postgraduate studies.

D’Urs, Michael (BA Spec. Hons. McLaughlin) is a full-time magician and is founder & creative director of Mega Magic. He recently finished a two-month tour across China and was featured on the Comedy Network’s “Keys to the JID” in Nov. 2007. He was part of a group of York magicians featured in Howl! Summer 2006 (howl.ca/york).

Gausamer, Matthew (BA Hons. Glendon) is currently studying at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. He hopes to soon teach English and history at the secondary school level.

Moti, Aliki (BA Hons. Glendon) is enrolled in the first year of her LLB in the Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa.

Vallon, Philippe “piano” established several student awards in the jazz program. A recipient of an honorary doctor of letters from York in 1998, he was governor of York in 1995 and was a Fellow of McLaughlin College. Peterson was also a companion of the Order of Canada.

Ellington called the “maharajah of jazz” established several student awards in the jazz program. A recipient of an honorary doctor of letters from York in 1998, he was governor of York in 1995 and was a Fellow of McLaughlin College. Peterson was also a companion of the Order of Canada.

Moure, Charles, economics professor in the Faculty of Arts and the Atkinson Faculty of Liberal & Professional Studies from 1976 to 2004, died at 69 of cancer on April 4. He received international recognition for his groundbreaking research in natural resource and environmental economics.

Seelig, John, former York sociology professor, died at 95 in Los Angeles on Dec. 16. He was a founding faculty member, joining York in 1960.
How I track the decline of the songbirds. BY BRIDGET STUCHBURY

Wings and a Prayer

It’s easy for me to break the ice at a cocktail party. When asked the inevitable question of what I do, I sometimes answer “bird detective”. Yes, I hide miniature radio-tracking devices on songbirds like the wood thrush and Acadian flycatcher and begin a stake-out. Listening carefully to the tell-tale beeps on my hand-held receiver, I follow unsuspecting philanderers through the forest as they sneak off to have a one-minute stand with the next-door neighbour. I even do DNA testing on their kids so the evidence of infidelity (one out of every three females cheats on her mate!) will stand up in the court of scientific journals.

This detective has turned her attention, and her tracking skills, to solving a more sobering mystery. Our songbirds are gradually disappearing, and the silent spring that Rachel Carson feared does not seem like such a far-fetched fable after all. At least two dozen species of songbirds have suffered a significant drop in numbers since the 1960s, over 30 per cent in some cases, and include birds like the rose-breasted grosbeak, wood thrush, eastern kingbird and bobolink.

The size of a population depends on credits and debits, just like the balance of your bank account. Breeding produces new recruits for the next summer (credits) and the deaths of adults during migration and on their tropical wintering grounds removes individuals from the population (debits). When populations are on a downhill slide, reproduction is not keeping pace with adult mortality.

Seems simple enough to figure out; just measure how many offspring are produced each year. With some patience and practice, just about anyone who doesn’t mind tromping around forests (mosquitoes, black flies and all) can learn how to find bird nests, count how many eggs are laid and then see how many nests evade detection by hungry blue jays, crows, squirrels and chipmunks. The trickiest part of measuring a bird’s success in raising a family is following the fate of the little nestlings after they leave their nest, the so-called fledgling period. This is where the bird detective comes in; radio-tracking allows me to find the fledglings and know their fate.

Hooded warbler nestlings, for instance, hatch out of their tiny egg as wriggling little pink embryos with naked bodies and closed eyes. When they hop out of the nest at the ripe old age of nine days, they are awkward, bulgy-eyed early teens with short stubby tails who cannot even fly. Still, it is safer for the young birds to leave home than to be sitting ducks in a nest full of noisy brothers and sisters. The parents continue to feed their increasingly mobile offspring for another three to four weeks until the kids are fully grown and ready to leave their parents for good. The fledglings are hard to find because they are smaller than a cell phone and well camouflaged, a needle in a forested haystack!

My students and I found that only 20 per cent of hooded warbler nestlings actually survived the three-week fledgling period. One victim’s remains, and the still working radio tag, was tracked to a moving object, a satisfied garter snake! Another was found mauled, its radiotag chewed up by a feral cat.

When all the threats are taken into account, a female hooded warbler produces only one-fifth of a daughter, statistically speaking, each breeding season. So she would have to have birth to 10 children just to have one daughter produce any grandchildren!

Migratory songbirds are slowly going down the drain because not enough young survive to replace the parents who die each year. If we do not help our songbirds, I may soon have to raise eyebrows by answering “bird undertaker”. 