

Rat Creek Press

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BY THE COMMUNITY - FOR THE COMMUNITY

FALL 2024

An unsustainable need for food in Edmonton

Community builds and grows at Bethel's Pantry

REBEKAH BRUNHAM

The lineup grows outside of the chapel, despite the heat and that Edmonton's Food Bank truck hasn't arrived. There are people sitting in the entryway, idly making chit chat. Music plays from the chapel and some sit in the pews, escaping the heat, and patiently waiting for their turn to shop at the Bethel Pantry.

Downstairs, the place is bustling. The air is jovial. Volunteers are more than happy to be there — in fact, it seems there's nowhere else they'd want to be.

Every Monday for the last three years, people have come to the Bethel Gospel Chapel to take part in the food pantry. Some line up as early as 6 am to wait outside the doors, despite Bethel Pantry opening at 3 pm and running till 5 pm. Visitors register themselves to shop for clothing, food, hygiene products, and even dog food. Sometimes there's candy, but only if the clients are good, some of the volunteers joke.

The pantry, which serves about 150 people, was founded by Arts on the Ave.

"Our commitment was for people to be able to shop for free with dignity, and take what they would use for their households," says Christy Morin, director of Arts on the Ave. "The Bethel Pantry doesn't use hampers and allows people to shop for what they need: from hygiene supplies, to clothing, to food. It really is turning into a community staple, which we're really excited to continue running."

The Bethel Pantry is a joint venture made possible by Edmonton's Food Bank, the City of Edmonton, Bethel Gospel Chapel, Arts on the Ave, the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, and the Neighbourhood Empowerment Team. They made a five-year commitment to provide a safe place for community members to access free food in the area.

"People's need is a way for other people to respond to that need," says Frank Parker, the church coordinator. "It creates a sense of generosity. And that is, I think, a part of community building.

That's a positive that comes out of a negative."

Ammar Alshikh, with Arts on the Ave, is the lead of the volunteers for the pantry. He stands at a whiteboard at the back of the room and directs the volunteers to where they're needed most. He ensures the entire operation runs as smoothly as possible. If anyone plans to volunteer, they'll be in touch with him.

Most volunteers are retirees who have known each other for a long time. They throw jokes at each other. The community extends to members who get their food from the pantry. "It's kind of fun to watch the community that develops while they're waiting [in line]," Parker explains. "We've had people bring guitars and others just visit out there, maybe under an umbrella, that sort of thing."

"There's some people that I certainly know quite well because they've been coming for about three years. Which is nice from one point of view," Parker continues. "On the other hand, it's sad that people become dependent on the Food Bank and [are unable] to fend for themselves. That's the upside/downside of what we do here."

Edmonton's Food Banks are facing an unsustainable need and are calling for community support. So far in 2024, there has been an average of 39,077 people making use of the Food Bank in Edmonton every month.

Anyone is able to make use of the pantry: newcomers, students, children, and families. There is no registration required ahead of time at the Bethel Pantry, only a form of ID is needed. Any form of identification works, including a library card. Please note the pantry doesn't operate on statutory holidays.

"A lot of our volunteers are also shoppers," says Parker. These customer-turned-volunteers try to give back to the community what they can. Everyone can help out within their means.



Bethel Pantry is run by volunteers who have created a community | Rebekah Brunham

DONATIONS OF FOOD, MONEY, AND TIME ARE ALL NEEDED

Support the Bethel Pantry

Lightly used clothing is needed and with winter approaching, warm clothing — such as mittens, toques, coats, and boots — are appreciated. As well as non-perishable food items. New and unopened hygiene products are also accepted, such as menstrual products, files, nail clippers, shampoo and conditioner.

Drop off donations: Bethel Gospel Church on Mondays between 1 pm and 2 pm.

Volunteer or get involved: info@artsontheave.org.

Support Edmonton's Food Bank

Drop non-perishable food in a Food Bank box on a trip to the grocery store.

Become a monthly donor (or make a one-time donation) by texting FEEDYEG to 20222.

Donate by phone, by calling 780-425-2133.

Mail your donation to PO Box 6261, Edmonton AB, T5M 4B5.

Donate online or volunteer by visiting

www.edmontonsfoodbank.com, Edmonton's Food Bank website.

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OPINION

City council needs to take a principled stand on user pay parking

GAIL SILVIUS

The quick cave-in displayed by the city councillors to placate car owners in our inner city neighborhoods around parking fees shows us that some of our councillors like to talk about a commitment to public transit and climate solutions but aren't about to weather the backlash of a privileged and vocal group.

We need all car owners to pay a reasonable fee for parking on public roads, reflecting the true costs to the environment of fossil fuel consumption.

These same drivers contribute to traf-

fic congestion, noise, and air pollution, as well as increase the costs of policing to deal with traffic violations and accidents.

A nominal monthly parking fee, perhaps equivalent to the cost of a senior or student bus pass, could help offset the true cost of private vehicles to our city expenses and demonstrate the city's commitment to healthy communities.

The RCP story on the "outrage" among vehicle owners who are being asked to pay a very small fee per month to park on public roads seems to have missed an opportunity to explore other perspectives.

Residents outraged at parking changes

City reduces restricted parking areas and institutes a permit fee for residents

KAREN MYKIETKA

Recent changes to Edmonton's Residential Parking Program sparked frustration among Alberta Avenue and Parkdale residents. After neighbours shared their concerns with their city councillors, the city is now distributing a revised program.

The city administration's new Residential Parking Program was approved by the Urban Planning Committee on March 19, 2024. The new criteria would reduce the 19 current parking restriction areas to five.

The Northlands permit parking area will be eliminated altogether. The Commonwealth Stadium permit parking area will be reduced in size by 30 per cent. Parking restrictions will only apply up to 115 Avenue football and other stadium event attendees will be able to park anywhere north of that boundary.

The two changes that infuriated residents the most were the extension of Stadium parking restrictions year-round instead of just on event days, and changing a \$120 fee for the parking permit.

"This neighbourhood should not be penalized for the development of a stadium. We already bear the brunt of many inconveniences," said Kelly Palka, a Parkdale resident, in a letter to Councillor Ashley Salvador. "A parking permit is not mandatory, but as most people use curbside parking, this becomes another tax," adds Alberta Avenue resident Howard Kowalchuk, addressing the councillor as well.

The Residential Parking Program was established in 1978 to manage street parking congestion in residential neighborhoods near popular destinations, such as Commonwealth Stadium and Northlands. In the past, residents were often affected since when both their own and their visitors' vehicles were ticketed or towed on event days.

The City of Edmonton shifted to Open Option Parking in 2020 and removed on-site parking requirements, leaving dwell-

ing residents and businesses to report all issues related to stadium events to 311, and copy the community logues.

Residents and community logues alike felt blindsided by the changes. Parkdale Cromdale Community League (PCCCL) volunteers distributed flyers in mailboxes encouraging residents to write to city councillors about the issue.

"The impending changes clearly do not serve the residents," says Kristina Palmer, president of PCCCL.

After receiving numerous complaints from residents and requests from both PCCCL and AMCL for meetings, Councillor Ashley Salvador met online with community leaders to discuss the issue. Salvador agreed that the Stadium parking needs were unique and shared that she was advocating for changes.

Boland also points out that, when Commonwealth Stadium was built, it was done so with the idea that it would be a transit-oriented facility. "The city seems to think that citizens will attempt to find an LRT station and pay the fare, as opposed to parking their car a scant six-minute walk from the stadium."

In response to the complaints, the city reversed the revised program back to being event-based and the fee was dropped to \$30.

Palmer agrees that streets without parking restrictions will fill up with football games. Even though the parking fee was reduced from \$120 to \$30, she says: "A fairer approach would be to collect a small levy from the Edmonton Elks and other stadium users to cover the cost of the parking program and enforcement activities."

Current permits expire on May 31. The Elks football game on June 8 will be the first event under the revised program.



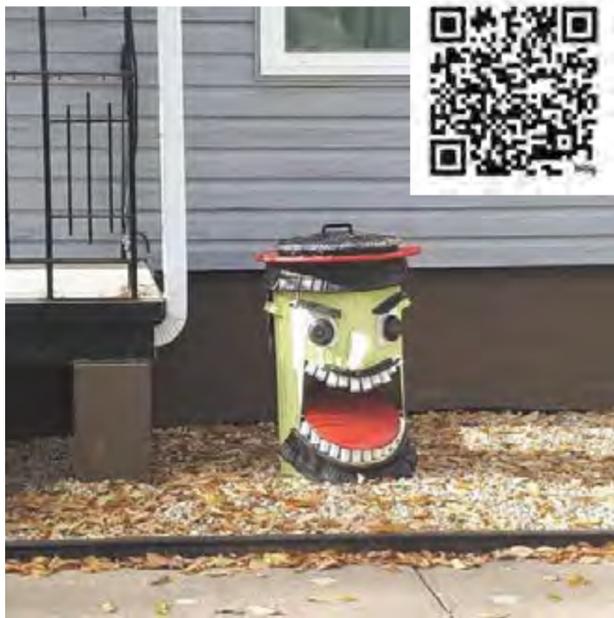
Today's "Things I Find While Walking My Dog" is a shout-out to unknown neighbours a few blocks away. You, sir and/or madam, are awesome!!

Things I find while walking my dog, Pt 2

JULIE MCCREA

McCrea uses her light-hearted commentary and photography skills to draw attention to the... eye-catching views of Edmonton. This is only a snapshot of her commentary. If you'd like to see more, visit RatCreekPress.substack.com. Scan the QR code to see the photo essay.

October 14, 2018



Today's "Things I Find While Walking My Dog" is a shout-out to unknown neighbours a few blocks away. You, sir and/or madam, are awesome!!

PHOTO ESSAY

Furry Friend Socializing

The dos and don'ts of dog interactions

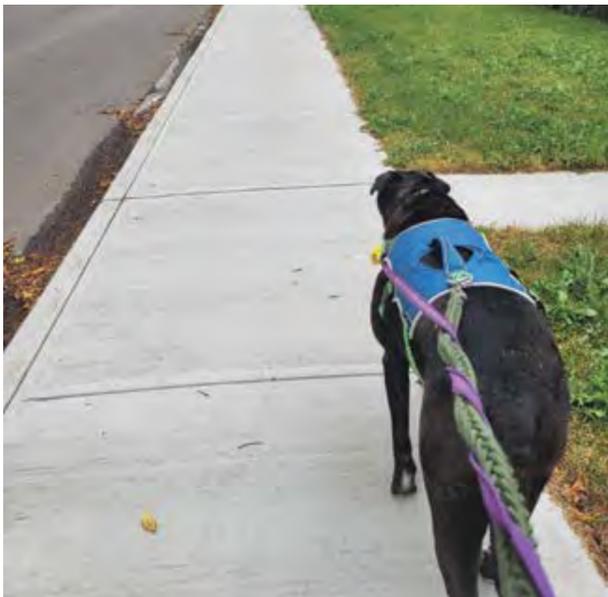
JULIE MCCREA

As a (permanent and foster) mom to many dogs, there were a lot of things that surprised me about the day-to-day reality of having dogs. Most people want to do right by their fuzzy family members and by the people in their communities that they might encounter. Here are some things I have learned over the years that may help you:

Dogs are complex, just like people. Your dog might be an absolute angel with you, your family, and with others they have interacted with so far. However, just because that has been your experience, doesn't mean they will always be that way. Think about yourself: Do you always like everyone you meet? I think some of us may be tempted to growl at someone, even if we are the picture of politeness most of the time. Someone could have a triggering tone of voice or smell, or something else you couldn't predict that your dog could react to.

Dogs, like people, are complex in their personalities and preferences. It's considerate to keep your dog away from others unless people indicate that they would like to interact with them. However, even when someone asks, watch for signs of your furry friend being uncomfortable. If the person is petting them in a way they are not used to or getting closer to their face than they like, stop the interaction and remove them from that situation before anything escalates. It's our job as pet parents to be vigilant for the benefit of our dogs and the people around us.

Reactive dogs are not bad dogs. My adopted dog, Valley, passed away last March. She was basically Valium with a fur wrapping and not much phased her. She pretty much ignored most dogs and loved people. My current foster, Jani, came to me



Walking her dog through the Alberta Avenue neighbourhood. | Julie McCrea

after being mauled by a wild boar in southern Alberta. He was scared and tentative around other dogs while he was healing from his multiple injuries.

Unfortunately, in December of 2023, Jani and I were out walking when we were attacked by two dogs that had escaped from their yard a few blocks away from our house. We actually had to be rescued by some people who chased the dogs off and brought us into

their yard. It was a very traumatic experience for both of us, and Jani has not been the same since. He is scared of other dogs and tries to scare them off by lunging and jumping at them. After this happens, he drags me away as fast as he can. The big lug loves people, but dogs represent fear and pain.

Because of this reactivity, I need to make sure I keep him away from other dogs when

we are walking. If I see a person walking towards me with their dog, I will make a point to change direction or cross to the other side of the street.

I would recommend anyone walking their dog to not come up behind someone walking a dog and overtake them. Any dog may be uncomfortable with that situation, but reactive dogs especially can see this as an aggressive move. Keeping distance between dogs is always best practice to avoid stressing them.

It is important to know that reactive dogs are not bad and there is often a reason that they are the way they are. They deserve love just like any other pet. However, those of us with reactive dogs need to take extra care that we also make sure those around us and their dogs feel safe too.

Not everyone likes dogs! Personally, I ALWAYS want to meet and pet everyone's dogs! However, some people just don't, and that's OK. One thing I learned working with newcomers to Canada is that people's experience with dogs can be different in other countries. In some places, there are more feral dogs than there are pet dogs, and the feral ones are often aggressive. In other places, dogs are exclusively used by police and military and may trigger negative emotions from traumatic memories.

Sometimes, dogs are solely working animals that guard livestock and are not treated like pets. Even people raised around our pet culture in Canada may not like dogs. Anyone's reasons are valid. When out walking with our dogs, pet parents should always make a point of keeping their dogs from getting close to others. Trust me, if someone wants to engage with your furry friend, they will let you know in their body language or ask you right out if they can pet them.

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ABOUT US
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Contributors

Our writers vary from trained journalists to community residents with varying backgrounds. We strive to be a place where individuals can learn new skills and acquire experience—whether in writing, editing, photography, or illustration. We welcome letters, unsolicited submissions, and story ideas.

Andres Calderon is slowly studying nursing while working full-time. He spends most of his free time either reading or going to used book stores. He has a collection of over 1,200 books.

Constance Brissenden is an experienced presenter, writer, editor, and historian living in Cromdale. She is co-author of nine award-winning books by Cree author Larry Loyie (1933-2016), in addition to more than 20 books of history and travel.

Jacob Ulickij is a writer and craft beer professional living on Alberta Avenue with his three talkative chickens.

Joshua Mira Goldberg moved to the Alberta Ave neighbourhood in August 2023, after gentrification destroyed the diversity and vibrancy of his previous home. He is grateful for friendly neighbours, magpies, and green onion cakes.

Julie McCrea is a 12 year resident of Alberta Avenue, and spent five years serving

on the league board where she continues to help as an event volunteer. What free time she has between her work as an adult educator at NAIT and the Newcomer Centre is spent gardening, reading, and as a foster mom for rescued dogs.

Lauren Kalinowski is a long-time Edmontonian who loves her downtown community and has too much to say. She is a creative writing graduate, construction project manager, and four-time mom.

Molly Staley is a journalist and communications specialist living in Alberta Avenue. More than writing, she loves her pug, Garry.

Rebekah Brunham is a journalism student entering her fourth year at MacEwan University. She has written many articles for class and the Griff Magazine, and has helped create some episodes for the podcast series "The Relevance Report." Outside of school and work, she enjoys reading, embroidering, photography, and playing the piano.

Delton Community League's Annual Membership Day

COME MEET YOUR NEIGHBOURS

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Permanent public washroom now open

Facility provides more access and local jobs in Alberta Avenue

REBEKAH BRUNHAM

On July 12, the permanent public washroom next to the Alberta Avenue Community Centre officially opened. The facility, run by staff provided by The Alberta Avenue Business Association, will be open 12 hours a day and may extend their hours during the summer months to support community and outdoor activities. The washroom is funded by the City of Edmonton as part of Edmonton's Public Washroom strategy to help create accessible bathrooms for everyone.

"For the last few years, we haven't had public washrooms. It's been difficult because you have people coming in wanting to use the washroom, and you want to provide access because it seems like a basic human dignity thing," states Amanda Nielson, co-owner and office manager of Norwood Dental Centre.

Nielson and her partner have had issues in the past with people using their washroom and clearing out all of their amenities, or locking themselves in the washroom. Nielson says, "You want to give people access, but you also have to take care of your patients and the people visiting your business."

Local residents and community members are part of the new public washroom staff. The Alberta Avenue Business Association actively works with each staff member to see where they want to go professionally, or specifically with this job. Shift work is about four and a half hours and cycles throughout the day. It is a flexible opportunity that works for people who are in retirement or taking classes.

"We think it's very important to provide job opportunities to our local neighbours who want to feel connected to the Avenue, and be proud of the facilities and public spaces that we have in here," says Erick Estrada, executive director of the Alberta Avenue Business Association. "We're working with our city partners to continue improving the space and finding other ways we can hire more neigh-



Erick Estrada from AABA (left) celebrates the opening of the public washrooms with staff and MLA Janis Irwin and MP Blake Desjarlais holding the street team t-shirt. | Karen Mykietka

hours to look after our community."

The public washroom not only helps people who are unhoused, but it also serves community members and other people visiting the Avenue. "It benefits everyone including playground users, festival goers, transit riders and unhoused people. And it takes the pressure off our busy community centre," says Karen Mykietka, facility manager of the Alberta Avenue Community Centre.

"It's accessible and then everyone will be able to feel comfortable," adds Nielson. "My kids also go to the [Alberta Avenue] park and, even just as a mom, [you want to have] a place where you can bring your little kids. I have a two-year-old who's thinking about potty training."

A solution to a growing problem in public spaces

The lack of publicly accessible washrooms has proven to be a large issue in the past. Local residents and businesses have had issues with people def-

ecating and urinating on private property and in public places. Businesses regularly have to clean their front and back entrances due to people using that space as a washroom. Members of the Alberta Avenue Community Centre's staff once witnessed someone defecating in front of the lounge window during a board meeting.

"We have all sorts of people coming to the community centre seeking to use a bathroom,"

says Mykietka. "When staff answer the door, we try to accommodate but it takes time and oversight. More often than not, the building is either privately rented or completely closed."

The Public Washroom Strategy is a multi-step strategy to provide the city of Edmonton with access to public washrooms and includes the Public Washrooms Accessibility Grant. The grant helps improve washroom accessibility for Edmontonians and helps curb the costs of providing and managing washrooms that allow non-paying

patrons to use.

In 2021, Edmonton City Council approved the design and delivery of two additional public washrooms: Alberta Avenue and Kinistina Park. As part of the design of these bathrooms, they also feature art on the outside. Clay Lowe is the artist who has done the artwork for both public washrooms.

"The design of the facilities has been extensive and thoughtful," explains Samson Awopeju, Program Manager, Citywide Public Washrooms Strategy. "The inclusion of artwork was part of the design from the beginning." The bathrooms feature vandal-resistant finishes and exterior lighting for increased security and visibility. Their accessible design includes braille and doors with muted colours compared to the rest of the building, so the actual bathrooms are easily identified.

Currently, there are many mobile public washrooms available throughout the city. They are staffed by Boyle Street Ventures (Hire Good) washroom attendants to help with maintenance and ensure a positive experience. Additionally, the two washrooms that open throughout the winter are the Bissell Centre East (10523 96 St.) and Hygiene Hub (10635 96 St.). The Hygiene Hub has washroom, showers, laundry facilities, and is usually open 24 hours a day. The City of Edmonton also provides a search bar for locations and hours for public washrooms throughout the city.



Local artist, Clay Lowe, designed the bathroom artwork to reflect the immediate landscape of the area around the bathroom. | Rebekah Brunham

A storybook public washroom

Inspiration and Design of Alberta Avenue's Public Washroom

REBEKAH BRUNHAM

Alberta Avenue's permanent public washroom features a storybook-like design with accessibility features. Each side of the building features a different page that represents the diverse culture and community on 118 Avenue. Some accessibility features include barrier-free signage (like braille) and simple doors, so that signage can be easily placed and utilized.

"It's not a sexy piece of architecture in the way that architecture is typically thought of," says designer Clay Lowe. "But it is a very important amenity."

Clay Lowe is from Edmonton and has created other artwork throughout the city. He designed the outside of the Kinistina Park public washroom as well. You've likely seen his work on 100 Street Place, which he has titled Wall of Encouragement. The building reads: "Take a risk. It's the most Edmonton thing you can do."

Lowe measures the outside of the buildings himself and creates to-scale pencil-drawn copies of the designs. On Alberta Avenue, the goal was to reflect the immediate landscape of the area around the bathroom and show healthy activities on the building: "Just kind of reflecting back in some ways, what I see is contemporary experience of life on 118," says Lowe.

The outside followed an unwritten story showcasing the diversity in the area. "It really is very specifically illustrated, almost like, if you imagine, each side of the building being pages from a [...] illustrated children's book," Lowe explains.

The design embraces "a real, sort of honest and kind of childlike way of representing play," says Lowe. "Really trying to play with our seasons in a way that isn't just, 'well, here's snow, and here's rain.' But like the activities that we might find ourselves: [like] playing hockey in a light snowfall when plants are coming up

in the garden."

The front side of the building features this hockey story. The washroom doors are quiet in comparison to the rest of the building. To help make it unmistakable, the doors read "Washroom," as well as signs showing wheelchair access. The bathrooms also feature a sign with scrolling text that reads if it's available or not. This side of the building also has a window for a bathroom attendant.

The building also features other specific details like the beekeepers at Alberta Avenue Community League. There is a honeycomb pattern shown right below the attendant's window, and a rose garden placed on the backside of the washroom to represent the immediate landscape and the beekeepers.

The other sides of the building show someone playing with a ball while wearing a prosthetic leg, a child reading a book written in braille, a construction worker heading to work with their coffee, and "the impromptu nighttime

basketball game, with the tattooed hands," says Lowe.

Trying to really bring attention to people's different abilities, Lowe expresses that the art is in some ways a response to the work that the Nina Haggerty Centre for the Arts does in the community. "Making sure that they are seen and heard."

The design is an important aspect of the public washroom, but Clay Lowe believes that what's most important is providing access to a public washroom for anyone who needs it.

"That's what's ultimately the most important part of this project — it provides space within a public park. And it's added value for families and visitors, but also for people that, frankly, live there," says Lowe. "They really are, for many people, a first line of access to public health care. And just the dignity of having a place to wash your hands or use the bathroom."

Vendors, Games, and Interactive Educational Fun

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Creating safe and inclusive neighbourhoods

Keeping CPTED away from Alberta Avenue



Bench on the corner of 118 Avenue and 87 Street, with a bar in the middle to prevent someone from comfortably laying down. | Joshua Goldberg.



Community-building benches and tables outside Paraiso Tropical, 9136 118 Ave. | Trish Pal.

JOSHUA MIRA GOLDBERG

I have spent the last year getting to know the Alberta Avenue area and the people who live here. I'm amazed at how safe I feel here compared to my previous neighbourhood in Saanich, BC.

I feel safest when I'm connected to people in my neighbourhood. I want people nearby who are looking out for each other, care about each other, and want to help.

In 14 years of living in Saanich, I only knew the people who lived next to me. In just one year of living in the Alberta Avenue area, I've met everyone who lives on my block. When I'm walking, I often have casual con-

versations with other people sitting on their porches, on the grass, or on benches.

When I moved here, I immediately noticed how many benches are on 118 Avenue. On residential streets, many people sit on grassy boulevards chatting with friends or taking a nap. In my old neighbourhood, anyone sitting in a public space was treated as a nuisance or a threat. Most stores with patios were gated or had signs saying, "No sitting except for customers." Here, people sitting or lying down are still part of the neighbourhood.

To help me understand the difference between the two cities, I spoke with writer and researcher Stephen Harrison. His blog, Needs

More Spikes, explores how the theory of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) has been taken up by police and urban planners to design neighbourhoods to shape people's behaviour.

CPTED isn't new: physical barriers like walls, drawbridges, and moats have been used for centuries to keep out groups of people. Today, common CPTED measures include fences or gates, removing pleasant features like benches or trees, deterrents like harsh lighting or uncomfortable seating, and increased surveillance through cameras or Neighbourhood Watch programs.

In the early 1970s, criminologist C. Ray Jeffery and architect Oscar Newman focused on street crime in low-income neighbourhoods in Oakland and New York. They claimed crime happened in these areas because residents didn't feel sufficient ownership of the space to defend their territory.

Early advocates suggested using physical barriers limiting access to the space, and promoting surveillance. Eventually police could be involved in architecture planning, to create buildings designed for territoriality and surveillance.

Safety or discrimination?

Design for crime prevention sounds good in theory. We want to be safe, and it's empowering to consider what we can proactively do to improve our communities. Barriers are protective — a fenced dog park lets dogs play without running into traffic, caution tape lets people know about a trip hazard.

But these measures aren't about mitigating the physical risks in our neighbourhood. Some researchers and advocates say CPTED should be called "hostile architecture," because of its impacts. They position people as threats and discourage them from connecting. From its beginnings, CPTED has promoted stereotypes of people with low incomes as inherently dangerous. It doesn't seek to address social inequities — it just tries to control people's movement.

In a society that profiles certain people, surveillance components of CPTED increase violence against Black and Indigenous people who are visibly poor.

Public space design particularly impacts unhoused people who live 24/7 in public space. Many CPTED measures are designed to make it hard for people to rest in public. These aren't crimes and don't threaten anyone's safety.

Watching out for each other comes from a place of care, while watching each other is rooted in fear and suspicion. I want to live in a neighbourhood

with a culture of respect and inclusion, rather than one with a siege mentality.

CPTED misdirects our communities to worry about danger from strangers. We are much more likely to experience violence from people we know, at home, in the workplace, at school, or in our peer group. In the past year, Edmonton Police Service investigated 8,374 incidents of family violence, compared to 671 instances of robbery.

Learning lessons for design that builds safe, inclusive neighbourhoods

In the 1980s, Saanich police persuaded the city government to require CPTED measures for new buildings. Current requirements for building or rezoning permit applications must include a statement on how the plan encourages CPTED.

The disconnect from my neighbours when I lived in Saanich wasn't a fluke: decades of deliberate architecture and urban planning decisions helped create that disconnect. In Edmonton, CPTED hasn't yet gained as much traction. The city promotes CPTED through educational workshops, but it's not a requirement for new builds.

The Alberta Avenue neighbourhood has many examples of positive design. Alberta Avenue Park & Playground is a highlight for our household. It's designed to encourage people to stay a while and interact with each other, with features like a chess table and winter firepits. As a person with disabilities, I especially appreciate the seating options for different kinds of bodies, a ramped play area for kids, a public bathroom, and a water fountain accessible to people in wheelchairs.

It's important to speak up and let our city government, community leagues, business owners, and neighbours know we want public spaces in our neighbourhoods that promote social connection. When we see hostile architecture, we can ask for it to be replaced. We can contact Edmonton Transit Service to ask them to stop using benches with bars in the middle, and to replace them with seating that is better for more kinds of bodies and allow people to stretch out their legs or lay down.

We can be friendly in our neighbourhoods — making a point of saying hello, checking on our unhoused and housed neighbours to see if they need anything, and organizing block parties or other chances for people to get acquainted. In our homes, we can consider what security measures are reasonable and what might be unnecessary.

Together, we can build the connected neighbourhood that we need.

Watching out for each other comes from a place of care, while watching each other is rooted in fear and suspicion. I want to live in a neighbourhood with a culture of respect and inclusion, rather than one with a siege mentality.

You can have a coffee with cops

A monthly local event is an opportunity to voice concerns and ask for help

REBEKAH BRUNHAM

When a police cruiser crawls up behind me when I'm driving, my heart rate picks up and my hands get a little damp. My mind immediately races over the last few kilometres: Did I cut anybody off? Was I speeding? Was I driving erratically?

Like many people, I face anxiety when it comes to the people in blue... at least when it comes to driving. For neighbourhood issues, like finding someone camping in my backyard or my neighbours conducting some questionable business, I want the police involved. But the help lines can be too slow or, sometimes, contacting the police leads nowhere.

Enter Coffee with Cops, a monthly meet-up with the Alberta Avenue's very own beat cops (officers assigned to the area) to vent frustrations or receive guidance about issues affecting the neighbourhood. The kind of help they can offer can range from advice to arrests (but no promises either way). It is hosted at The Carrot Community Arts Coffeehouse. I attended my first Coffee with Cops to share what to expect:

The Carrot is a hodgepodge collection of mismatched chairs, tables, local vendors, and (of course) coffee. Warm tones welcome you in, despite the rising anxiety of meeting with police. The collection of tables and chairs is arranged in a vague oval shape and there are people sitting along both sides of it, buzzing with chatter about some of their issues in the neighbourhood and their weekend plans.

"Are you with the Coffee with Cops?" the man behind the register asks. Coffee or a baked good is free with attendance. A free iced mocha makes my rising anxiety about how to report on this event a little bit easier.

The beat cops for this month's event were held up by a different call, so they were a little bit late to the start of it. The evening began with introductions from every person: their name, reason for being there, and the areas where they live.

"I'm Rebekah and I'm a journal-



Coffee with the cops is a monthly opportunity to meet with your local officers. | Rebekah Brunham

ist for the Rat Creek Press," I introduced myself to the room. My anxiety was growing wondering if my presence there could influence what people feel comfortable sharing. After I finish my introduction, I am politely told that Coffee with Cops is a private meeting between citizens and the police, so I am free to sit in and listen but can't take any quotes from people who attended or take any pictures.

"The Beats," as some of the people in the room called the police, walked amid introductions. People were venting about frustrations with neighbours, issues with people hiding in their alleyways or strangers hopping into their cars while they drive and refusing to leave until they're paid.

That evening was a neighbourhood walk-through. After everyone shared the areas where they lived, we took to the streets and walked by some areas related to the complaints so the police could

see where the issues were. The air was warm in that early summer kind of way, and everyone took a relaxing stroll with a member of the police force. The beat cop led the way and different members of the group switched places walking in stride with him. If the person was a little bit older and couldn't walk as fast, he slowed his pace.

The most interesting thing about the whole night was how approachable the beat cops were. They sat and listened to people's complaints, explained why they would not be able to do certain things and where they could reach out for help. There were also people who worked with the police in a professional aspect, and they brought an informational pamphlet titled Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design. It provides information on how to prevent crime in your area through changes like adding more lighting to the outside of your home or security cameras.

The officers explained what they try to do in their capacity and spoke with the community as friends. They shared some of their goals for the community and one handed out his phone number for people to reach out to him directly.

While there may not always be a clear-cut solution to what the community needs, the local police are doing their part listening to the communities they are patrolling.

CHECK THE THE CARROT CALENDAR FOR FUTURE COFFEE WITH COPS EVENTS.

To contact the Edmonton Police Service for non-emergency services, dial 780-423-4567.

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Kaleido Festival is coming

The festival is part of the soul of Alberta Avenue

LAUREN KALINOWSKI

From September 13 - 15, every corner, rooftop, alley, and open space on Alberta Avenue is going to be turned into a party. With a theme of Hearts a Meltin' for Kaleido Family Arts Festival this year, compassion and diversity are the heart of the celebration. All kinds of artists, cultures, all ages, and all personalities are welcome.

The festival begins Friday night at 6 pm with food trucks, music in the alley, and an artisan market. The heartbeat of it all, the Aurora Lantern Parade created by Arts on the Ave and partnered with The Nina kicks off the weekend. The parade led by lights and Indigenous drumming begins at 8:30 pm from The Carrot (94 St) corner and travels down 118 Ave to 92 St then north to the main stage.

The swing band The Happy Hep Cats will help lead the parade of artists, festival goers, and lantern carriers. Anyone can meet up at The Nina between 6 - 8 pm Friday night to make their own lantern for the parade or bring one from home.

Taking the stage at 9 pm is the Canadian Folk Music Award-winning soul and roots band Secondhand Dreamcar. At 10 pm, The Alberta Avenue Community Centre will host Kaleido After Dark: featuring an improv show by "The 11 O'clock Number."

Saturday morning kicks off with the free Bluegrass Pancake Breakfast at 10 am at the main stage; Where Myhre's Music owners, Byron and Alfie, will be performing. Throughout the day, the main stage will be a cultural showcase of dance and music performances from across the globe. On Saturday from 7-10 pm, Cirque Kalabante will fill the stage with amazing acrobatics and drumming from Africa. Sunday features Big Bands and a capella choirs at the main stage.

The Carrot Community Arts Coffehouse will serve as headquarters and transform itself into a music venue,

Consider biking, walking, bus, or taking the LRT to Coliseum or Stadium Station. Bus drop-offs will be north of the site location. Due to the adaptable nature of the festival, artist line-ups are subject to change. For the most up-to-date information on the Kaleido Festival keep an eye on their website and social media platforms.



All photos of Kaleido Fest 2023 | Epic Photography

while the street in front will be converted into a gathering area resembling a living room. Music in the nearby alley will be going non-stop throughout the weekend.

The Nina will bring artists out onto the street. The community league green space will become the main stage for dancing, music, and other performances. Food trucks and a beer garden will be there to keep your energy up.

"I'm really excited for the Sari-Sari Mercado," says Mary Ann Roa, Operations Director of Arts on the Ave, with a smile. "We're going to have over 40 Filipino vendors featured, as well as the Kaleido Market with artists showing off their works."

She adds, "I just look forward to the performances and the whole vibe."

Newcomers and long-time residents are all welcome to Kaleido Fest; it's a celebration for everyone.

Arts on the Ave is still looking for all sorts of contributions: volunteers, participants, sponsors, fundraising, and partners. It's never too late, and serendipitous volunteering can help the organizers. Last year, a drumming group had to step out at the last minute, but another cultural drumming group reached out just in time to fill the space. They are also looking for the Edmonton community to continue supporting the festival by tapping your debit card at the donation tubes and taking part in the festival's 50-50 raffle.

"There are so many surprises. It's our relationship between community and artist. It's a beautiful place where arts becomes accessible and enjoyed by all — it's magical," says Christy Morin, Executive Director of Arts on The Ave. "We give friends, family, and neighbours

a chance to walk away smiling."

One of Morin's favourite moments last year was when a young man asked an older lady to step into the compliment booth — a special telephone booth installation set up by the University of Alberta. She stood in the headphones and he told her how lovely she looked with her lipstick matching her outfit. She came out and hugged him, teary, sharing that no one had commented on her appearance like that since her husband died 12 years ago.

Another favourite is a giant plexiglass finger painting wall where everyone can play with paint. "The thing about Kaleido is that it's just so open and joyous," Morin says.

She suggests everyone take a walk in Tawakin Village (pronounced tugwaken) organized by Melissa-Jo Belcourt Moses. There you can enjoy bannock, see the afternoon mini-Pow Wows, and experience the Prayer Ribbon installation by artist Doreen Cardinal. A smudge ceremony will take place at noon on Saturday.

Watch out for the balloon team who has a special surprise project on display this year. They'll be making backpacks for children and huge, artistic sculptures with balloons. A flash mob might take you by surprise, teaching bhangra on the street.

The Avenue is going to turn into one giant creative arts village for the weekend, and this is one of the festivals that gives Alberta Avenue its soul.

"We're so blessed by the artists' contribution, generosity of the community, and the great production team, artists, and volunteers," Morin says with gratitude. "It's our 19th year, we're going back to our roots and we're still going strong."



KALEIDO FESTIVAL 2024

Friday, Sept. 13, 6 pm to 11 pm
Saturday, Sept. 14, 10 am to 10 pm
Sunday, Sept. 15, 12 pm to 6 pm
kaleidofest.ca

Main Stage Headliners:

Friday Sept. 13, 9 pm
Secondhand Dreamcar
Saturday Sept. 14, 6 pm
Kalabante / 7 pm Funk the Matriarchy / 8 pm Misery Mountain Boys

Locations

Main stage: Alberta Avenue soccer field.

Past the playground north of the community league – bring a blanket or low chair

Beer garden: Soccer field by main stage

Kid zone: Alberta Ave playground adjacent to community league

Tawakin Village: Grassy space. Smudge ceremony 12 noon Saturday

Sari-Sari Mercado: Community league parking lot, 40+ cultural vendors

Kaleido Market: On the street, 40+ artisan vendors

The Alley (Blues, Roots, Jazz, Folk): Between 93-94 Street

Music & Coffee: The Carrot

Piano: The Nina Gallery

Junk in the Trunk Community "Yard" Sale:

Sunday Sept. 15, 12 noon to 6 pm

\$25 per car fee for parking stall. Sign up online.

Hot Rod and Antique Car Show Sunday Sept. 15, 12 noon to 6 pm

\$25 per car fee for a parking stall. Sign up online.

Call for Volunteers

Over 400 volunteers are needed to make this happen! All that is required are two four-hour shifts, you'll be fed and get a t-shirt. Sign up online.

Road Closures: 118 Avenue between 90 Street to 95 Street and adjacent alleys Friday to Sunday.

Artist Spotlight

Lalith Senanayake



Giant, glowing wildlife: travelling sculptor Lalith Senanayake will be featured in the Kaleido Festival this year. | Lauren Kalinowski

LAUREN KALINOWSKI

Senanayake and his family have travelled the world spreading their message of environmentalism. The sculptor uses entirely reused and recycled materials. Sometimes the materials are from the ocean or often found near his work site. This year, he is preparing giant animal lanterns for the parade opening of Kaleido Fest.

The sculptures often appear lifelike, in motion or ready to pounce. His mission speaks through Senanayake's artwork, as he chooses large animal subjects for an emotional effect. "This is to teach people to think about animals and how what we do affects the animals," his wife translates. Working in the studio behind The Carrot, he presented works in progress: a bighorn sheep, bison, and bumblebee that will become part of the parade.

"We like to work with children. When

we are [in Sri Lanka], we go into schools with our kids to gather scraps and make sculptures with the students," she said. Perhaps in the future, this is a project they could pursue in Edmonton as well. Senanayake says, "Animals are our partners; we are using their land, and we use big animals for big impact."

Senanayake and his family have recently moved here from Sri Lanka and are hoping to call Edmonton home.

Lalith Senanayake's other works include a recent brass sculpture, "Our Triangle Leopard Friend," which made its debut at the 2023 London Art Biennale. His sculptures remind us to think about our waste as he turns it into something beautiful.

Follow @lalithsenanayake on Instagram

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Upcoming Board Meetings and AGM

SPRUCE AVENUE COMMUNITY

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AGM - Tuesday October 22nd @ 7:00 pm

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Hand drum circles are open to all

Drumming and singing are vital parts of Indigenous culture



Christine Turenne and Terry Coyote Aleck hosted a drum circle celebrating June Solstice at Alberta Avenue Community League. | Constance Brissenden

CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

Since moving to Edmonton in 2023, Terry Aleck and his partner Christine M. Turenne have joyfully shared Aleck's songs and many hand drum gatherings at The Carrot Community Arts Coffeehouse on 118 Avenue and elsewhere. Terry Aleck, also known as Coyote, is an Elder of Lytton First Nation in British Columbia. The name Coyote was given to him by his great uncle. After four days fasting in the mountains, it marked a transformation on his healing journey. During their time together, Turenne was given the name White Wolf Woman, which she cherishes.

I asked the couple to share their thoughts on the meaning of drumming in their lives:

What does the hand drum represent?

Terry: Every life has a heartbeat, whether it walks, flies, or swims. When we drum, we show respect for life. Drumming is sacred to our way of life as First Nations people. It was a tradition that was lost until fairly recently in my community. We woke up with the power of the drum.

How does the hand drum help you?

Terry: I wanted to drum as a young man in my twenties. But the Elder told me, "You are not ready yet." He was right. I fell off the wagon again and went into treatment. Thirty-seven years later, I am still clean and sober.

In 1988, I picked up a hand drum at the Stein Valley Festival. I was on the highway walking home when I received my first song. It felt like I hit an invisible wall. I felt a surge of energy from Mother Earth went right through me, and the song came out. When it peaked, I walked into the Elders Lodge. They said they had not heard that song

for 50 years. It was a medicine man's calling song to feast together, share storytelling, and have fun.

Sometime later, I got together with the medicine man's family. They pulled out his hand drum and asked me to play it. What an honour to hold his drum. This was the start of my hand drum journey in 1988.

Christine, why did you and Terry start the hand drum workshops?

Christine: We teach people from all walks of life, sharing our songs. After an hour of drumming, people feel differently. They have new energy and feel more positive. Many say, "I'm glad I came today." Even though Terry and I may have obstacles on the way to the circle, we feel the same way when we finish.

How does the drum help others?

Terry: Drumming brings healing energy to people. When they hear the beat of the drum, it opens them up to healing and energy in their lives. Something changes in their DNA, in their system, which can lead them to a better way of life.

Do you have to be Indigenous to play a hand drum?

Terry: No. When the Elder was teaching me, he said, "If anyone is interested, share your knowledge. Keeping it in can lead to sickness." That's why I share the Elder's songs with their permission, and the songs that come to me.

What is your feeling about playing the hand drum?

Christine: I love it. Terry encouraged me to sing. I loved to sing but my mother and my elementary school teacher discouraged me. They didn't like my voice. When I first got up in public and sang with Terry, it was scary. Today, I see drumming and singing as prayers. The more you say

prayers out loud, the stronger they are. I feel happy. That inspires me to continue.

Terry, is it hard to learn to play the hand drum? Are there protocols to respect?

Terry: No, a drum is like any instrument. Everybody has a heartbeat. Tune into that rhythm. Listen to the other drummers. Close your eyes and feel it.

Before we begin, we offer sage to the organization that has invited us, as well as the animals who provided their hides, be they deer, elk, moose, bison, elk, coyote, bear, or even dog. We learned from a teenager back home how to rescue hides. She was deeply committed to respecting the animals who were deceased and discarded. This fall, we will teach drum making.

Many people have a drum hanging on their wall at home that they never play. Take it down and play it. The drum is never too old, nor the drumstick. My drumstick is over 40 years old.

Drumming is good for the soul. When you drum alone or in a drum circle, you change the energy in your body. Soak it in.

Aleck was recently profiled in an award-winning documentary, *s-yéwyáw: Awaken*. The documentary is about the pain of being taken from his grandparents' home to St. George residential school and its harsh reality. Produced by his daughter, the musician, Ecko Aleck, it is a moving film about intergenerational healing, available free of charge on Telus STORYHIVE. Watch for ongoing drum circles and drum making workshops in Edmonton this fall.

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Overcoming challenges, paying it forward

Local resident details his story of a new beginning in Canada and his love for community

ANDRES CALDERON

Entering a radio contest and winning may seem like a long shot to most, but for Rauldon "Rauly" Augustine it was more of a surprise than anything else.

"My son entered me into a radio contest on Kiss 91.7 for winning a new roof from Roe Roofing," says Augustine, "and to my surprise I was one of the top two." Reaching this level was followed by disappointment when Augustine lost the listener-driven vote for a contest winner — by a mere two per cent.

"They called us in at 7:30 in the morning to know the results," says Augustine. "We were on the radio and they announced [the] winner and my son almost cried. I had to whisper quickly and hug him and say 'don't worry, it's OK. We still have a roof even if it's not a new one.'"

Despite the results, the owner of the roofing company broke tradition and decided to award a new roof to both applicants who made the final. Much to everyone's surprise, as it marked the first double win in the contest's history.

"He said he's been reading our story that we submitted and he was really inspired and impressed with how my son took initiative to apply for me," explains Augustine, "and how I'm raising [my son] all alone and doing so much in the community. For that, he wanted to also offer me a roof."

Overcoming setbacks is nothing new to Augustine. Born in Guyana and raised in Saint Lucia, Augustine came to Canada as a refugee in 2008, fleeing for his life after being assaulted for being a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

"It's illegal to be gay in Saint Lucia, you

can get arrested or get killed and I almost got killed, that's one of the reasons I came here," says Augustine. "My own friends found out about me and tried to kill me. I got stabbed twice in my chest."

Unable to access a hospital after being assaulted, Augustine was forced to care for his wounds on his own over a three-week period at home. Finding no help from local police due to his sexuality, Augustine decided to leave his country for safer ground.

He initially planned to join the British army as a member of the Commonwealth, but decided instead to move to Canada after reconnecting with an old friend over social media, who suggested he come to Edmonton.

Augustine then moved to New Brunswick and later Montreal, where he had his son and got his cooking diploma. In 2012, he came back to Alberta to work in the oil fields as a chef. Assuming full care of his son in 2014, Augustine claims camp work was no longer viable as a single father. Instead, he opted to do a series of odds-and-ends jobs in town until he completed schooling as a massage therapist — a job he now does from home.

Keeping himself busy, Augustine has since become active with both the Parkdale Cromdale Community League. He champions diversity as the programs director and showcases his cooking skills hosting a Caribbean pub night twice a year. With the help of a local church, he makes food for the local unhoused community.

"When I first came here, I was technically lost trying to figure out my way and I met a lot of kind people along the way who helped me without requesting



Rauly standing with his son at a BBQ. Rauly has become very active in the Parkdale Community. | Supplied

anything in return," says Augustine. "This is my way of paying it forward."

You can congratulate Augustine on his win and thank him for his work in the community at the next Caribbean pub night, being held at the Parkdale Cromdale Community League on Friday, Aug. 23.

You can thank Augustine for his work in the community at the next Caribbean pub night. Keep an eye out for Parkdale Cromdale Community League's events on their Facebook page! (Facebook.com/PCCLYEG)

Halloween MOVIE PUB NIGHT

with PCCL Members-only Event

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PCCL HALL @ 11335 85 St

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Fibromyalgia: The Invisible illness or the Ignored Illness?

"My whole body aches."
 "I never have any energy."
 "Nobody can find anything wrong."
 "I can't sleep with all this pain."
 "I can't spend all day in bed, but I am too tired to move."
 "My flare-ups are ruining my life."

This was Lorraine's daily life, a relentless battle against fibromyalgia. "I would spend my days in bed as the pain travelled to different parts of my body. It felt like I was covered in bruises. Knowing I was missing my grandkids' childhood and feeling like I was letting them down every day was devastating." Lorraine shared.

Fibromyalgia is a complex and chronic condition affecting over half a million people in Canada. Its inconsistent and all-encompassing symptoms make it one of the most challenging conditions to diagnose and treat.

Typically, it becomes a diagnosis of exclusion, where scans show nothing, tests are inconclusive, and unanswered questions lead to a diagnosis of fibromyalgia. This is particularly frustrating because something is clearly wrong, but the problem is invisible to our modern tests.

"All the doctors and specialists I met couldn't offer a real solution. Some even suggested I was faking my pain. I had never felt so defeated and disrespected. I felt like I was being sent on a wild goose chase, I was referred from Doctor to Doctor and no one could help. The long wait times to see every doctor and specialist certainly didn't help.

I spent more time waiting than anything else so I started doing my own research, trying everything from going gluten-free to eliminating toxins, but nothing helped." Lorraine explained.

Lorraine's story is all too common among those suffering from fibromyalgia. The pain is inconsistent and relentless, leading to chronic fatigue and brain fog, often referred to as 'fibro fog'.



On top of all that, fibromyalgia often has flare-ups where the pain, fatigue, and other symptoms are worse.

While some suggest causes like genetics, infections, weather changes, emotional stress, and physical trauma, much about this disease remains unknown, earning it the nickname 'invisible illness'.

Fortunately, Lorraine went looking for other solutions while she was waiting for yet another specialist referral and would eventually find Dr. Melanie Morrill Ac.'s blog posts on fibromyalgia, talking about similar symptoms and how she offers relief at Accessible Acupuncture. "I was willing to try anything. I couldn't keep living like that."

"Since starting treatment, I went from not being able to play with my grandkids to babysitting them for the weekend. It is wonderful to be able to spend time with them." Lorraine stated.

Dr. Melanie Morrill Ac. uses a combination of 4000-year-old acupuncture and modern frequency-specific microcurrent, a new technology that targets fibromyalgia pain to restore function. This innovative approach has shown a 90% success rate in relieving fibromyalgia symptoms.

"Fibromyalgia isn't invisible, it is being ignored. I hear the pain, I see the fatigue, and can feel the tension in the the muscles." Dr. Melanie Morrill Ac. states.

"The only time fibromyalgia is invisible is when you are looking at scans and lab work instead of the real live person in front of you."

If you or someone you love are suffering from chronic pain that presents as dull aching pain, fatigue, insomnia, or has been diagnosed with fibromyalgia, it's important to know that there are options.

There is hope!

Best of all, it is timely. Instead of waiting months for another specialist, Dr. Melanie Morrill Ac. is scheduling consultations within two to four weeks.

When you have severe chronic pain, everyday matters.

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An eye-opening roommate

A summer student shifted my ideas about Muslim culture



A place to learn about Indigenous Peoples: Zainab at the Royal Alberta Museum | Constance Brissenden

CONSTANCE BRISSENDEN

When it comes to roommates, I've had plenty. As the landlady over the past 40 years, I've lived with students from Japan, Korea, Africa, and elsewhere. They helped pay my bills, but they also taught me a lot about other countries, their cultures and habits. In the end, I find this best of all.

My most recent roommate is a case in point. Zainab saw my advertisement in a university listing and called me from her school in Newfoundland. We switched to Facetime, and there she was: an international master's student and lively young woman with a great smile. We quickly agreed that she would move in for three months this summer.

I prepared to pick her up at the airport on a cold and windy May evening. "How will I recognize you?" I asked. She sent me a photo dressed from head to toe in a black abaya (a robe-like dress). Her hair was cov-

ered by a hijab (a head covering that covers all of a woman's hair); her lower face covered by a niqab. Only her eyes were visible.

I have friends from many cultures but none of them were practicing Muslim women. I've seen women completely covered, with only their eyes showing, a few times in my life. I will be honest: I was shocked.

The feeling did not last long. I quickly realized that my new roommate was her own person. She showed up at the airport with one small bag, which she tossed into the back seat. She removed her niqab and chatted away.

Once she was familiar with Albertans, she often made the choice to remove the niqab. "When I first got to Edmonton, I didn't know what kind of people I would meet here," she told me. "I felt safer wearing my niqab. Soon, I got to know there are good people here, very welcoming to me. I felt comfortable without wear-

ing it." She explained that it was entirely her choice.

A master's student with a summer research placement at MacEwan University, Zainab loves to travel. Banff was on her wish list of places to visit. I arranged to drive her and her school friend, a scholar from India on a summer program, to Banff and back. In one day!

Turns out that, whether they are from Canada, India, or Saudi Arabia, young women are the same. They love selfies. They took hundreds of shots by lakes, rivers, and craggy peaks. They weren't impressed by Banff itself. "Too many tourists," they said. But our spectacular Rocky Mountains won them over.

Since this whirlwind trip, we have visited Elk Island National Park and Pigeon Lake Village. With friends, she explored the Edmonton Art Gallery, Royal Alberta Museum, Muttart Conservatory, and (of course) West Edmonton Mall.

I have learned that my practicing Muslim roommate is a vivacious person who lives life with an open mind. She shared her faith and its customs. She listened to me talking about my practice of Buddhism. Her open mind encouraged me to open my own.

My summer roommate has been a welcome guest. She cooked many tasty Indian-style meals for me. She also taught me to let go of my preconceived notions about life as a Muslim woman.

Zainab's family is close; so is mine. She seeks knowledge; so do I. She likes ice cream; so do I.

Friendship and respect are important qualities in life. I am grateful to have spent three months with my new acquaintance. We are different in age and culture, but entirely the same on a friendship level. I look forward to hearing about her adventures as a student and a traveller.

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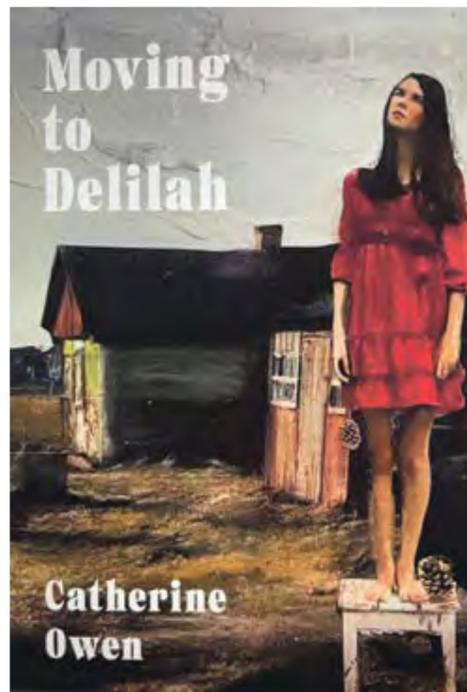
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A Phenomenon of Senses and Nostalgia

Catherine Owen's 16th collection of poetry is an ode to her home



MOLLY STALEY

Catherine Owen's *Moving to Delilah* is her latest poetry collection, whose pages bleed with vulnerability, personal anecdotes, snapshots, and amassed moments of her journey to Edmonton. There is a strong feeling of tenancy you experience as a reader — you nestle into a habitat you do not own, but you are rewarded from the foundations made by its owner.

"To me, the focus when I was editing this book — and I edited it over and over and over — was the flow between the different sections," says Catherine Owen. Her newest collection of poetry shows that the life changes we experience are often synonymous and entangled with

the changes of the seasons. As Owen illustrates throughout the collection, a person's growth is paramount. The learnings we keep and retell may be messy, but it all serves a purpose.

Owen's journey to *Delilah* began in 2018. In her search for constancy, Owen moved from Vancouver to Edmonton. She became a member of a bustling community of artists and creatives. She was living amongst the large trees off 118 Avenue and the sea of 90-some streets. Standing inside a 100-year-old home in the Alberta Avenue neighbourhood, Catherine Owen had an epiphany: "My name is Delilah. I heard the words. I can't

explain that...So I didn't look at any other houses."

In the section "The House," Owen gifts readers with a tantalizing overview of her relationship with *Delilah*: From day one to The Guest Who Didn't Leave (a beautiful tale about an Airbnb guest who has never left), with tidbits of history and lore peppered throughout. Through thoughtfully written prose, we visualize and understand Owen's fascination and love for *Delilah*.

Owen had a particular item on her new home to-do list: building a book box. "That's important. My father built a book box in front of his house in Burnaby. Then he built mine," she remembers. Nestled between her front gate and a small tree, the book box is a temporary home for nomad

books to settle. Owen credits her father for her love of reading: "As an avid reader, he came up and read to me every night as a kid. He would read me *The Win in the Willows* and *The Hobbit*... books like that." The box emphasizes the importance of personal stories and ancestral knowledge in shaping one's identity and sense of belonging. For Owen, the box is a connection to the community.

"The Garden," is a section dedicated to Owen's passion (but not her talent) for gardening. It includes poems that make a reader salivate at the effortless imagery. In particular, the colourful delicacy of *The Garden Diary* goes down like a sweet glass of Brisk Iced Tea because...we are in Canada, after all.

Community is a steady theme throughout the collection, particularly in "The Neighbourhood." Whether finding community in the neighbourhood watering hole like in *Mon's Pub* and 118th Avenue, or exercising your civic duties like in *Mowing the Ghost House*, readers are welcome into Owen's world of quirky observations.

The author beautifully splices her prose with a formal structure that keen readers may pick up on. From pantoum to villanelle, there is a format that will suit every poetry lover's needs. After a *Form* by Galway Kinnell that also uses the word *Winter* in the 4th Stanza is an astute and subtly humorous piece that drives the inclusion of structure home to her readers.

To the *Thief Who Reads Poetry*, notably and appropriately placed in the second half of the book, is a standout piece of work. Owen writes about her experience watching someone attempting to break into a home next to hers. When she goes to intervene, she notices the intruder is carrying a copy of *Woman Reading in Bath* by Anne Szumgalski. The beautiful notion that the artist exists in multiple lives and

"That was such a weird moment. It was so strange, that kind of collision of feeling," Owen says. "You know, I'm protecting my neighbour's property, but I also wanted to nurture that person and move them away from illegal activities."

in various ways for other people, is humbling to read.

Owen spent two months touring and promoting *Moving to Delilah* in Alberta, Ontario, and her home province, British Columbia. She concluded her tour in a private event at *Delilah* on June 22 as a part of her home-based series, 94th Street Trobaritz. Owen reflects on her tour, "It went supremely well, with excellent audiences. The way to connect with readers and send your book into the world is definitely to get out on the road."

In addition to writing poetry, Catherine Owen also edits manuscripts and mentors writers. You can follow her on social media @mslyricspoetryoutlaws.



Catherine Owen stands in front of her historic house named *Delilah* which is the inspiration for her new book of poetry. | Michael Belandruk

Bachelor in Parkdale

Meet Local Resident Adventurer Ben Mazor

JACOB ULICKIJ

While the inherent value of Parkdale and Alberta as a whole brings new faces to our streets, it cannot be said that everyone takes advantage of our nature and recreation equally. For Ben Mazor — a Toronto transplant — the wilds of Alberta called, and he answered readily.

Meeting Mazor gives the immediate impression of a man built to craft things. Between career hopping through accounting, data management, aviation, and tourism, he picked up a few interests that are uniquely tailored to Alberta's climate of self-starters, adventure-seekers, and tech opportunities. His hands typed invisible patterns as we spoke about his journey, no doubt coding or tying the life-saving knots that his rock climbing hobbies demand. From his 114 Avenue condominium, Mazor has been taking time to reflect on just how grateful he is to have moved out West.

"What shocked me the most about Alberta is everyone's dedication to lifestyle and culture," Mazor said. As evidence, he pointed out the numerous galleries that dot the foothills and mountain towns he frequents. With only a couple of years in Edmonton under his belt, he effortlessly listed bars, cafes, and hobby shops that even locals overlook. "This sort of commitment to culture wouldn't exist in Toronto. It couldn't. In fact, it almost couldn't exist anywhere but in Edmonton."

Mazor went on to paint a picture that many Albertan transplants know well: a life spent monetizing hob-

bies, strategically choosing friends, and fighting to stay afloat.

"Back home, it's almost like finding a third job becomes your hobby." Out here in Parkdale, life couldn't look more different than the rat race he had come to expect of city life. Within a year, Mazor found a welcoming community of indoor climbers, plentiful job opportunities, and weekly access to the Rocky Mountains.

Where he once knew congestion and busy streets, he now knows weekly bikes to the airport and back. Where there were overpriced coffees and too-trendy bars, he now finds luxury products at everyday prices — a testament to Alberta's unique climate for self-starters who have built businesses on the grounds of shared passions for elevated dining.

Parkdale in particular was a lucky find for Mazor. As a man with more hobbies than most, the affordable and spacious condominiums allowed him to break into new niches and practice at home. Chin-up bars double as rock climbing anchors, and built-in heating and cooling systems mean he can thrive in any climate our province throws at him — fitting, as he cracked up sharing a story of how -41 C winds once turned his winter climbing gear into a wearable sheet of stubborn ice.

Have there been downsides? Yes, but you might be able to help. When it comes to dating, Ben has found it hard to share every facet of his life through the scant pixels a dating app offers. If you or someone you know is looking for a date with Parkdale's



Introducing Ben Mazor: local resident, weekend adventurer, and bachelor | Jacob Ulickij

newest bachelor, get in touch. Thirty is looking great on this local explorer who has more stories than our streets have lilac trees.

In the wild, you'll find Ben scaling the walls of Boulders Climbing, sipping wine at 82nd Sports Pub, or

scouring outdoor shops for deals on his latest outdoor fixation. Don't be afraid to say hi — there's much more than meets the eye of many new faces on the Avenue. If you're interested in learning more about him, email him at cadets.ben@gmail.com.

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