

in medias res

St. Thomas More College's liberal arts journal since 1995



*The "Traditions" Issue
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers:

We are happy to present our newest issue *in medias res*, "Traditions". This issue is filled with creative works from our USask community that represent traditions within their own lives, showcasing a diverse selection of poetry, visual art, fiction, and nonfiction, from our USask community of undergraduates, graduates, staff and alumni, who all explore the different aspects and ideas of this expensive topic.

From traditions old to new we asked the question, what do traditions mean to our community? We explore where traditions come from and how they change. We also challenge our community to ask themselves whether traditions are worth keeping. Should they always remain the same or grow and change with us? As you explore our next issue we ask you to be open to new ideas of what traditions can be. Some are gifts and should be forever cherished, while others are poisonous and must be either changed or forgotten.

We are thrilled to share this inspiring collection of works with you from our homes to yours and we hope that they will invoke your imagination and spark meaningful conversations about the ideas of traditions.

Sincerely,

Toni Elliott.

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On Tradition

Dr. Jonathan Brent

As a Latinist, I feel compelled to begin by with an etymology: the English word “tradition” comes from a Latin noun, *traditio*, that itself derives from a verb (*trado*, *traderè*) which means “to hand over,” “to pass down,” or “to teach.” Traditions come in many forms, and we cannot lay claim to them as a uniquely human property. Animals too have “traditions”: juvenile reindeer learn from the herd where to migrate and where to give birth; young songbirds acquire the distinctive tunes of their forebears, in much the same way as children learn to speak; crows pass the use of idiosyncratic tools down from generation to generation, creating what might be described as their own cultural groups. In such cases, and at its best, tradition connects the individual to the community; for humans, at least, such communities often include those broader imagined communities that exist not just in the here and now but through that most meaningful stretch of immemorial time.

The Latin *traditio* appears in sources from the English Middle Ages in another sense, which helps me introduce some trouble into this (as far as we know) uniquely human impulse to ground our traditions in the distant pass: for sometimes handing over (*traditio*) can be “an act of betrayal or treachery.” Stretching this sense of *traditio* a bit further, we might come to a

question: How do we know that we can trust what we receive from the past? After all, traditions that we assume connect our present-day experience to the sacral time of our distant ancestors are often innovations of much more recent history. Many European folk dresses, for example, are products not of the remote past but of the long nineteenth century, a period in which the creation of nation-states encouraged the development of easy cultural markers that could be used to separate “us” from “them.” And sometimes what the past has given us is both misleading and *just plain wrong*. As a Southerner, for example, I cannot but help think of the Confederate battle flag, which as a child I had the naïve impression was the expression of regional pride, against hostile national stereotypes. Historical perspective – the origins of the symbol and the fact that it gained popularity as a reaction against the Civil Rights movement – makes this attitude almost difficult to believe. (And certainly, it makes me feel no little shame.) And yet historical perspective may be most difficult to come by in those things that we hold to be traditional. To even question the origins of our traditions suggests that they may have had a beginning, which in turn suggests that they might end. The fact that some things *should* end does not ward off the psychic difficulty of interrogation, of

cutting bait from what connects us as individuals to larger groups, be they healthy or destructive.

As an historian, I have long had the sense that a culture’s normative stance toward tradition moves in cycles: now rejecting those who came before us, now holding them up as models. Even among those who reject tradition, however, there is never quite an escape from the past. (Show me someone who believes that the Renaissance was a radical break from tradition, and I’ll show you someone who doesn’t know anything about the Middle Ages.) The question, then, is what from the past should we accept as a gift? What should we reject as poison? What should we preserve? What should we change? When we ask such things, we ask them not just for ourselves but as intermediaries in a great chain of being, linking the past to the future. We owe it to our forebears to take these questions seriously; we owe it even more to those who will live in our wake.



Comb
by ERIN
Quilt, English Paper piecing

This quilt is being created in a traditional method called English Paper piecing, where each piece is hand sewn over paper, and then stitched together. When I make it, I feel as though I am connected to all the other people throughout time, who have slowly, and laboriously created something of value out of scraps, often anonymously.

blame it on tradition (we blame our domovyk)

mike sluchinski

For Professor Yurko Foty. Thank you, we remember!

us ukrainians we suffer
our houses
they suffer
(we blame our domovyk)

the domovyk they bless blessings
and curse
since our

since our beginning beginnings
they live with
they live with us
(we blame our domovyk)

a long time ago and more they were us
they lived in the
the hearth

some say in our heart sometimes
but the kitchen
or these days
(we blame our domovyk)

the dirty domovyk badly begging he
lives in my fridge
and grandpa

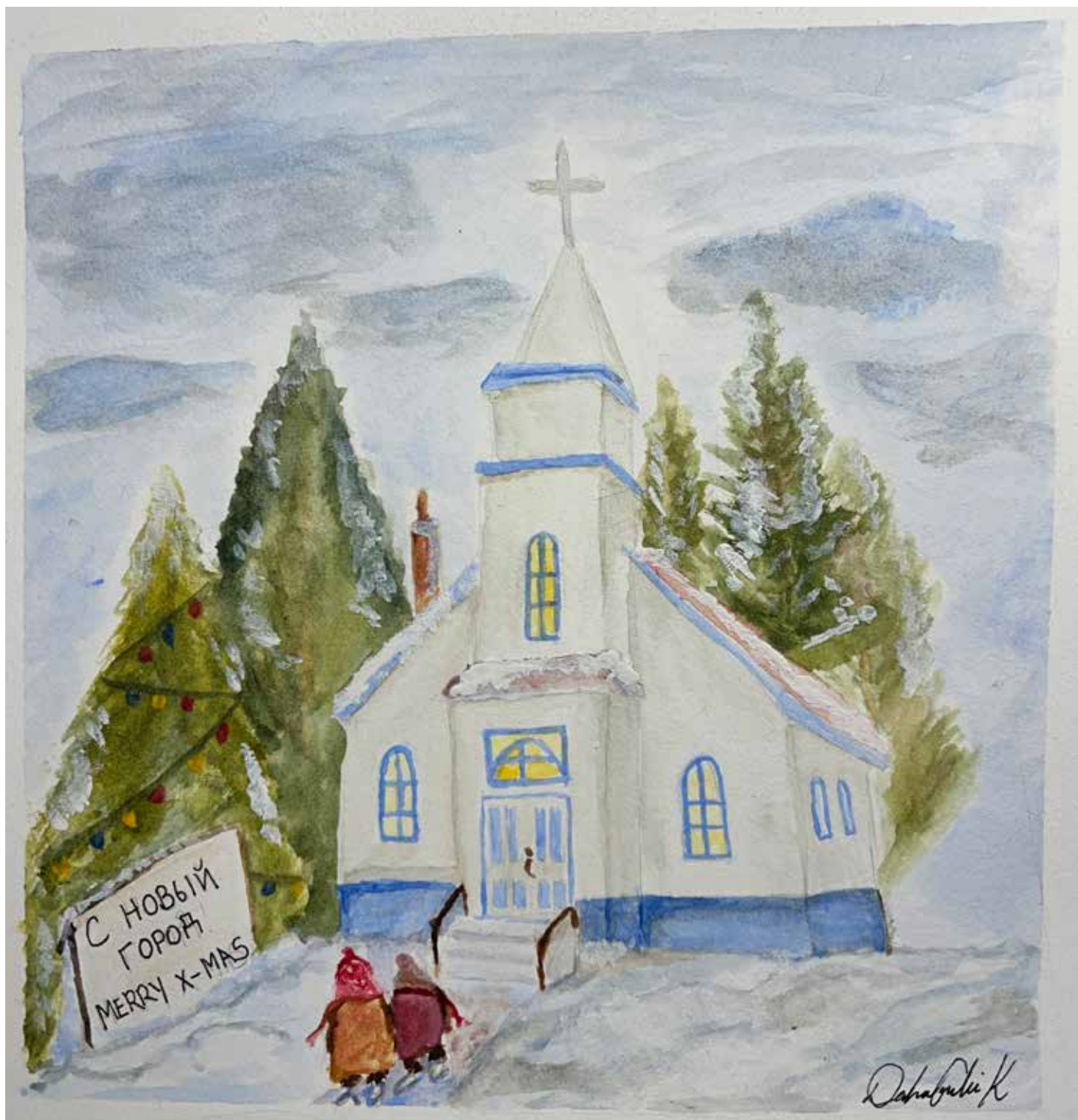
grandpa even blamed him sure did
blamed him
for empty bags

empty bags of jujubes and mints and lemon drops
chocolate gone too and
sugar cookies a few

that domovyk never left any none nothing but
nibbled sausage
marked the bottle

marked the bottle of homebrew clear through black lines
black marker no
didn't help no not at all
(we blame our domovyk)





*Christmas Morning in
Norquay, Saskatchewan*
by DASHA
Watercolour

My piece reflects the Christmas morning tradition of going to church with one's family, no matter the weather, in rural, prairie Saskatchewan. It also highlights the intercultural element of being a Ukrainian Canadian Christian and importance of church life in rural towns.



Cake

Eunice-Grace Domingo

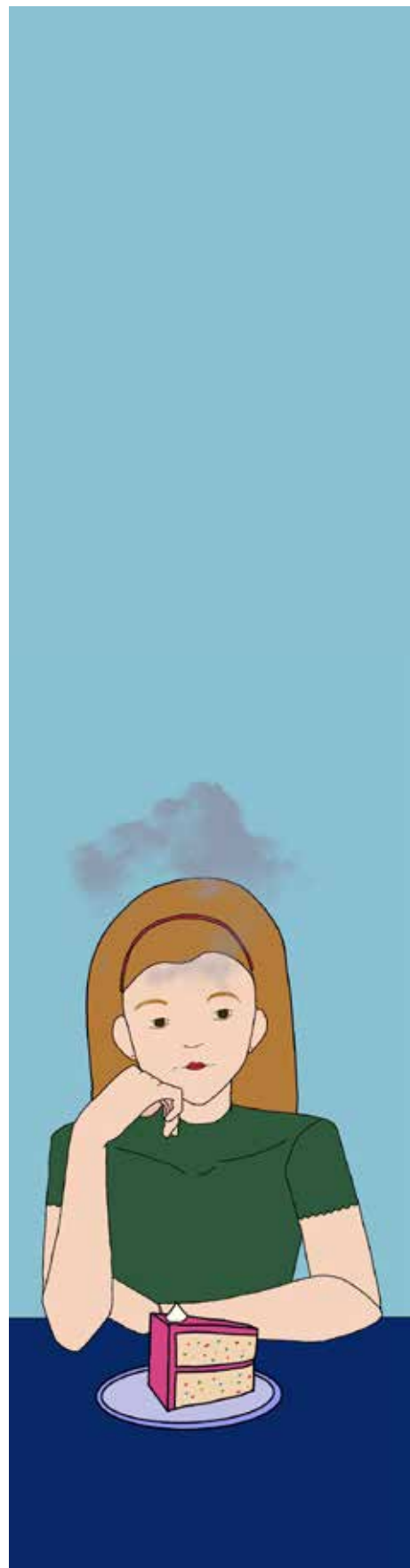
I feel as if I'm always the loneliest at birthday parties.
I keep thinking of how every wish seems to die the
second it touches the candle, how the streamers look like
convicts that hang in the dark, how better it would've been if I'd just
gulped down the pills instead of mixing them in the brownies.

We do so much for this taste of eclipse: the rattling of
a tool shed after the garage's been cleaned. They ring
around the rosy, open presents nobody wants, sing
a song they stop singing to you when you're under a sheet
again. I know I have to be here -- she's my friend, she's
older, deader, a little chubby on the edges. I'm supposed to
deliver the cake -- vanilla and roses, pocket full of poses, --
And he said if I came, it'd be an excuse to wear the green dress,
The one with the poplars? Yes. No, I didn't think they were
pretty either: just on sale and matched the misery.

I want to talk about anything else but the merry-go-round he
fell off thirty years ago, the towers we lit on fire last summer
because of the children, the wagon we dragged through mud and
ichor to carry out the sandwiches -- Can't we just eat this
goddamn cake and the potato mashes, mashes before we
all go home and dread when it'll be our turn to talk to our mothers about
who to invite next time?

◀ *Thirty Re-Edit*
by JON KENDRICK
Printmaking

A lot of my recent artworks have dealt with the interaction
of humans and the environment around us, being in balance
with nature and ourselves. Gender roles, consumer culture,
what t-shirt we wear. That feeling of "there are no adventures
left" unless we buy it. That feeling of being boxed in a post-
consumer society, a drive to find the utopia I know can exist.



White Chrysanthemums

Vivian Truong

One step after the other. One breath after another.

Easy. It was all supposed to be easy. It was walking, just walking, one foot following the other. I was able to do it without a thought a few days ago. But the weight on my chest settled down and pressed, a familiar weight that stole my breath with each step. My past that I had tried so hard to neglect, one that came crashing back with every step I took into that concrete jungle. One that came crashing back like the waves of the sea that I could see through the large airport windows.

Sounds surrounded me: the rumbling of engines, the mumblings of tired passengers, and the chattering of friends that could be heard over all the noise. All in a language that I knew all too well. A language that I had not spoken in years, yet I could recognize it as well as my own name. There was an inherent identification of my own soul within every word, each tone of the language forming melodies I found myself recognizing. Some of the faster bits flew past me, but I clung to what I could understand, attempting to find comfort where I could.

I stopped, then admired the calm beyond the concrete and metal of the airport. A mountain, outlined behind a pane of fog in the distance. The ocean, still as a painting from afar, and yet I knew it was dancing. My mother had always said they were dancing.

Remember my son, do not be scared when it storms, for the sea and the sky are only dancing together instead of rehearsing alone.

The memory weighed me down as my trembling hands tightened around the handle of my suitcase and I turned on unsteady feet to exit the gate.

One step after the other. One breath after another. Even if memories played hide and seek behind every corner in the airport, I could do this. The same gate where the flight would always arrive, and where I would always leave. There were the same blue seats lined with gray plastic, places that used to be my playground. The small shop down the long corridor from the gate that was owned by the grumpy old man, who would ask where my manners were whenever I tried to buy small

packs of Hawthorne candy, who would then laugh low and gruff and slip me an extra pack nonetheless.

That little shop is gone now. The old man vanished from his station, replaced by another large chain store. Everything had changed since the last time I had been here, the last time I had taken the time to notice the change at least. Memories swirled around me, animating themselves with every step I took. Smaller versions of myself running...laughing. Then there I was: taller and curled up with my head in my mother's lap. Awkward bones jostled against the uncomfortable angles of the airport seats. I kept walking with voices surrounding me. Old ones from my memories and newer ones. Voices tinged with accents that spoke of home. Excited voices asking, tired voices replying; all fading as I walked past them all.

Customs went smoothly, easily. Words spilling from my mouth like a script of a badly written play. A dialogue I could not seem to bring myself to care for. She asked, I answered, until the final line when the customs officer asked what the purpose of my journey was.

"I'm here to see my parents," I answered. These were words that I registered as mine and yet it felt like a foreign body, a part that I wanted to tear away and abandon. To run into the comforting words of my mother when she would answer the officers, but I was no longer a child, and my mother was not here.

Freedom greeted me after I walked through a series of metallic corridors. Home. A place I no longer recognized, and yet, the lost pieces of my puzzle began to appear. I walked with the crowd to the place I knew no one was waiting. But as I left the terminal, I still scanned the excited faces with a childish hope that I knew would not be fulfilled. Everyone was watching for someone, smiling with empty trolleys prepared to pick up suitcase after suitcase, to bring someone they loved home. I couldn't help but feel out of place with my lone suitcase- a measly carry on- hastily thrown together in my rush to leave.

I lingered on the sight of a family reunion, a young

boy clutching an older man like a lifeline, an older couple dotting on the man as he held his brother close. I continued on my journey, my suitcase trailing behind me. Just one step and then another, I repeated in my mind. I could take the memories. I could handle the guilt. The familiar smell of hot soup wafted through my senses as I continued to walk through the airport, my feet stepping onto another escalator, as more voices swirled around me. Lost bits of conversation I managed to collect.

“You’ve lost weight. Don’t worry you’ll have plenty to eat at home.”

“Oh look at you now, you’re so tall. And you look so much like your father!”

“I missed you.”

As the escalator continued to rise, the smell became stronger, and a familiar sight appeared before my eyes. A food stall, less of a stall and more of a makeshift restaurant, a sectioned sanctuary against the entropy of the airport. I sighed as I stepped off the escalator, my empty stomach making itself known as I checked the watch on my wrist.

8:34

It was still plenty early in the morning and my mother’s voice rang clear in my ears, so clear that I had to remind myself that she would not be there when I turned around...

Have something warm after such a long flight. Your body must be tired, you’ll get sick. Have something warm my son, it’s good for you.

With a sigh and a heavy heart, I approached the entrance.

“How many?” the host asked.

“One. Just one.” I replied, the words metallic on my tongue as I went off script. After all, my mother had always said two or three. The host smiled at me, that artificial customer service smile that spoke of far too many early mornings and far too little pay. But nevertheless, he grabbed a menu and led me to my seat; it was a small table with two chairs tucked away in the corner. Sitting there, I saw the movement of the airport on full display.

“Anything else to drink?” he asked while placing two teapots onto the table. I paused, the request for an

iced coffee on the tip of my tongue, but the voice of my mother rang once more and an ingrained desire for comfort washed over me.

“Do you have any sweet soy milk?”

“Hot or cold?”

“Hot.”

He nodded in response and left. I eyed the two teapots on the table, removing the lids off both of them. One was tea, the other hot water, and in the back of my mind another piece of the puzzle slid into place. The weight on my chest grew heavier as I poured hot water into my teacup, swirling it before pouring it into the large glass bowl on the table. I did the same to the small bowl. Then I placed my chopsticks and soup spoon into the large glass bowl and poured the hot water directly onto it.

It had always been my mother who had washed the utensils as I had been too young. Far too concerned with my own childish fantasies to understand the traditions I had been reared by. Of course, I had picked up the important ones. Rules that needed to be followed, ones that seemed so natural and simple when I was younger. I felt like an imposter in my own skin, an actor forgetting lines in front of an invisible audience. I poured the tea into the teacup, realising that I had never done that for my parents before. It had always been my mother filling my father’s cup first, then mine, and lastly her own.

Before I could lament over my own guilt, a waitress approached and placed a clear glass of soy milk on the table. I spoke, surprised by the steadiness in my voice as I told her I was ready to order. I had not looked at the menu, but there was no need to. The dish was a tradition, a small one, but a tradition nonetheless and I could not forget that. I found my mouth mimicking the soft tones of my mother’s within my mind.

“A bowl of century egg and pork congee please.”

The server nodded and with that she left, taking the large glass bowl with her. She disappeared behind a set of swinging doors. I resumed my quiet observation of the airport. There were fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, rumpled clothes and tired smiles. I was reminded of people who had not crossed my mind in years; people that I used to see around the airport and I wondered where they were now. The auntie that my mom had made friends with

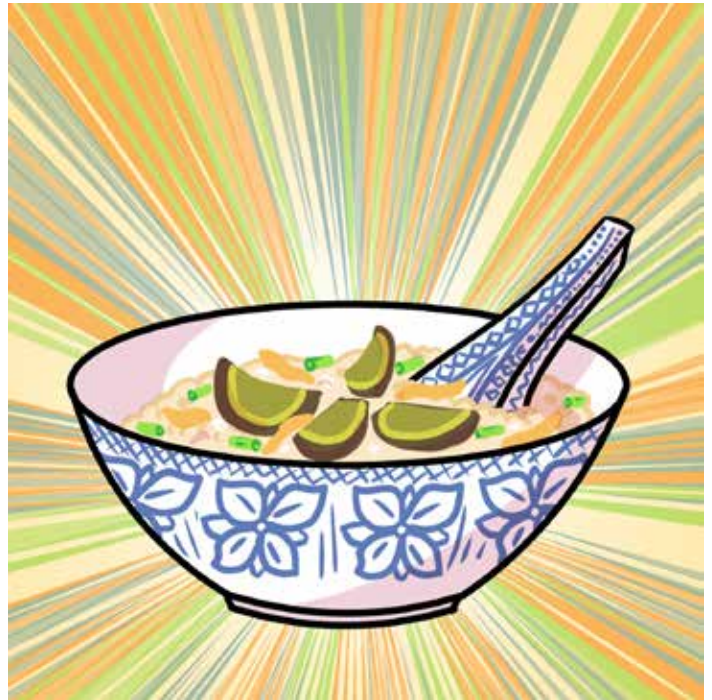
on the flight who had given me a lemon candy when I felt like my ears would explode. The old businessman that my mother and I would see every few years whenever his visit home coincided with ours. I never knew his name, but I still remembered how his eyes would light up whenever we recognized each other. His smile when I would wave, a grin spread wide on my face.

And then I saw them. Hidden between the families tired from travelling, behind the couples that leaned against each other for a moment of peace. I had never noticed them before, the silent ones, the ones that always travelled alone with nowhere to belong and nowhere to go. The ones that I had suddenly found myself stranded amongst; a strange kind of kinship formed between strangers. The last time I had travelled I had only one place in mind with my family waiting for me at the departure gate. Now I was alone. My usual excitement coiled tight and suffocated by the permanent weight that had settled upon my chest. The loneliness that used to be so easily clouded by my mother's incessant chatter growing louder with every passing second. I found the quiet in front of me far too loud; the empty seat a red pen mark scratching on my memories.

My memories vanished as they dissolved into the steam of the congee that was placed in front of me. *Was the bowl smaller than I remembered?* I remember that whenever my mother had ordered it, it had taken both of us to finish the bowl. Or was that just another silent thing that my mother had done? Allowing me to eat before her so I was full before she ate the rest. I spooned some into my own bowl, the eggs forming dark crescent moons against the cloudiness of the congee. The tang of the eggs mixed with the savouriness of the pork filled my nose. It pulled a trigger within my mind as I carefully scraped off the top layer, my mouth blowing onto it. The low tones of my Father's voice rang in my mind.

Of course it's hot if you eat it just like that, it just came out of the pot. Here, just scrape off the top layer, here like this, with your spoon. Like that! Now blow, 1, 2, and eat. See, it's not hot anymore! Now let's eat!

My eyes closed in bliss as I focused on the flavour. The congee warmed a part of me that had gone cold for a long time; another piece settled into its rightful



place. Finally, I grasped the childish part of me that begged, the one that I had been neglecting for so long. And I indulged it. The light thud of a small plate being set on the table broke me from my salvation as I turned my gaze to an auntie looking at me. A sad smile stretched across her face.

"I didn't order this." I told her, examining the golden chunks of cut up youtiao as if they could tell me the answer.

"Who can have congee without youtiao?" Her answer was simple and yet it left me still. My thanks were forgotten as I watched her retreating figure walk back to the double swinging doors of the kitchen.

I stared at the golden pastry, realising that I had completely forgotten to order it. My mother never ordered it at the airport. *Too oily, too heavy*, she had always said. It was a comfort, one reserved for quiet Sunday mornings and busy streets, one that I craved more than anything. So I grabbed a piece, placing it onto my spoon as I scraped the top of the congee once more, lifting it to my mouth. I felt the crunch, hearing the crackle as my early weekend mornings at home made themselves known once more. When my mother would rise up early to make congee and my father would leave early to buy youtiao and fresh soy milk from the vendor down the street before she sold out for the day. Those were always my favourite mornings: when my mother would

indulge me, knowing how much I loved her congee.

The congee here was good, it always had been. But, it would never be my mother's. Hers was a recipe I had neglected to learn in my desperation to leave our town. To leave the comfort that my parents had shaped to be their own; one that I had once found suffocating. But today it was enough. It had to be.

Time passed faster as I ate the congee and the youtiao, the soy milk draining from its glass. Before I knew it I was standing, my feet moving towards the till as I dragged my suitcase behind me. She appeared again when I pulled out my wallet to pay. The lady who had brought me youtiao.

"Thank you." I managed to say. Grateful that she had slid another piece back into its place.

"Oh it was nothing, there was this kid that seemed so lonely that this old lady couldn't just stand there and do nothing. Don't worry about the cost, it must be so hard being young these days." I gave her a smile, the first one I had cracked since arriving back home. But I felt my chest sink again as the faint illusion of comfort dissolved faster than I could grasp onto it, leaving my heart cold once more.

I wondered if the lady knew my mother, if she was pitying me for them. After all, my mother had been too sociable for her own good, having the incredible ability to make conversation with whoever sat next to her. My father had always hoped that I would inherit that trait of hers but alas I was as socially inept as he was. *Like two rocks*, my mother would always say. But she had loved us both the same with a heart far too big to fit her body.

I stepped out of the airport, the humid air suffocating and sticky as I followed the crowd to the buses. I heard the frantically paced speech of those around me as I attempted to keep up. I walked past the panicking families as they attempted to usher their children onto the buses one by one. I walked past them all. When it had been me and my mother, we had always headed first to the buses as there was one that could take us home to our tiny neighbourhood. But today that was not the destination I needed to go. There was a stop I had to make first.

I walked past all the bright colours one step after the other, one breath after the other. Until, finally, I reached the red and green road. I waved to one of the

drivers in the taxi and asked if he was taking passengers. He waved me in, his hand hitting the familiar knob that started the fare counter. His gruff voice asked me where I was heading.

I rummaged through my bag for the tiny slip of paper that one of the flight attendants on the plane had been nice enough to write out for me. Her neat penmanship is far more legible than it would have been with my childish scrawl. I could speak the language plenty but writing and reading was a whole different matter. The characters were ones I could no longer name but I knew the destination all the same. I passed it to the driver without a word. He paused to read the words before nodding solemnly, flipping down the visor as he began to drive.

The drive was silent, somber almost. I stared out the window, the sky a clear blue as the world awoke and began their day. Buildings were crowded, people roamed the streets, large glass display windows, fresh fruit spilling out in crates from small street markets, words flashing past me as we drove. Everything was so familiar and yet unrecognizable. A sense of warm comfort coupled with the realization that *I no longer belonged here*.

I asked the driver quietly if we could stop by a flower shop on our way, stating that I would pay him for the wait and he responded with a hum. He took a left and drove for another few minutes before we stopped in front of a shop. It looked like it was overflowing with colour, leaves and petals spilling out onto the sidewalk. He told me roughly to go and that he would not charge me for the wait. But he added that if I was not done in ten minutes, he would take my luggage out of the trunk and leave me behind. I knew he didn't really mean it but a small smile made its way to my face nonetheless.

I walked into the flower shop with that same smile, a man inside greeting me asking if I knew what I was looking for.

"I'd like a bouquet please. For my parents. It's been too long since I've last seen them," I replied.

He smiled at me and began pulling out flowers of all types of colours. He clipped and tied them together, explaining the meaning behind each one: *love. Family*. He glanced at me after each explanation, silently asking for my approval but I continued to nod as he placed flower



over flower onto a sheet of paper. After all, I had only one request.

“Can you include that one?” I asked, my hand pointing to the white ruffles of the chrysanthemum. I watched his smile falter when he nodded. He finished quickly after that, tying a silk white bow around the bouquet. He rang me up quickly, a price appearing that I quickly paid for with cash before thanking him with a nod. I returned to the cab with the flowers cradled in my arms.

I looked out the window. Busy streets and buildings that seemed to touch the sky greeted my eyes. They wavered as we drove on. Apartment complexes became shorter as they gave way to greenery, and the noise of the city began to fade as we reached our final destination: A large patch of greenery hidden behind large stone gates. The driver stopped by the entrance, his hand clicking the counter as he named his price. I handed him a wad of cash before stepping out, my hands trembling around the bouquet, careful not to ruin the bow that the florist had so meticulously tied for me. I stood for a moment as the driver grabbed my suitcase from the trunk. I bowed my head quickly, thanking him before he waved me off and drove away.

I approached the gates. The large stone gates gave way to a wide expanse of greenery that seemed to greet me with every step I took, every breath I took. Flowers

sprouted naturally as grass grew long and untrimmed except for some pathways that had been trampled into place. It was a sanctuary of life in the outskirts of a concrete city. But there was no time to admire the greenery or smell the freshness of the dew, not when I had already made them wait. So I kept walking, following the directions that my aunt had given me. Take the road to the left, all the way to the end, until I reached a small hill on the right; the one with the small tree that oversaw the sea. *They’ll be waiting for you there*, she had said with a half-hearted smile. That smile had remained as she asked if I wanted her to pick me up at the airport, the same smile that had disappeared when I told her no. I knew she was trying to comfort me, and I was thankful. But I needed to do this alone.

So I continued walking, passing rows of greenery and stones, until finally I reached the hill. The hill of my ancestors, of my family. And there they were. Next to a thin apple tree, one I knew had been planted in their honour, sat a large black stone, marking the place where my parents were. Photographs I knew far too well staring back at me from where they had been set into the stone. My father smiling on the left, my mother shining on the right. Their names carved below them; family names etched next to their smiling faces. My aunt told me they had been buried together, and I was glad. I should be glad. Glad that they weren’t alone, glad that they had each other, but all I could do was let the weight on my chest win as the photographs bore into me, fragments of the family I had once known. The family I loved. And I gently placed the bouquet in front of the black stone as I let the weight finally sink me down to my knees. My hands crumpled the thin paper of the bouquet; the bow coming undone as I bowed my head.

“I’m sorry. I took too long.”

Hallmark of Life

Toni

No matter where you go I'll always remember
Watching TV on those cold nights in December
We watched those movies that all go the same
She returns home from the big city life to find all has changed
She must find a way to save her family's business
And it must be done fast before it is Christmas
She finds a friend from the past who has never left town
Against all odds they fall in love
Forgetting her partner for this man from above
They work hard to save business
All is happy and well until the night before Christmas
Suddenly she is faced with a tough decision
When her two worlds collide like a bad car collision
Yet in the end all ends off well
She falls back in love with her home
She finds her true love and we hear wedding bells
These are the days I remember the most
We forget our lives and let go of our ghosts
For a view winter nights in the cold of December
Life was simple with our holiday protector
With life filled with chaos
We are happy to watch without blame
Those holiday movies that all go the same





A Sip of Serenity in Nature
by ASMAA
Photography

As we conclude each nature therapy walk guided by Ken, we initiate our simple yet profoundly meaningful tradition by expressing gratitude to nature with a cup of tea offered to the earth. Sipping with appreciation, we sense the enduring embrace of nature in our hearts. Thank you, Ken.

Memories of Flanders Field
by CAROLYN BUCKLES
Painting

I grew up reciting John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" in school. For me, it carries special meaning, because of my grandfather, who was born in the early 1900s and fought in both WW1 and WW2, signing up when he was only 15. He came home with a piece of shrapnel in his head, but he was there for me in the '60s-80s. My dad graduated in engineering at the University of Alberta during the war and served in Oshawa Ontario at Camp X as a pilot officer training pilots to fly Lancasters over Germany. Image inspired by the Art Sherpa.



Every Night Sky is Beautiful

Nolan Long

The snow finally begins to fall
on that vacant morning;
sticky and wet,
I think of how we ran through the rain together,
and I long to run through the falling snow with you.

The ornament slips from my fingers
and explodes on the ground,
its shards scattering
like a plateau of stars.

Stars, the one thing we have in common,
almost unchanging across the world.
We share every night sky,
and every night sky is beautiful.

And as I sweep up the pieces,
those little glass stars
into the dustpan,
my back aches.
We're growing up,
but I will wait for you.



Blue Sky, or What it Means to Be Saskatchewan: a Requiem and an Awakening

Rob Procyk

The other day, as I was impatiently waiting in the Tim Horton's Drive Thru for my coffee, I glanced at the clock in my dashboard and noticed that it was a few minutes past noon. Immediately, my index finger went absentmindedly to the radio dial, where it knew by rote to touch the farthest button on the left to switch the radio station from the soothing sounds of crystal-clear XM satellite radio to the crackly, tin can scratchy cacophony of the AM dial. After so many years, changing the radio dial a little after 12:00 PM to CBC 540 has become an act of muscle memory. One could say I am nothing more than a creature of habit, and they wouldn't be wrong. However, I am a creature of habit and what I like to listen to whilst multitasking on my noon hour is CBC Saskatchewan's *Blue Sky*.

Blue Sky is the last real phone-in show in the province where folks from all backgrounds and walks of life can call and be heard. *Blue Sky* is the program where, no matter where you are from in the province, you can listen at noon each weekday to as they tackle topics from suicide to succulents. Sure, there's always John Gormley on the Saskatchewan Party Network, hidden under the probable holding company 650 CKOM, but unlike the Gormley Show, on *Blue Sky* anything goes, regardless of where folks land on the political spectrum.

On this particular day, I was hoping for the topic to be something lighthearted like why kittens were so darn cute. Instead, I was shocked to hear that the topic was goodbye. Long-time *Blue Sky* host Garth Materie announced his retirement from the program and that this would be his last day. Love him or not, Garth has steered the *Blue Sky* ship for over fifteen years, and has become a modern institution of sorts to the legion of CBC Saskatchewan radio devotees. However, as an aging Gen X'er who has spent half a century feasting on a diet of sugars, saccharine, and aspartame, and taking endless proverbial shots to the head from

movies, music, stimulants, sedatives, Drakkar Noir, and enough pistachio red dye number 9 to choke a horse, I have no real attention span nor lasting emotions. Thus, I quickly bid Garth adieu and paid attention to see who Saskatchewan's new David Lee Roth was going to be.

It turns out that Leisha Grebinski has become our Sammy Hagar, and really, I was fine with that choice. I can get used to almost anything, and even if I didn't initially connect with her style, I'd just think of England and keep on until I saw the light. Honestly, I was just happy that the show was continuing, in this world of "Defund the CBC" and all that right wing hogwash. However, as I listened to Garth's goodbye, I noticed that the message regarding the program going forward was alarmingly confusing. There was mention of the show continuing for a few weeks and then, with a half-hearted zest that even Helen Keller could see through, the show's producer told us about the exciting new podcast they were going to maybe morph the program into. This vagueness meant to me that in all likelihood, this was just a stall tactic to keep the crazies with a sack full of opinions quiet until the show died a prolonged death and we had yet one more podcast to be added to some damned playlist nobody will ever play.

Since then, I have been silently stewing on the possible loss of *Blue Sky* as we know it. I haven't dared convey my sadness out loud to anybody, because I know I would be assaulted with taunts of "You're so old! Change is good! Phone in nay! Podcasts yay!" While I have consciously practiced a life devoted to non-violence and as I also cannot kick my leg higher than perhaps the height of a jackrabbit, I'd make a valiant effort to kick these dissenters in the stomach. Why do I care so much about a call-in radio show on AM radio? Previously, I wouldn't have been able to tell you. However, I now see that *Blue Sky* represents one of the last vestiges of what makes this place I have come to know and love *Saskatchewan*. Every place

has its own quirky aura and vibe, and the tangible and intangible things that make them unique. *Blue Sky* is one of the last traditions that embody exactly who the people of Saskatchewan are at heart. The fact that I, of all people, are pledging my devotion to both *Blue Sky* and the Saskatchewan zeitgeist will have my parents rolling over in their graves. Let's blame the seismic graveyard activity on fracking for the moment and let me plead for the importance of the Saskatchewan Tradition.

How is the Saskatchewan zeitgeist captured in a radio program? Let me explain in overarching and recklessly sweeping terms. It is hard to find the reason that makes us different, but the people of Saskatchewan have something different in our auras that makes us stand out from other Canadians. Those who came to make their homes in Saskatchewan have leached something from the pre-Round-Up Ready soil that ultimately remains in our plasma and our souls and set us apart from other settlers. You do not find a population that appears heterogeneous, yet ultimately shares an invisible thread that ties us together. I don't know if it's the collective trauma from homesteader days mixed with the saint-like collective caring, kindness, and fellowship from Tommy Douglas that spray-painted our psyches like a John Paul Basquiat brick wall, but to say you're from Saskatchewan means something.

Up until recently, saying you are from Saskatchewan meant many different things, from the quirky to the profound. If you were from Saskatchewan, you slowed down and veered to the shoulder of the road to let someone pass you on the highway, and the person passing gave the driver a kindly wave of the index finger in thanks. It meant that if someone was stranded by the side of the road that they would be picked up and taken to the nearest service station. It meant that if you got an apple while trick-or-treating, you would smash it to the ground because that is a lame Halloween treat, not because you believed it to be poisoned or stuffed with razor blades. At one time, your children would get free dental work and everyone's prescription drugs cost less than a pack of cigarettes. Speaking of cigarettes, they came in packs of 25, not 20 like in lesser provinces, and you could always enjoy a cold Coca-Cola in a glass bottle, while the rest of the country polluted

the world with plastic. If you were ailing, some good-hearted person would drop off a "shipwreck casserole" on your doorstep to feed your family. If you or a loved one was *really* ailing, the good folks from every damned town with a grain elevator would gather their Kinsmen and their Kinettes and Royal Purple and everyone from ages 5 to 105 would donate to chili lunches and bake sales and dress-down days to collect money for Telemiracle, and then challenge their comrades across the province to match their donations. The Telemiracle Village raised the child. For sure, we were a sitting duck for the creation of *Corner Gas*, which celebrated our charming, yokel vibe.

While I now wholeheartedly wear the scent of Saskatchewan with pride, I was not always ready to be an ambassador for the goodness of this province. Indeed, to say I was a reluctant immigrant to Saskatchewan is an understatement. I arrived in Prince Albert in October 1981 because my father, who was an RCMP Officer, was given a promotion that he felt was too good to refuse. Until then, we were living in Chilliwack, British Columbia, the only home I knew from the age of two. My older siblings, friends, outdoor cat, and the mountains that I loved that somehow always wrapped their metaphorical arms around me and calmed the severely anxious child I was just by looking eastward, were all suddenly a world away. I was in sixth grade, almost twelve years old, and traumatized that my life was completely uprooted. Sure, I had visited Saskatchewan many times up to that point of landing, but those trips were always in the summer, full of laughter, weddings, anniversaries, and other celebrations big and small. However, the old adage "a nice to visit but" couldn't have rung truer for me. In addition to my life suddenly going topsy-turvy, I felt like a traveller in a strange land, not understanding the customs of the people.

Upon arrival, I learned that things were done a little differently in Saskatchewan. I know it's low hanging fruit to pick on poor Vi-Co so I won't, but I seriously had no idea what Vi-Co meant on a restaurant menu. It sounded about as crazy as the Clampett's calling a swimming pool a cement pond, and I admit I still refuse to say Vi-Co. It was even weirder my first week of school, when we would be dismissed at lunchtime for "dinner." "Dinner is at supper time, you fools," I would



have replied the first few times I had heard the term used so strangely, if I weren't terrified of being beaten up by these Saskatchewan toughs that were my new classmates.

"Dinner" was almost as perplexing as the secret world of "purple gas." Whenever we would visit various family friends on their farms across the province, there would at some point be covert whispers happening across the farm table about gassing up our vehicle with the purple gas. This was always discussed in veiled words, and I was always shushed when I asked what that meant and the subject was quickly changed with knowing glances, so soon enough I became adept at pretending I was absorbed in my current library book and not listening to the conversation to figure out what was really going on.

Considering this secrecy, what I eventually sussed out of the matter was that purple gas was something that only farmers could legally use. Thus, every time we'd leave to head to our next destination, I was fit to be tied with an imminent sense of both dread and diarrhea, sure that we would be pulled over in a high-profile sting, with police lights flashing and my entire family standing by the sides of the road with our hands up, guns aimed at our backs, while an officer inserted a magical dipstick (in my mind, it would look like a unicorn's horn) into our gas tank and, upon removal,

pulled out a stick not only covered in all shades of fluorescent purple, but enveloped as well in a purple-hued cloud of mist, not unlike the aura that surrounded Barbara Eden every time she left her magical bottle on *I Dream of Jeannie*. Then, I imagined, my parents would be whisked away to do hard time, while I was sent to the Orange Home for Boys in Indian Head, forced to do hard labour that was alien to my delicate body, until I quietly died on a half-dug hill of potatoes.

While I was eventually somewhat armed with the rudimentary perplexities of both Vi-Co and the purple gas, I nevertheless was not prepared for the state of the media in Saskatchewan. I arrived from a place in the lower mainland where, from earliest memory, I was bombarded by American and "big city" media. Our television dial led off with the four big American alphabet networks, along with a few independent stations, a couple UHF stations, and, finally, as an afterthought, the two requisite Canadian networks. As a semi-typical family of the 1970s and 1980s, I grew up knowing that the television was something you turned on even before the coffee pot in the mornings and turned off in the evening after adjusting the thermostat before bed.

Imagine my shock at learning that cable television in my new city meant CBC-TV, CTV-TV, and the dreaded French channel. To make this even more of a nightmare, these stations went off the air around midnight and did not return to the airwaves until morning. Stranger still, the sign off and sign on would be preceded by the signing of "O Canada" and "God Save the Queen" like some sort of reform school assembly. Gone were the early morning "Frisky Frolics" cartoons to eat sugar cereal in front of every morning before school or catching the latest celebrity news on the sleek and sexy Good Morning America. Indeed, these calming touchstones were replaced with the sterile and unabashedly unsexy Canada A.M. Instead of the excitement of GMA where each week we were given fashion news and tips by the likes of Gloria Vanderbilt, Diana Vreeland, and Diane Von Furstenberg, and shown the latest in haute cuisine cooked by the latest celebrity chefs such as Wolfgang Puck and Paul Prudhomme, who introduced our mothers to Beef Wellington and Seafood Newberg, Canada A.M. was more pragmatic in nature. Instead,

the Canadian celebrities ranged from Madame Benoit to Salome Bey, perfectly wonderful women, but two who lacked the razzle dazzle of popular culture. They were more the type you wouldn't notice walking down the aisles of the local O.K. Economy.

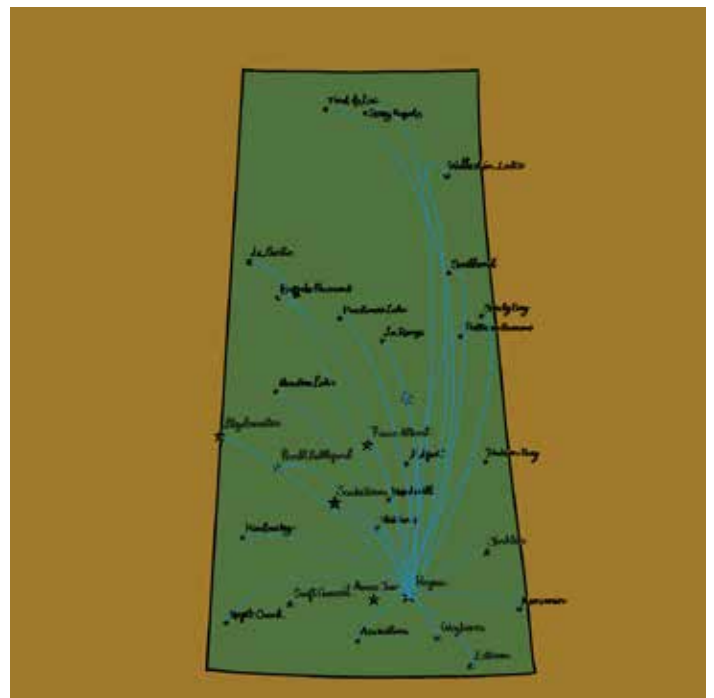
Because the programming was lacking on the national scale, our provincial affiliates provided as much local content as they could, and, for better or for worse, we had our own celebrities. We watched Greg Barnsely on the weather each night, telling us how cold it was in Cambridge Bay and Baker Lake. Every summer morning and school sick day, I waited to see what local talent Carol Blenkin would have on her 11 o'clock show. I especially loved when the guest was Monty Zarey, the plant lady, because she smoked on camera and that was badass. Easten Wayman fainted on air one day during the crop report and had all of us in a tizzy. And for entertainment and our gambling fix, nobody could call TV Bingo like Jack Cennon. In short, we had our own celebrities, all of whom shared the Saskatchewan vibe and who could have been your aunt, uncle, neighbour, or friend.

Being forced to watch 12 hours of local Canadian television a day, I also noticed that the commercials were different in Saskatchewan. Instead of pop culture touchstones such as Life Cereal's Mikey who "hates everything" and the horrifyingly racist "ancient Chinese Secret" Calgon commercials that an entire generation grew up with, in Saskatchewan the commercials were entirely locally made and peppered with local joie de vivre. It was on these crudely crafted vignettes that local celebrities were created and made infamous. Ask anyone on coffee row in Saskatchewan, and they will still be able to identify the father/son duo from Sherwood Chev Olds, hum the jingle for Venice House restaurants across the province, and belt out the choruses for the various city theme songs: "Melfort, the city of northern lights", "Tisdale, the land of rape and honey", "Let's all go to Kinistino"... (you get the picture). I am sure even the Blaine Lake hermit who lived the cave by the side of the road knew those songs.

In those days, radio also brought the people of Saskatchewan together. Moose Jaw's 800 CHAB played the hits and had the cool round yellow car decals just like Vancouver's 14 CFUN and Calgary's XL radio, and they dominated that market until CKOM moved

down the dial to 650 and morphed for a bit into a superstation of hits. My mother played the radio in the early morning and switched between the talk show on 620 CKCK and Denny Carr on 600 CFQC Radio. You also could not interrupt her at 11:30, when it was "Tradio" on Swift Current's 570 A.M. Even though we were a four-hour drive from Swift Current, it was always fun to hear what people were selling, and Tradio was followed by the Hospital Report, where we would be told that folks such as Gladys So-and-So was resting comfortably in hospital. P.A.'s *The Wake-Up Shake Up Show* had no trouble finding its local audience in the same time slot that the kids styled their hair to *Brent and Penny in the Morning*.

What does any of this trip down memory lane have to do with *Blue Sky*? Since those days, the wheels on the bus have continued to go round and round, and many things have changed in our province and in our times. Television channels, radio stations, newspapers, and online communities are available to us at the click of a button. The freedom of choice means that the 13 year olds of the province are no longer forced to watch Kevin Hursh's Farmgate. But despite all of the changes in technology, *Blue Sky* persists and thrives. Each day, people from Assiniboia to Zennon Park call in and share their wisdom on every topic imaginable, from safe consumption sites to the best Fall Suppers in the



province.

My favourite regular caller to *Blue Sky* is, hands down, Velda from Prince Albert. I don't know much about Velda, but what she says always catches my interest. With a voice that is both deep and throaty, yet also as delicate and translucent as crepe paper, Velda can hold court on any topic. However, she especially shines when the topic swings to "Birdline" and "All About Soup." Velda's backyard hosts birds of all makes and models, from springtime's fluffy-backed tit-babbler to autumn's red-footed booby. Okay, maybe the birds she sees are more along the lines of robins and blue jays, but I know her radio persona enough to know that in her heart of hearts, she would enjoy a little poetic license. I bet anything she'd laugh and call me a veritable tease with that one - if I actually knew her, of course.

Velda is also skilled in the kitchen, and I have been known to quiet the passengers in my vehicle with a stern "Shhhhhh" whenever Velda comes on to talk soups. "Go on, QUEEN", I exclaim to the hostages in my back seat, while we learn about what bones to boil, and for how long, in order to make a tureen of borscht like Mama used to make. Even though some of what she says may be dubious, such as boiling soup bones in vinegar overnight to increase the calcium content of the soup, it is no faultier advice than your mother telling you to put socks on when it's windy so you won't catch a cold: a scientific fallacy, but steeped in love.

I always assumed that Velda needed *Blue Sky* as an outlet of some sort. In my mind, it was her way of reaching out to strangers who felt like family and sharing what she sees and knows with this motley group of listeners. "Who the hell will Velda call now when a dickcissel or a perplexing scrubwren swoop in to feast on her gooseberries," I asked myself once the shock of the upcoming changes started to wear off. "The Velda's of this province need *Blue Sky*."

I've come to realize, however, that not only I am Velda, but we ALL are Velda in some way. The reason Saskatchewan is strong is because of the connection the people have to the land and to each other. This connection is complicated and often contentious, but at the very heart of it is the fact that we are connected because we have built a foundation where it is for our greater good to connect. In a world where freedom

of choice fragments us, the heart of this province still binds to the marrow. But I am not sure how much longer we have until this unique connection to each other dissipates. Gone are the grain elevators and many towns are nothing more than commemorative plaques. Nobody pulls over to let someone pass, and it is downright crazy to stop for a stranger at the side of the road. Our local news outlets and media have gone "big city", and the three radio stations in my city have the majority of their on-air talent broadcasting out of Kelowna and selling their fake localness to 14 markets across the country. The foundation of caring Tommy Douglas laid down for us has all but crumbled to dust, and the small "c" progressive conservatism of Diefenbaker is unrecognizable from the Scott Moe "Let's Veer Far Right and Care for Nobody" agenda. I hardly recognize my Saskatchewan anymore. But the one thing I can count on is *Blue Sky*, where I can hear the voices of Saskatchewan's people talking, arguing, listening, and connecting. We aren't going to connect in a podcast, no matter what the 27-year-old producer thinks. We want real people, from the places we live, talking in real time, keeping that Saskatchewan connection alive.

I don't know what will ultimately happen with *Blue Sky*, but one blessing I can take away from this current uncertainty about the program is that I've realized that I now have Saskatchewan forever in my spirit and spilling out of my senses. To borrow from Michael Ondaatje, I am Saskatchewan's son. Smell me.

Always Been Here - A Dance in Colour
by LIAM
Digital Art

The piece is based on some traditional costume for powwow, my theme specifically is a two-spirit person dancing in a ribbon dress. I found that not only did I find my first powwow moving, but the inclusion of two-spirit people in the celebration was beautiful to see, especially as a trans person.



For Me

Kim Baquiran

Everything is the same.

The sun reflects its rays on the shiny ornaments,
which causes bursts of light to dance up and down on the walls.

The same tree from when I was six stands proudly,
Its lights flickering on and off from blue, red, yellow, and pink.
My cousins and sister are squealing as they parade their newfangled valuables

Around each other, in circles, cheering and giggling as they
Run their hands up and down the aluminum casing and glass screens of their newfound prized possessions.
I look down at the little box before me, my mother filming me, my father right beside her, both grinning down at
the neatly-wrapped seven-by-four cube in my hands.

I unravel the bows and ribbons, unwrap the carefully folded paper, and undo the lid on the box to be greeted by a
bright, sleek, modern, new phone,
All for me.

I look up at my parents, and I see them looking down at me.
I see them looking down at me. I see them looking down at me.
I see the dark circles tinting the skin under my mother's eyes,
caused by her long nights in the hospital,
struggling and sorrowfully sacrificing her body and time
All for me.

I see her tired, thin, sickly, aging hands.
They are another sign of her loss of life,
After years of caring for those who would shortly lose theirs.
I think of her twelve-hour shifts alone in her unit,
Always anxious anticipating the next time another unprovoked series of medical affairs
Would call for her attention.
She lives her life in inducing apprehension,
All for me.

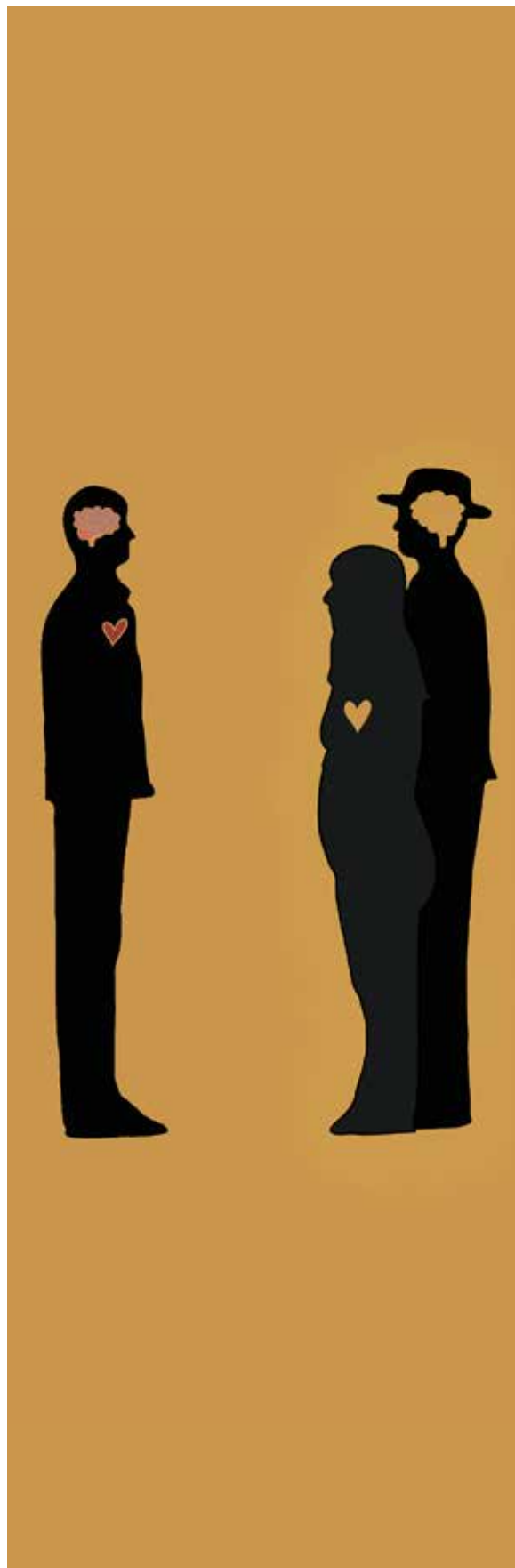
I see the wrinkles creased into my father's skin
As he smiles down at me, warmth etched into his grin.
I think of how the man I see now
Is a stark difference from the one I hear
Stomping and muttering sour somethings to himself
At 4am in the morning before he would have to leave for work,
To slave away thirteen hours of brutal labor,
All for me.

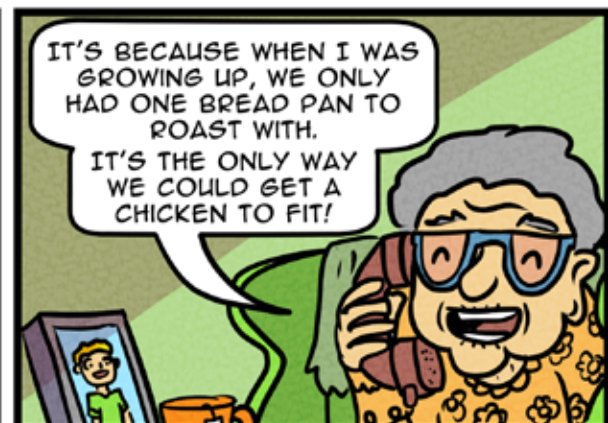
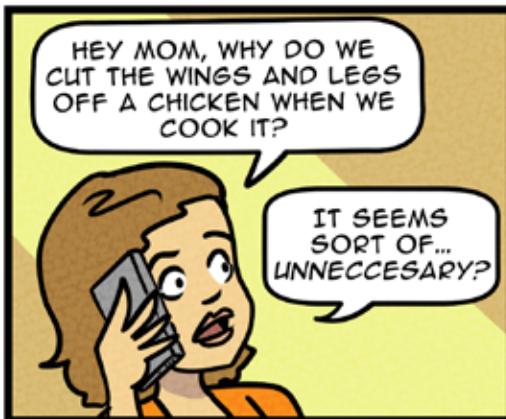
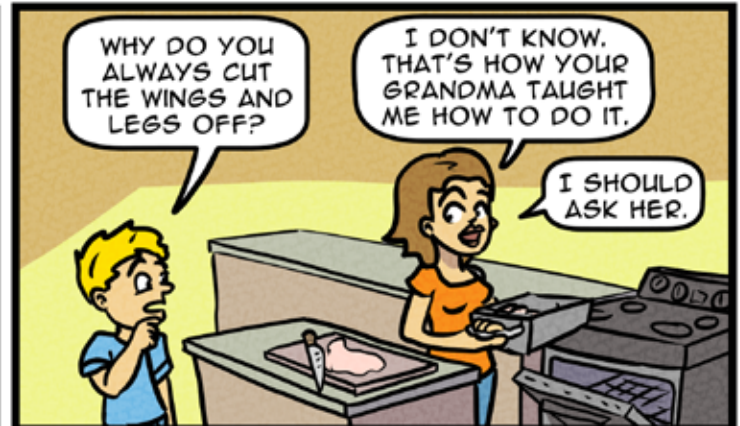
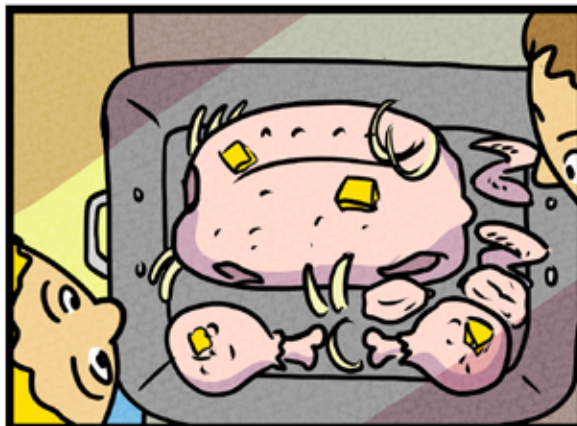
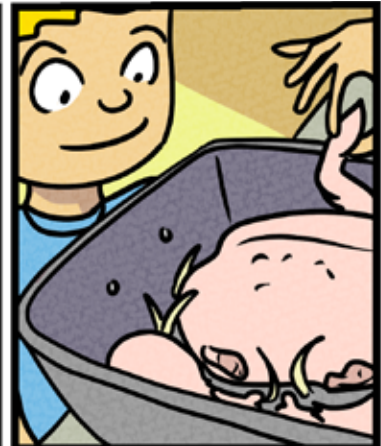
I think of how damaged his lungs and heart are,
After years of working with processed chemicals
And unnamed particles,
And unknown substances,

And undefinable gasses,
Weeks, months, and years spent
Risking his health,
All for me.

Nothing changes throughout the year,
And nothing changes during Christmas.
Because every year, for another full cycle,
My parents will battle all of the
Closed doors, dark corridors, and their
Deepest, closeted distresses,
Just to deliver to me my heart's content.
Their Christmas tradition is love,
And their love is endurance.
And that is dedicated
All for me.

I thank them, reach under the tree, and pull two boxes out,
One for each.
“For you.”





ROB SHAUF DEC 2003

“A Sip of Serenity in Nature”

Asmaa (she/her) is a graduate student in the College of Dentistry at the University of Saskatchewan. She is a nature and mental health advocate who firmly believes in the therapeutic power of nature. She reflects her passion as a nature photographer, capturing the incomparable beauty of nature through her lens.

“For me”

Kim Baquiran (she/her) is a first-year university student majoring in political studies with a minor in crime, justice, and law studies. She hopes to one day attend law school and fulfill her dream of becoming a human rights lawyer. In her spare time, Kim fulfills her responsibilities as an executive at USask's Filipino Students' Association, a volunteer at the Women's Centre, and is a part of STM's Service and Justice Project. She is a big foodie and enjoys shopping, spending time with her boyfriend and family, and of course, writing!

“Memories of Winters' Past” & “Memories of Flanders Field”

Carolyn Buckles is a senior student at the University of Saskatchewan majoring in psychology. She has been involved in art since high school. She has submitted art to various Facebook pages including Usask Community Art Group as well as SWAA (Saskatchewan Wildlife Artists Association) and has participated in their shows at Prairieland Park, Reflections in Nature, and the fall Saskatoon Exhibition. She currently has quite a few paintings on display at a local clinical practice.

“Christmas Morning in Norquay, Saskatchewan”

Dasha (she/her) is a Ph.D. candidate in history where she studies 20th century Canadian religion, gender/sex, and medical history. She is also completing a non-degree Arts Certificate through the University of Saskatchewan's Arts program. Much of her art is inspired by her historical research, her five cats, or the Ukrainian-

Canadian culture that she grew up in, particularly as it relates to identity, immigration, and rural Canadian prairie culture.

“Cake”

Eunice-Grace Domingo (any pronouns) is a graduate student in the University of Saskatchewan's English Masters program. She's writing her project paper on Japanese literature and media studies. You can follow her on [ladymacbeth.egd](https://www.instagram.com/ladymacbeth.egd) on Instagram.

“The Comb”

Erin is a fourth-year student pursuing a double major in biochemistry and biology, as well as an executive member of the Visual Artist Student Union on campus. She is of mixed Scottish, English, French and Cree ancestry, and is a proud member of Muskoday First Nation. When she isn't studying, she enjoys spending time outside hiking, skiing, backpacking, canoeing, and painting en plein air. She cares deeply about the beautiful landscapes of Saskatchewan and has been overjoyed to watch the re-establishment of bison populations on the prairies.

“Always Been Here - A Dance in Colour”

Liam (he/they) is a Métis transgender man. They are fluid with their gender expression from time to time and have lately been learning more about how multiple communities intersect, feeling strongly about bringing light to modern issues and highlighting the beauty of intersectionality. They are passionate about speaking through their art when they can. They wanted to showcase some of the experiences they have had—or seen/heard about—so that people can learn more about the community beyond the headlines. He feels that especially in this day and age, we see and hear so many bad things, but forget that there are always good things too and that with time, it will get better. Some of their work can be featured on the Instagram page [@_asherlux_](https://www.instagram.com/_asherlux_) and they plan to post more as time goes on.

“Every Night Sky is Beautiful”

Nolan Long is a third-year undergraduate student majoring in political studies and minoring in religion and culture at the University of Saskatchewan. His work has been published in various political and poetry outlets.

“Blue Sky, or What it Means to Be Saskatchewan: a Requiem and an Awakening”

Rob Procyk (he/him) is the Operational Lead of USASK Prince Albert Campus by day, and a prolific writer of personal essays by night. A lover of both music and humour, and never one to shy away from self-deprecation or poking fun of his quirks, he aims to relate to and disarm his readers. He is currently working on a collection of essays tentatively titled *Songs for Navel Gazing: A Playlist of Essays*.

“blame it on tradition”

mike sluchinski is a mature, part-time University of Saskatchewan student. His poetry has been published in *Freefall*, *in media res*, and *Grain* magazines, with more forthcoming and in the publication process.

“White Chrysanthemums”

Vivian Truong (she/her) is a first-year student in the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition currently pursuing a Doctor of Pharmacy. She has previously published work in a prior edition of *in medias res*. “White Chrysanthemums” is based on the author's fears about limited time, and being so involved in the busyness of day-to-day life that you begin to forget simple traditions, only realizing the loss of your identity when it's too late.

in medias res



"Memories of Winters' Past"
by CAROLYN BUCKLES

As a senior, memories of my childhood always make me happy. I spent many holidays visiting my grandparents on a farm in Winterburn, Alberta. I also enjoy reminiscing with the people from my youth. Painting was inspired by the Art Sherpa.

in medias res is a student-led liberal arts journal at St. Thomas More College that aims to publish content to reflect the identities of the campus community, its complexities and diversities. Our mission is to be a forum for community expression that showcases the high-quality work of artists in the University of Saskatchewan community.

Our title describes the experience of university life, in which we are always caught "in the middle of things."

* * *

What are you thinking about? What worries you? What moves you? We want to hear the artistic voices that make up our community and help put their work out into the world.

Our office is located in room 158 of St. Thomas More College in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. We acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.

As part of their mission statement, St. Thomas More College says that "the work of our college is not an end in itself, but must find application for the good of humanity." We ask all readers to consider how they benefit from settler institutions such as the university and how they can apply their learning not towards maintaining the status quo but instead towards change and meaningful reconciliation.