Doctoral student and CBC Canada Reads winner Joshua Whitehead sees Indigenous mental health through a new lens.

OUTLIERS AHEAD

Along with courageous and creative researchers, innovators and educators, Joshua is at the vanguard of redefining the future — with room for radical hope.

Teaching death with dignity  +  The psychedelic renaissance is here  +  Comic books vs. the coronavirus
Welcome

A publication for and about University of Calgary alumni, faculty, students, supporters and curious readers at large, Arch reflects and amplifies the innovation, creativity and relevance of our researchers, big thinkers and storytellers. Enjoy our first biannual print issue (and its accompanying playlist; scan the QR code above) and read us online at arch-magazine.ucalgary.ca.
The world is lucky to have these outlying, passionate minds to bring light to dark places.

I'm so proud to kick off this first issue with a column from academic-activist Dr. Malinda Smith (see next page), our new Vice Provost of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. She's leading the charge to stuff out systemic racism on campus and in our community.

My hope is that Arch (available online, and twice a year in print) will enlighten, entertain and otherwise positively disrupt any previously scheduled programming.

Thanks for reading — and for inspiring us to keep raising the bar.

Jacquie Moore
Senior Editor - Arch magazine
Joy and ambition find a way: students, faculty and alumni prove not even a pandemic can keep them down.

If being a ‘real man’ means expressing your feelings in a healthy way, then these guys are as authentic as it gets.

An undeniable force of talent and empathy, Indigiqueer writer and doctoral candidate Joshua Whitehead is an original on paper and in person.

If being a “real man” means expressing your feelings in a healthy way, then these guys are as authentic as it gets.

 помогает пациенту умереть — врачи — не так просто. Но обучающиеся в Кемминг школ медицины находят значение в обучении, как бороться с этими вопросами.

Индигикуэрированный писатель и кандидат в докторанты Дженнаса Уайтхед — оригинальный в письме и лично.

If being a “real man” means expressing your feelings in a healthy way, then these guys are as authentic as it gets.

Вот что говорит о мужестве: эти парни.
Nobody talks about Dover like Joshua Whitehead talks about Dover.

The southeast Calgary neighbourhood, bounded to the south by Peigan Trail and overshadowed by Forest Lawn to the north, flies low on Calgary’s real-estate radar. Seen through the lens of one of Canada’s most inventive young artists, however, Dover is a heartland of stunning river views, bucolic swimming holes and unconventional vibes that both inspire and ground his work.

Indeed, Whitehead, who is poised to complete a doctorate in English from the University of Calgary this summer, has a gift for seeing and articulating beauty and meaning in unexpected places. A two-spirit, Oji-Cree/nehiyaw member of Peguis First Nation in Manitoba, he is the author of the novel, *Jonny Appleseed* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), which was longlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize and recently won CBC’s 2021 Canada Reads. The book’s lovable protagonist, Jonny, is an Indigenous sex worker who is as unforgettable as the rez he leaves behind. “It’s… home because the bannock is still browning in the oven and your kokum is still making tea and eating Arrowroot biscuits,” writes Whitehead. “It’s home because it has to be — routine satiates these pangs.”

At 32, Whitehead, who is as unassuming as he is original, has racked up more accolades than successful writers twice his age: in addition to the above, he won the Governor General’s History Award for the Indigenous Arts and Stories Challenge in 2016 and, in 2018, his debut poetry collection, *full-metal indigiqueer* (Talonbooks, 2017), was a finalist at the Indigenous Voices Awards.

Now, a version of the dissertation behind his PhD in Indigenous literatures and cultures is poised to grace literary festivals and nightstands everywhere. In addition to a book deal with Penguin Random House for two novels, Whitehead signed with Knopf Canada for a creative work of non-fiction excerpted from his academic topic and titled *Making Love with the Land*. As Whitehead describes it, the book will be a reflection on his personal experiences with the land in Manitoba and Alberta, “as spaces ripe with knowledge for approaching mental health and queerness from an Indigenous perspective.”

If Whitehead doesn’t wake every day feeling like “one to watch,” he’s not unaware that his life is observed from afar by legions of young people, in particular Indigenous young people, for whom he thinks of himself as “a gate-opener.”

Whitehead believes “things are shifting in queerness overall in Western society, and also normalizing within Indigenous cultures.” Via his storytelling and uninhibited social media presence, he imagines “holding hands with everyone as we move forward.”

In the long term, Whitehead hopes to find an academic post teaching creative writing and Indigenous literature. Meanwhile, he’ll keep writing and “enriching two-spirit stories over my lifetime.”

Wherever he lands, he vows to keep returning to the places he loves in the Blackfoot territory: Áísínai’pi (Writing-on-Stone), Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump — and the Dover hills. •

Joshua photos by: Tim Nguyen

SPRING SUMMER • 2021

by Jacquie Moore, BA’97
It’s been a tough year to cultivate feelings of accomplishment, not to mention find fun — but, as these resilient students, faculty and alumni prove, the pandemic has also inspired a world of joyful detours.

1 “Ice skating is a new hobby I picked up in my spare time and I absolutely love it! I think the best way to regain motivation during a time like COVID is to continually work on yourself through challenging new skills.”
— Aiza Asif, BComm’21, Business Information Technology Management, Haskayne School of Business. Aiza was part of a team that won the 2020 RBC Fast Pitch Competition for its World Blood Investigator mobile point-of-care testing device

2 “Personally, I’m proud of the puppy — Benjamin — my husband and I got this year because he’s brought us closer as a family. Professionally, I’m proud to have worked through adverse and challenging times in the ICU throughout COVID, and to have built resilience.”
— Mia Torres, BSc’12, BN’15, staff registered nurse on the intensive care unit at the Peter Lougheed Centre

3 “This year, I’ve spent a lot of time learning about investing in the stock market — so much so that I was asked to be a team lead for a nonprofit startup called The Detoxified Students that teaches students about financial literacy.”
— Michael Kohlman, first-year student and 2020 Schulich Leader in the Schulich School of Engineering

4 “To celebrate Wordfest’s 25th anniversary online during the pandemic, we created a series called the Daisy Chain: 25 of Canada’s best fiction writers, linked together by mutual love and admiration, and watched by thousands across Canada. More than half of the writers were BIPOC [black, Indigenous, people of colour]. All the writers were generous. Every member of the audience felt so much less alone.”
— Shelley Youngblut, B.A., CEO and Creative RingMaster, Wordfest

5 “I’m thrilled to have been appointed to the Order of Canada this year — it’s incredible and awesome because Indigenous women are usually the last people to be recognized. I’m still levitating to be recognized.”
— UCalgary Cree Elder-in-Residence Doreen Spence was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada for her efforts advocating for peace and Indigenous Peoples’ human rights

6 “My weight-training hobby has long played an important part in strengthening my physical, mental and emotional health. I’d always been a gym rat, so I could never imagine having the motivation to work out at home. I’ve managed to assemble a home gym over the past few years, and it has really saved my (turkey) bacon during the pandemic. It’s made managing stress in these uncertain times a whole lot easier.”
— Dr. Greg Tweedie, PhD, associate professor, Werklund School of Education, winner of the 2020 UCalgary Teaching Award in the Teaching in Online Environments category

7 “Over this year, I’ve really worked on becoming more patient and more able to stay calm amidst all the busyness in my life — I take more breaks, including weekly Zoom chats with friends to watch The Bachelor and laugh and talk about it together.”
— Whitney Ereyi-Onas, BSc’20, first-year medical student at the Cumming School of Medicine, president of the Black Medical Student Association, and vice-president of SES (Equity, Inclusion and Diversity) for the Canadian Medical Association

Illustrations: Julie McLaughlin
What pulled you away from your rural roots?

My parents were very interested in education. My mom was a teacher and my dad had good success as a farmer, and they wanted their kids to be educated. I went to the University of Saskatchewan for what we used to call “household science” (nutrition and food science) but it wasn’t for me. I switched to nursing and loved it. Student life was strict: curfews and 12-hour days, not much freedom — the year before I went, students weren’t even allowed to have a radio. We all bonded so strongly and we still have reunions. From there I moved to Port Alberni, and then worked at the Edmonton University Hospital.

You’ve lived in Calgary for nearly 70 years; what brought you here?

My husband, Donald, was a geologist, so Calgary was the place. We lived along the Elbow River and raised our three children here.

It’s a challenging time living in a seniors’ care centre during COVID. What brings you joy?

It’s been hard. At least I can see my daughter now and go for walks. There’s not a lot else to do, but something that makes me happy is helping young people. When Donald died in 2003, I started a foundation and started making donations to create bursaries and scholarships. It’s addictive! I created scholarships in the University of Calgary’s nursing program, and other causes, too. I’ve met some wonderful people that way and it’s been rewarding meeting and hearing from the students. That’s really heartwarming. It’s just really, really special.

This year, you created a scholarship (the Agnes Stephanson Cooke Law Bursary) for Black law students — a departure from the nursing-related gifts you’ve gravitated toward. Why this, why now?

I know that I’m fortunate, and I’m able to give where people might need help. And the more I learn about what’s going on in the world, the more I want to help. There are too many sad, awful stories about how the law and society treat Black people unfairly, and I started to understand that if change is going to happen, we need more Black lawyers. One thing I could do was to create a scholarship for students who need help to get through law school with success. I’m so happy if I can make any difference. — JM

Q+A: radical acts

In 1954, Violet King Henry became the first Black person to be admitted to the Alberta Bar. Between 2016 and 2020, only eight per cent of federal judicial appointments were visible minorities; three per cent self-identified as Indigenous. This lags behind Canada’s combined visible minority and Indigenous population of 27.2 per cent (2016 Census).

“People told me it wasn’t a good idea for a girl to be a lawyer, particularly a coloured girl — so I went ahead.”

—Violet King Henry

At the age of 96, Agnes Cooke — farm girl, former nurse and enthusiastic philanthropist — aims to be the change she wants to see

Where did you spend your childhood?

I grew up on a farm near Elfros, Saskatchewan. Back then it was thriving, but it’s a bit of a ghost town now (2016 population 90). We grew mixed grain and had lots of animals, horses and cows, pigs, and sheep. My brother’s family still farms the land.

How would you describe yourself?

Lucky. I am very lucky. I had fantastic parents. They were both loving, hard-working, progressive Icelanders. I guess I’d also say I’m kind — or, I mean, I think I want to be kind. Sometimes, that’s not easy. But mostly it is. I like to do what feels right to feel good about me.
Some Blue

A UCalgary startup has found a way to create a tantalizing colour not found in nature, naturally

It's been more than eight years since comedian George Carlin left this planet and, of all the vintage comedy routines YouTube provides, his are still among the best. But events are catching up with some of those old classics. Case in point: an exciting discovery by UCalgary researchers addresses Carlin's complaint that, "I can't find blue food!" Not only do we now have all kinds of blue food but, thanks to a UCalgary-rooted clean-tech company, we can make it while pulling CO2 from the air.

For those who haven't checked into Carlin's backlist lately, it was on the very first episode of Saturday Night Live in 1975 that he complained:

"I can't find the flavour of blue! I mean, green is lime, yellow is lemon, orange is orange; red is cherry, what's blue? There's no blue... Where is the blue food? We want the blue food! Probably bestows immortality! They're keeping it from us!"

A few decades later, here we are enjoying blue Popsicles, savouring blue frosting and fueling ourselves with blue sports drinks. Soothing and eye-catching, blue also looks really good on Instagram. (It's fun to ponder what Carlin would have had to say about Instagram.)

Indeed, demand is high — as in US$120 million per year — for blue food pigment, or phycocyanin as the stuff extracted from spirulina, a blue-green algae or cyanobacteria, is called. That extraction calls for an energy inefficient process — or it did, until UCalgary's Synergia Biotech came along.

Synergia Biotech consists of a half-dozen UCalgary professors and research associates from the faculties of science and engineering including Dr. Angela Kouris, PhD (CEO); Dr. Agasthavas Vadlamani, PhD (CTO); Dr. Christine Sharp, PhD'14, and Dr. Marc Strous, PhD (directors); and business partners and collaborators from the community.

The company didn't start out in 2013 looking for a way to make a better blue, rather, the team was hunting for ways to capture carbon and produce bioenergy using algae. In 2017, Vadlamani noticed that, "Hey, we're also able to produce phycocyanin." He knew blue was big business, so the group nimblly "shifted focus, incorporated a company, entered UCalgary's Creative Destruction Lab Rockies accelerator program and concentrated completely on commercialization."

"The Synergia process relies not on spirulina, but on different natural populations of cyanobacteria originally found in specific British Columbia lakes. The team developed a way to cultivate this renewable resource using a process that draws CO2 from the air. The researchers prize this carbon-capture aspect, production process and aims to have a Canadian manufacturing facility in place by the end of 2021. Once that happens, it will be time to start looking for food labels proclaiming their "natural blue" and, perhaps, trumpeting the carbon-negative pathway to the blue Popsicle or cupcake you clutch in your hand.

From the first blue glass in ancient Egypt and the ground lapis lazuli in Vermeer's paintings, to trade wars fought over indigo in the 1500s, fortunes have been built on blue.

From the first blue glass in ancient Egypt and the ground lapis lazuli in Vermeer's paintings, to trade wars fought over indigo in the 1500s, fortunes have been built on blue. Thanks to Synergia's fruitful collaboration between engineers and microbiologists, this UCalgary startup now brings us to a new moment in the colour's long cultural history — and marks the first time it's played a role in mitigating our very own 21st-century climate challenges. •
Advancements in the field of psychedelic medicine have put magic mushrooms at the leading edge of a renaissance that could transform health care.
Psychedelics have the potential to revolutionize mental health-care treatment, and a new startup called MagicMed is striving to find therapy that allows patients to ‘skip the trip’

In April 2020, in the middle of the pandemic lockdown, Willows decided to reduce its Calgary-based headcount, and Facchini and his team suddenly found themselves contemplating their futures.

Psychedelic research boasts a long history on the Canadian prairies. Indeed, it was a Saskatchewan-based psychiatrist named Dr. Humphry Osmond who first coined the term “psychedelic” in 1953 in a poem he wrote for his friend, author Aldous Huxley (best known for his science-fiction novel, *Brave New World*), after guiding him through a mescaline trip.

Facchini co-founded Epimeron Inc., a private biotechnology firm, out of his UCalgary lab in March 2014. For the first five years, Epimeron focused on producing opiate molecules in yeast rather than from poppies, just as he’s doing with psilocybin. In the spring of 2019, Epimeron merged with another Calgary biotech firm to form Willow Biosciences Inc. Under Facchini’s direction as chief scientific officer, Willow used the same yeast process focusing on psychedelics. The investor had confidence about psychedelics, had a lot of Zoom calls, and said, “To hell with it, let’s start another company!” Facchini says. “Opportunity knocked.”

A Toronto-based investment banker familiar with Facchini’s work wanted to launch a new biotech firm focusing on psychedelics. The investor had confidence in the team’s broad experience, Facchini says, “not just in the science with the things we’d done before, but also in our business savvy.” What started out as a thought experiment by Facchini and his crew at the beginning of April 2020 was incorporated as MagicMed Industries by the end of May and had secured $30 million in commitments from investors by the end of the year.

In February 2021, *Business Insider* magazine ranked MagicMed the fifth highest money-raising psychedelic startup in the world.

Work by Hoffer, Osmond and colleagues in labs worldwide led to a revolution in brain science and psychiatry that lasted through the 1960s — but the party ended once the parties started. The drugs inevitably drifted out of the labs and into the counter-culture, and recreational use of psychedelics overshadowed their research potential. As the drugs became associated with anti-establishment movements — especially among anti-Vietnam War activists in the U.S. — governments began to regard psychedelics as more menace than medicine. The UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances banned psychedelics globally in 1971, and medical research effectively ceased for more than 30 years.

Psychedelic science was resurrected in 2005 when researchers at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine showed a single high dose of psilocybin had long-lasting positive effects on a patient’s mood and sense of well-being. The study sparked an ongoing renaissance of psychedelic research, especially in the last decade.

By the end of January 2021, the U.S. National Library of Medicine’s ClinicalTrials.gov website showed 39 psilocybin drug trials had been registered worldwide. These studies pit psilocybin against a wide range of conditions including depression, anorexia nervosa, cluster and migraine headaches, PTSD, alcoholism, and disorders linked to cocaine and opioid use. If the outcomes of such tests prove positive, psilocybin could soon emerge as a licensed medication for multiple forms of mental illness.

Perhaps it was no surprise, then, that Facchini and his locked-down colleagues didn’t stay unemployed for long. “I sat in my backyard, drank a lot of beer, thought about psychedelics, had a lot of Zoom calls, and said, ‘To hell with it, let’s start another company’!” Facchini says. “Opportunity knocked.”

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Facchini confesses to not understanding the psychology of venture capitalists. “I became a scientist to avoid dealing with lawyers and businesspeople,” he says. Still, he wonders if the pandemic-stalled economy inspired investors. “Investors need an active economy; they need...
money to be moving to do what they do. And so, they were looking for these opportunities.” Especially, as it turns out, in the medical psychedelics space. Investors are pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into the sector. “We’re capitalizing on it,” Facchini says. “We have business savvy, but it’s also a pretty easy sell. And we’re one of the few companies that actually has hardcore science behind it.”

Facchini says MagicMed’s approach of responding to market demand differs from the usual academic model “which is, ‘If you build it, they will come.’ They usually don’t.

“Where are still people who feel academia should be this pure, ivory-tower endeavour. If you are trying to make money from your research, then it’s dirty.”

But, in order for universities to remain relevant to the world off-campus, they have to emerge as economic engines. Facchini says he believes the kind of market-focused research MagicMed engages in could drive the post-pandemic recovery in Alberta — especially in the wake of a collapsing energy industry. The province may turn to academia to create new jobs in new sectors. “The university is saying we should lead,” Facchini says. “You have to start by being supportive of the trailblazers.”

UCalgary’s new Parker Psychedelic Research Chair, established earlier this year by alumnus Jim Parker (BA ’90), demonstrates the university’s commitment to innovation in the psychedelic field. The Chair will launch a psychedelic research program within the Mathison Centre for Mental Health Research & Education at the Hotchkiss Brain Institute (HBI) to consider initiatives targeted toward improving mental health. Under this program, UCalgary could emerge as a world leader in psychedelic research.

That said, market enthusiasm for psychedelics will eventually abate; investors showed similar excitement for cannabinoids only a few years ago, but then the bubble burst. “Cannabis are mostly yesterday’s news,” Facchini says.

The “mushroom boom” won’t last forever, either, and many of the new psychedelic startups won’t be around in a few years. “I have no delusions about what to expect,” Facchini says. MagicMed needs to raise as much capital as quickly as possible and position itself in terms of partnerships and acquisitions. “You want to be one of the survivors as opposed to some of these companies that aren’t going to be here a year from now.”

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**trippy roots**

The earth abounds with chemical compounds intended to deter herbivores, protect against pathogens and other clevver tricks of nature — for humans, however, such psychoactive plants can have mind-altering effects

**Mushaboom**

What makes *a mushroom magic?*

Psilocybin is a psychedelic compound occurring naturally in more than 200 species of fungi. In humans, psilocybin has hallucinogenic effects similar to LSD and mescaline including a sense of euphoria, changes in perception and a distorted sense of time (think Alice in Wonderland).

**Wile E. Peyote**

Used for thousands of years by Indigenous tribes for healing and religious purposes, *peyote* is a small cactus that grows in the American southwest, Mexico and Peru. Effects of its hallucinogenic substances, mescaline, include a loss of ability to think rationally and a feeling that time is passing more slowly than it is.

**Cogito, Ergot Sum**

Not the assisted by brain eaters is a parasitic fungus that grows on rye. Discovered by Swiss chemist Albert Hoffman in the 1940s, ergot contains a compound from which lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) can be derived. “Bicycle Day” (April 19) marks Hoffman’s legendary trippy bike ride home after trying the drug for the first time.

**Morning’s Glory**

The common name for more than 1,000 species of flowering plants, *morning glory* seeds contain ergoline alkaloids that can produce a similar effect to LSD when taken in large doses. Their use dates back to ancient Aztec and Mayan tribes whose high priests would consume the seeds to trigger vision quests.

**Potent Brew**

A brew made from various ingredients including caapi vine, which grows in the Amazon region, *ayahuasca* has long been used by traditional healers in several South American countries, and it plays an important role in some religious ceremonies. According to current research, its psychedelic properties may protect brain cells and stimulate neural cell growth.

**Big Chew**

A perennial rainforest shrub growing in Central Africa, *iboga*’s roots and bark contain a psychoactive alkaloid that induces a profound psychedelic trance state when consumed in large doses. Its taste has been described as “like sawdust laced with battery acid.”

**Salvation**

A member of the mint family, *sahila* is a psychedelic herb whose leaves contain opioid-like compounds. It’s fast-acting and, anecdotally, when chewed, smoked or imbibed in tea, can produce a particularly unpleasant experience. —JM

Illustrations: Mathieu Potvin
In the meantime, important science needs to be done. Researchers remain uncertain how psilocybin and other psychedelics function. A U.K.-based scientist has been using MRI scans to observe what parts of the brain light up with psilocybin and determine the mechanism of action. Evidence suggests that psilocybin and other “classic” psychedelics like LSD and mescaline bind to particular serotonin receptors. The drugs likely disrupt brain circuits and systems that encode rumination — the sort of repetitive thoughts and behaviours that characterize a range of mental illness, from depression and addiction to anorexia.

Facchini and his team at MagicMed are working at developing derivatives of psilocybin to create what he calls a “psy-brary” of novel molecules that can be patented and tested for their clinical effectiveness.

HBI director Dr. David Park, PhD, is keen for members of the institute to work with MagicMed and the psilocybin derivatives they eventually isolate. “We can act as matchmakers to see what researchers within HBI would be interested in some of the novel compounds generated by MagicMed,” Park says. The Mathison Centre, HBI’s mental-health research arm, can facilitate both animal studies as well as clinical trials important to understand how psilocybin and/or its derivatives may affect mental health.

HBI is excited about collaborating with a startup as local as MagicMed — whose labs are literally up the street — and the psychedelics’ potential as a treatment for a variety of mental-health conditions. But, despite the anecdotal evidence supporting the effectiveness of whole-plant psychedelics, their long history as recreational drugs, and the enthusiasm for MagicMed’s novel compounds, Park cautions against moving too quickly. “You can’t shortcut science,” he says.

If Facchini, Park and their scientist collaborators occupy one end of the medical psychedelic chain, palliative-care physician Dr. Lyle Galloway, MD, a clinical lecturer in the Department of Oncology, stands at the other. Galloway first encountered psychedelic mushrooms when he was in his early 20s, while travelling abroad. “It was a profound experience,” Galloway says. “I had a big-dose experience right off the bat that gave me a considerable amount of respect for what these medicines can do.” Galloway bought some books on how to cultivate mushrooms and ordered himself some mail-order spores. “I got reasonably good at growing psilocybin mushrooms,” Galloway says. “And then I got married and had kids and then life went on.”

After decades of dormancy, psychedelic mushrooms have bloomed in Galloway’s professional life over the past few years. Research started to emerge suggesting psilocybin can have a role in alleviating what palliative-care physicians refer to as “existential distress” — one of the most difficult forms of suffering to treat. “Supportive counselling helps to some extent, but talk therapy only goes so far,” Galloway says. Two simultaneous studies published in 2016 from New York University and Johns Hopkins showed patients with end-of-life depression and anxiety responded dramatically and rapidly to a single treatment with psilocybin.

The studies hardly surprised the many therapists who’ve long been working outside the law with psilocybin and other psychedelics.

“There is a wealth of experience out there with underground therapists who’ve been working for years — decades, in some cases — with these medicines,” Galloway says. “That’s not really acknowledged.”

Galloway, though, sought more official training. In 2019, he enrolled in the year-long Psychedelic-Assisted Therapies and Research certificate program offered by the California Institute of Integral Studies. The program’s faculty included scientists who performed much of the original research on therapeutic psychedelics in the 1960s and 1970s.

Galloway, a clinician-scientist who is currently collecting data to inform future practice and research, has had a number of patients ask him about possible use of psilocybin in their own cases, often having heard about it in the news or through support groups. Galloway makes sure these patients understand that the science of medical psychedelics is relatively new, and that while he believes the treatment is safe for most patients, careful screening is necessary and there may be side effects the medical community doesn’t yet know about. If patients are interested in pursuing this option, Galloway will discuss the evolving process by which they can apply for an exemption, and ensure they are connected with appropriate medical and psychotherapeutic supports to proceed safely.

Once granted an exemption, the patient must seek out his or her own supply of psilocybin mushrooms. Unlike cannabis products that can now be legally purchased in specialty shops in nearly every neighbourhood, psychedelics remain illegal. Still, patients have little trouble sourcing them. Even those with no street contacts or any experience with recreational psychedelics easily manage to score mail-order ‘shrooms online. “I have patients in their 60s who went online and, without substantial Internet knowledge, ended up with therapeutic quantities of mushrooms in their mailbox,” Galloway says.

Galloway then encourages his patients to bring their newly acquired mushrooms into the office for a formal, supervised therapy session. However, psychedelic-inspired healing does not rely on the presence of a therapist. “Essentially, the real healing comes from the patient — it comes from inside,” Galloway says. “However, a trained therapist can function as a guide for the experience. Someone familiar with the territory [who] can help make sense of what happens.”
Unlike drugs that serve to blunt consciousness, psychedelics can bust down all the doors. “These medicines need to be approached with a certain amount of respect, or even reverence,” Galloway says. Trips are rarely pleasure cruises to a patient’s happy place. “A psychedelic experience can be extremely scattered and extremely scary,” Galloway says. While patients can enjoy some fun and levity during their psychedelic session, the experience is often agonizing. Long-buried grief and unprocessed guilt can erupt unexpectedly.

One of Galloway’s palliative colleagues observed one patient endure such agony during her psilocybin treatment that the therapists who witnessed the experience also suffered distress. “They even arranged a debriefing for all the staff on the unit,” Galloway says. “Sometimes it goes this way.” The patient, though, woke the next day needing half of the pain medication and none of the sedatives she’d been using before the session.

After meeting the therapist for one post-psychedelic “integration work” appointment, the patient “went on with her life,” Galloway says. “She was able to address her life without any therapy involved? Maybe. I don’t know.” Clinical testing of Facchini’s novel compounds may eventually answer these questions.

In the meantime, Galloway and his colleagues in the field weigh the actual therapy component heavily. “We look at the psychedelic as the catalyst for the therapy,” Galloway says. An introspective patient who is a disciplined meditator, say, might be able to make some progress with psilocybin on a solo trip. “But there’s something about having an objective third party in the room who gives a good perspective and can guide things in a helpful direction.”

The emergence of psychiatric medicine may do more than treat existential distress in patients; it might cure a sense of disillusionment among the palliative-care professionals themselves. Galloway figures half of the palliative-care physicians he knows have grown cynical about the work. “You can say we’re treating depression and anxiety, and we do that, or at least pretend to do that, with existing medications and therapies,” Galloway says. “But we were worried that we weren’t doing much good.”

Galloway had grown so disheartened with the work, he contemplated quitting psychiatry altogether. “Then [psychedelic medicine] came along and revolutionized things. The reason why I got into psychiatry was because I wanted to help people in the way I am seeing this help people.”

As psychiatric medicine inches gradually into the mainstream, Galloway hopes his fellow practitioners talk openly about their own experiences with psilocybin. “A year ago, I wouldn’t have admitted I was good at growing mushrooms when I was in my 20s,” Galloway says. “Now, I am more comfortable. The fact is that these medicines have been used by responsible people in the real world for decades, if not millennia, and are not causing damage all over the place.” He says he believes more open conversation about use of these medicines by both patients and therapists will be beneficial.

In addition to assisting patients access therapeutic psychedelics, the non-profit coalition TheraPsil has been working on obtaining psilocybin exemptions for their physicians and therapists. Health Canada granted at least 19 such exemptions for health-care professionals in December 2020, and more are forthcoming. “I hope this becomes the norm in order to qualify to be a psychiatric therapist,” Galloway says. “I don’t believe you can do a good job without having some personal experience.”

For his part, Facchini cares little about the approval of mainstream science. He’s built a career out of researching compounds many consider illicit. “I’ve never been concerned about what someone else is going to think,” Facchini says. For tut-tutting conservative academics who would shy away from such research hails him. “The whole idea of tenure is you’re supposed to be able to push the boundaries, as long as you’re not breaking the law or harassing anybody,” Facchini says. “You should be taking risks, and those risks are what pay off.”

Many of Facchini’s medical psychedelic colleagues were first drawn to the field by their own experimentation. “I’ve heard from others in the sector say, ‘I went somewhere in South America and did ayahuasca and it changed my life,’” Facchini says.
It seems fair to say that men haven’t typically been encouraged to discuss the contents of their hearts — a new research project aims to change that with an eye to improving mental health.

We have a lot of boxes in our society.

There are the kind we can see and, for instance, check off on a form or fill with our most precious belongings. It’s the boxes we can’t see, however, that often hold the power to define and restrict our potential.

When it comes to societal notions about what it means to be a “real” man, such boxes can be not only limiting but downright damaging — to the individual compelled toward such a stereotypical image of himself, as well as to those around him.

A new community-led research project from the Faculty of Social Work titled ManBox is exploring our ideas of masculinity by creating actual boxes and asking men to paint and illustrate them to represent the faces they show the world — and, perhaps, who they are inside.
“It’s a heavy box,” says assistant professor and research lead Dr. Liza Lorenzetti, MSW’06, PhD’17. “I think the boxes represent the weight men feel to perform as men in society.”

For social work alumnus Will Tabak, BSW’19, it’s the walls of the box that hold the most significance. “For me, the box represents the unhealthy way that we socialize men and male children,” says Tabak, who works with the Alberta Men’s Network and is co-ordinating the partnership project in the community. “The way we teach them to believe that you can only show the world certain parts of yourself so that people will trust you and see you as a protector — basically, the generalized stereotypes that men tend to live with in society.”

When Tabak created his own box earlier this year, he described the process as transformational. He says he initially tried to rigidly control the process, which in some ways reflected his approach to life and even to his work leading the ManBox project. Tabak’s box helped him realize this and, ultimately, to let go. “I found myself trying to be very open to whatever feeling came into my head and my heart,” he says. “That was what I tried to express at the end of the journey of my project.”

Tabak is hoping to share the therapeutic boxes with men in lower-income or other marginalized communities who don’t typically have access to artistic materials, or who aren’t often asked to take part in reflective, artistic, research-based exercises like this one. He also hopes to provide the experience to men who are reintegrating into society from the justice system. “We think it might help some of these men get back on their feet,” Tabak says.

Like the artists behind them, each ManBox is multifaceted. On the one hand, they’re a tool for social change — a challenge to harmful societal ideas about masculinity. Research shows these stereotypes fuel societal issues like domestic violence, increased substance abuse and higher suicide rates among men. On the other hand, they’re also a tool for reflection built on a theoretical framework of transformational learning.

“The group’s collective project design really resonated with my experience over 25 years of practice in domestic-violence intervention,” says Lorenzetti. “We need to invest — up-front — in well-being, and in healthy relationships and self-care.” People can change, she says, “but they need to engage in personal transformation to do that and — on the ground, in the community — that’s where the change is going to happen.”

Create your own ManBox and join the dialogue at albertamen.com.
Generations of men have been told it’s a weakness to show vulnerability — that creates a toxic environment. Opening up to my partner and my family, specifically the females in my family, gave me a better perspective on who I am and how I affect the people around me. I’ve felt isolated through COVID, not interacting with my friends in the usual way. Reaching out to friends to say, ‘I’m struggling, wanna go for a dog walk?’ That’s been empowering.

Ricky Kawa
Co-founder of Sprout Society
vegan-meal prep company

Building the boxes for this project was meaningful to me because I want to help make art more accessible and approachable for people.

At some point in our lives — maybe especially for men — we’re taught to stop being creative and just have fun with art. I wanted to help celebrate and create opportunity for that.

Nicole Chalifour
BSW’19, social worker and artist who designed and built the boxes for this community art project.
I think many men fall short in their communication— that hurts them, and it can hurt others. My box symbolizes my sides that people see—a loving father and husband, a musician—and how I feel inside, which is sometimes soft or playful and sometimes foolish or even cracked or breaking down. The cobwebs show how I can feel stuck or confused and can’t always reach the heart there in front of me. The plant extends toward the various facets of me and shows how these complexities can co-exist.

Arya Boustani

Media technician, with his daughter Parisa

I grew up angry and aggressive. I think back to my romantic relationships and where things went wrong. Through therapy and a peer group, I’ve realized how my unperceivable exterior has caused me a lot of distress. Working on this box has deepened my reflection on my struggle with expressing emotions: the metal-studded exterior is prickly and hard to touch and, inside, I layered it with text to show my inner complexities. On the back is a rising sun, to symbolize the dawn of a new day.

Sebastian Benavides

BA’16, BSW’20, child and youth care counsellor at Hull Services
Whether or not they choose to be with an individual in their final moments, residents at the Cumming School of Medicine are trained to care for those who have a legal right to end their life. It’s a complex and exceptionally personal path for the patient at the heart of such a decision — and a profound experience for the doctor who chooses to be there.

by Christina Frangou
“Wherever the art of medicine is loved, there is also a love of humanity.”
—Hippocrates

... always do what's expected. Caring never perfectly predictable; bodies of life. Lee struggles to answer. It's loved one drifts closer to the end if tonight's her last night? as their think I should stay? and, “What stomach in these moments, she says. There's often a pit in her pain at bay and their families at and others die at peace, with their medical training.

Another big change came to medical education in 2005 when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Canada's Criminal Code must be amended so doctors could now legally assist in a patient's death, when it is an eligible patient's wish, fulfils their oath to the patient and patient autonomy, she says. Generations ago in medicine, perhaps a doctor's opinion might have trumped all others, but no longer, Adams says. Modern medical ethics recognizes the need to put patients' values at the forefront of decision-making about their medical care.

A good physician always sees things from a patient's perspective, she says. "We shouldn't be paternalistic and tell them they must suffer." Adams supports MAID. She sees it as an act of care—a new variation on the way physicians have long sought to ease intolerable suffering of their patients. When she trained in the 1980s, she remembers coming to the realization that even state-of-the-art treatments can cause anguish and misery. "There is a...
Students who are opposed to MAID don’t have to participate in assisted deaths, but they need to understand that capable patients should be able to make their own decisions about their bodies.

Adams has not been present when someone has died by MAID, not as a provider nor as a witness. A psychiatrist, she cares for patients with mental illness who are not eligible for MAID under the present legislation. Mental illness does not meet the criteria of being clearly associated with a reasonably foreseeable death, despite the fact that many of those affected die prematurely. “Severe mental disorders should not be excluded from consideration for MAID — however, I am concerned we have not done enough to provide appropriate access to evidence-based treatment for mental illness,” she says. “I would like to see more investment in these resources and ensure a patient has had appropriate care prior to this consideration.”

As the person responsible for overseeing medical education at UCalgary, Adams says patients have a right to a medically assisted death, so medical students must know about it; they must know what MAID is and who is eligible, and the ethical considerations around it such as the need for fair access. “It’s part of the curriculum. We need it to be covered,” she says. Students who are opposed to MAID don’t have to participate in assisted deaths, but they need to understand that capable patients should be able to make their own decisions about their bodies, Adams says. “In med school, they teach you, ‘First, do no harm,’ right? Maybe that’s why some people grapple with [MAID],” says Adams. “But we also talk about humanism in medicine.”

In medical school, students learn about MAID through an ethics course that covers the evolving legal status of MAID and resources available for patients and physicians in Alberta. Students talk through a series of scenarios, breaking down the ethical and legal requirements in each case. For instance, a man with incurable cancer, depression and anxiety — would he be eligible for MAID? A 15-year-old boy with an inherited muscular disease who asks his long-term pediatrician about MAID — would he be eligible? And what, if any, do patients need to do to make decisions about their bodies?

Once they graduate from medical school, physicians progress to residency, years of hands-on, in-depth training in their area of specialty. It’s here that new doctors get most of their exposure to patients who are considering MAID, particularly physicians training in palliative care, family medicine or internal medicine.

Dr. Lee majored in philosophy as an undergraduate and came to medical school interested in the practical ethic of medicine, including patient autonomy. She felt patients had a right to make decisions about their bodies, even though she was uncertain about how she felt about participating in MAID or witnessing it. During her residency in family medicine, she worked with a physician who mentioned that she did MAID assessments and procedures. When the physician asked if Lee wanted to be present when a patient received MAID, Lee said yes. She felt she wanted to know what MAID was like first-hand. “If it’s something my patients might want, I should know about it,” she says.

The patient, an elderly man, seemed genuinely happy that Lee was there to learn, Lee recalls. She met him at his home on the day of his planned death. “We walked in and he was joking. He had a friend with him and they were laughing, they were reminiscing,” she says. The man, who had advanced cancer, was at peace with his decision. Lee waited for the pit in the stomach as they went through informed consent and the procedure began, but it never came. “There wasn’t that air of futility that sometimes accompanies a bad death. It felt like he was choosing his path,” she says.

Lee calling at the bedside for an assisted death a privilege, and one that should be reserved for the physicians most interested in providing MAID as part of their medical practice. She compared the experience to that of asking patients whether a medical student can try an IV on them for the first time. “The suffering and the generosity required for [a patient to let a student start an IV for the first time] are different for someone allowing you into their home to witness their last moments,” she says.

Lee hasn’t decided if she will participate in MAID as part of her medical practice after she finishes training. If a physician is going to be part of MAID, they need to be prepared and capable emotionally, spiritually and psychologically of providing MAID. “It’s not clear to me that I’m able to do that yet,” she says.

“Who are we to say this person should probably qualify and someone else doesn’t?”
issues who wants MAID but cannot legally access assistance in dying because they’re ineligible. “In that position, we feel a little helpless,” he explains. “Who are we to say this person—should probably qualify and someone else doesn’t?” He applauds the ongoing re-evaluation by the federal government of how MAID is working in Canada, taking into account perspectives of ethicists, experts, patients and physicians. “These are challenging decisions to make, and not overnight decisions.”

Neufeld has been present as patients died by MAID. Their deaths are unlike many other deaths in medicine; patients often express a sense of relief, he says. “I think it gives them a sense of closure or peace, that they can sort of be the master of their own ship.” From his perspective, MAID is a rare chance to be there with a patient through the end of life. With other patients, he’d said goodbye at the end of a day and gone home to think about their case overnight. “It’s a bit of an adjustment every time that happens,” Neufeld says. Otherwise, he feels the experience of being someone’s doctor as they seek out an assisted death is the same as caring for any patient going through a challenging time. A physician’s role is to get to know who a person is, what their fears and values are, and to provide the kind of care that’s as close to what they want as possible, he explains. “Whether that’s MAID or [not] doesn’t change anything for me,” he says.

Dr. Lauren Bilinsky, MD, a fourth-year CSM resident in family medicine and public health, came to medicine after majoring in chemistry and Canadian studies as an undergraduate. For her, the humanities had revealed experiences of Indigenous peoples, immigrants and refugees to Canada. “And, through all those discussions, equity became very, very important to me,” she says.

As a physician, she wants to address inequities, including in end-of-life care. Across Canada, care for the dying is a patchwork of unevenly distributed services that are not always accessible when patients need it, particularly for people who live in rural areas, or are less advantaged socially or economically,” Bilinsky says.

Rural areas are less likely to have the same access to palliative care services like hospices, and people who have severe illness or nearing the end of their life may not comfortably travel long distances for care. In fact, relatively few Canadians receive formal palliative care outside hospitals: in Ontario and Alberta, fewer than one in six people who died in 2016-2017 received publicly funded palliative home care, according to a 2018 Canadian Institute for Health Information report.

In her own family, Bilinsky has seen how good end-of-life care makes a difference to patients and their families, her grandfather died in hospice with his daughter at his side and Bilinsky, who was in Nova Scotia doing her undergraduate degree, watching over her phone. She was in her last year of medical school when MAID was legalized. She says she wants to help patients achieve their end-of-life goals, whatever those may be. Everybody sees dying differently and people should have an opportunity to make choices as they see fit, Bilinsky says. “Each person, each patient, each provider is going to have a different idea of what constitutes quality versus quantity of life.”

Dr. Lauren Bilinsky is a CSM resident in family medicine and public health; she strives to address unevenly distributed health-care services, including end-of-life care.

“Then, at all three, after a couple of minutes of crying and deep breaths, all three families started telling stories about all the wonderful times,” Bilinsky says. “There’s a moment to reflect on the sadness of the situation, but also the blessings of being able to be there for each other and honour somebody’s wish for their end of life.”

Public health work has dominated Bilinsky’s waking hours throughout the pandemic, and she expects to work mostly in that area when she completes her training. But end-of-life care, perhaps including MAID, will hopefully be a part of whatever she does, she says.

In March 2021, after a year of bitter debate, the federal government passed Bill C-7. The law opens the door for more Canadians to access MAID, including those whose deaths are not “reasonably foreseeable.” For patients in this new tract, they must have a serious and incurable “disease, illness or disability,” be in an advanced state of decline and be suffering intolerably. They’re required to go through a minimum 90-day period between their first assessment for MAID and the day of the procedure.

The bill also gives the federal government two years to come up with guidelines that would allow people to seek MAID on the basis of a mental disorder.

How changes will play out in hospital rooms, hospices and patient homes is unclear. But they will not affect how students and residents are trained to help patients who seek MAID, says Adams. “The principles are still the same,” she says. “You’re paying attention to a patient’s pain and suffering.” •
Certainly, there’s more than enough food in the world to feed us all — but ensuring nobody goes hungry takes strategic vision, compassion and an appetite to upend the status quo.

Hunger. It’s a sensation all living beings know — the feeling of discomfort or weakness brought on by a lack of food, quickly followed by a compelling desire to eat. For most of us, this unserving sensation is readily sated with a meal at home or on-the-go. Yet the problem of hunger is a growing one right here in Canada and has far-reaching effects, from impacting physical and mental health and relationships, to hurting the ability to find and keep a job.

While there is certainly more than enough food produced to feed the global population, more than 690 million people go hungry every day — and that number is on the rise. By the year 2030, it’s estimated that the number of people affected by hunger will surpass 840 million, more than 10 per cent of the world’s population.

In recent years, this urgent global issue has been described as “food insecurity.” This is defined as inadequate or insecure access to food, mostly due to financial constraints. While the term may have a more technical ring to it than “hunger,” its devastating effects are just as real. In 2017-18, according to Statistics Canada, one in eight Canadian households, or about 4.4 million people, were food-insecure, and one in 16 Canadian children suffer from food insecurity, which can be anything from the fear of running out of food to going days without eating.

Most people who suffer from food insecurity are in the workforce, but low wages and job-precariousness mean that even those able to work often don’t bring in enough income to avoid its effects. According to a report from the non-profit Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC), during the COVID-19 pandemic the number of Canadians experiencing food insecurity has increased by a staggering 39 per cent, disproportionately impacting Black, Indigenous and northern communities. Along with low wages and employment insecurity, low social assistance rates, systemic racism and the high cost of food in Canada’s north are among the reasons cited.

The eradication of food insecurity, however, is being tackled on a wide variety of fronts, with the understanding that it requires the co-operation and integration of policy actions across social, health, economic and agricultural domains, as well as all three levels of government.

With food supply chains temporarily impacted during the pandemic and predictions of more pandemics to come, there is also an increasingly urgent need to re-evaluate where and how we get our food — and how sustainable these practices will be in the coming decades.

In recent years, UCalgary has played a leading role in promoting healthy living and safe food for Canadians, with projects undertaken by academics, employees and alumni that address food insecurity in innovative ways. Initiatives like UCalgary’s Simon Farm Project also address the issue with sustainability at its core, ensuring that ecological balance and the avoidance of depleting natural resources are also incorporated into the aims to alleviate food insecurity for all.

UCalgary researchers, alumni and staff are working to address the urgent need to fight food insecurity in our communities, whether for urban and rural families or for residents of remote northern communities. While these passionate individuals and groups address the issue in unique ways, they share a common belief: that hunger has no place in a healthy and caring society.

by Valerie Fortney, B186
the "community fridge," part of a growing North America-wide movement to ensure easier access to healthy food for all. The fridges are appearing on well-travelled streets, often tucked in between a local pharmacy or coffee shop and other businesses. They are stocked and replenished, often every day, with healthy, fresh, donated food for the taking — no questions asked.

Lavoie says she and a small group of like-minded friends saw an opportunity to do something concrete in their own city in a time of extreme deprivation for many due to the global pandemic. "Community involvement and lowering barriers to accessing aid resonate so much for me," she says. The project appealed to her as — in the words of fellow organizers — a "mutual-aid project,` wherein individuals take charge of caring for one another through a redistribution of wealth and resources.

The Calgary Community Fridge, located outdoors at 908 Centre St. N., is accessible 24/7 and stocked by local restaurants, grocers, businesses and residents; it is regularly cleaned and restocked by a small team of volunteers.

Lavoie, a native Calgarian, says her experiences volunteering with agencies such as Distress Centre Calgary opened her eyes to the close connection between mental health issues and food insecurity. "Seeing the end of a food hamper or even accessing one is a real stressor," she says. "In an ideal world, we wouldn't need community fridges — this is just one more way to help our neighbours." •

It’s the centrepiece of any home, the big appliance teenagers run to at the end of the school day, the destination for grumbling tummies and creative cooks. For far too many, though, the family fridge brings more anxiety than relief, its bare shelves a stark reminder of the tangible impact of living with food insecurity.

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"It really struck a chord with me," says Lavoie, BA’12, a student in the Department of Psychology. "They were mental health strategy and current undergraduate communications co-ordinator for UCalgary’s Campus Wellbeing Program. "They were far too often, privilege — is far from universal."

So, when photographs of brightly painted fridges started popping up on Sasha Lavoie’s Instagram feed earlier this year, it got her thinking about how this symbol of plenty — of the hydroponic system, a 40-foot shipping container that is the equivalent of a traditional growing acre. Penn, a post-doctoral researcher with the Institute, says that for people living in the region, access to fresh produce often requires a several-hour drive to Whitehorse, where grocery store prices for such essentials as apples and potatoes can be two to three times higher than in southern centres like Calgary.

The Calgary Community Fridge project was born. The project’s birth was the result of a conversation Penn had with Solvest and Cold Acre about using solar technology to power the research station, which, for more than a half-century, has been conducting research in a wide variety of disciplines, from glaciology and botany to zoology and anthropology. Solvest was also looking to try hydroponic growing, which has seen success in such centres as Whitehorse. The sustainability component — so far, the diesel fuel usage at the research station has been reduced by 80 per cent — was vital to its success.

Penn, whose team has been working with the region’s First Nations communities since the project’s inception, admits it "isn’t a silver bullet," but it does have the potential to help address food insecurity in the Yukon. "We’re not proposing these systems as a replacement for traditional growing, but it could help us understand better where hydroponic systems, indoor growing, could fit in as part of a broader food security system solution," he says.

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"It’s a place of breathtaking beauty, where giant glaciers are surrounded by majestic mountains and ancient icefields. The starkness of the landscape is matched only by its extreme seasons: eternal sunshine in the summer, weeks of darkness and temperatures plunging to -40°C in winter."

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FreshRoutes & LeftOverS Foundation

Lourdes Juan brings affordability, culturally appropriate shopping to the doorstep of Maskwacis, seniors in affordable housing, and people on Indigenous reserves with her nearby grocery store options.

and serve those in the community experiencing food insecurity. Since 2012, her LeftOverS Foundation has been redistributing food to underserved populations, to the tune of about 10,000 lbs of food per week in Calgary, Edmonton, and Winnipeg, collectively.

Working with her regular partners, restaurants, bakeries and other food suppliers at the start of the pandemic last March, she and her team were able to quickly redistribute 22,000 lbs of food when those businesses were caught off guard and shut temporarily.

Juan’s newest project, Fresh Routes, uses a refurbished Calgary Transit bus that houses a mobile grocery store filled with fresh produce and other healthy food items, at prices between 25 and 40 per cent lower than those of regular grocers. “We saw that the LeftOverS model helped to bring food to agencies serving vulnerable Calgarians, but we also wanted to bring food directly to households,” she says of Fresh Routes, which also operates in Edmonton. The bus, along with several trucks, have removable carts that can be placed outside and will move into high gear this spring as the weather gets warmer and COVID-19 restrictions potentially ease.

Juan, who in 2020 was seen by the Al Jazeera TV network’s 40 million viewers in a feature on pandemic heroes, has high praise for organizations like the Calgary Food Bank. She sees her programs as another part of Canada’s food security network’s 40 million viewers in a feature on pandemic heroes, has high praise for organizations like the Calgary Food Bank. She sees her programs as another part of Canada’s food security system.

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Juan, who in 2020 was seen by the Al Jazeera TV network’s 40 million views...
It’s a rare and enviable career that’s built on a childhood obsession — race-car driver, ballet dancer, astronaut. No matter how into Spider-Man they are, however, it’s unlikely to occur to most kids that an acceptable adult life could be spent immersed in comic books. Dr. Bart Beaty, PhD — a professor in the Department of English and author of several books about art, history and the significance of comics — is proof that what intrigues us as children can be not only an acceptable but an important lens through which to learn, teach, research and otherwise shape and meaningfully engage with the world.

A globally respected expert in his field, Beaty’s love of, first, Archie (the focus of his recent scholarly study, Twelve Cent Archie), then Spider-Man, Wolverine, Maus and dozens of European titles, started when he was eight with nothing to do but dig into a neighbour’s box of comic books. His trajectory from there has led him through adventure and academia and put more than one of his undergraduate courses on the list of classes that fill up faster than Jughead can eat a dozen burgers.

Beaty was both fascinated and dismayed by the impact of COVID-19 on the comic-book industry — a quaint world in which, until the spring of 2020, fans (despite various digital offerings) still gathered in retail shops every Wednesday all over North America to grab and gab about the newest releases on New Comic Book Day. The fracture took place after shops closed and Diamond Distributors — who have had a monopoly on distributing DC, Marvel and other publishers for nearly 40 years — completely shut down, putting the industry on hold for weeks. When the machine started up again, things were — for better or for worse — different.

It’s a tenuous time and, certainly, Beaty isn’t alone in wondering with hope, curiosity and perhaps a touch of nostalgia: what’s next? — JM
As I grew older, my interests changed.

Two Christmases later, this note is from Aunt Barbara.

And this one’s from your Uncle Byron.

And this one’s from us.

RIP.

TEAR.

48 49

Comics on the curriculum? What the heck?!

My second way of comics—love begins.

I moved to Montreal for grad school.

Pfft ... maybe I can learn French from comic books.

I penned a monthly column for the prestigious Comics Journal.

In University...

Required reading.

RIP. SNAW.
... and that's why people are referring to comics.

You should write a book.

Studies!


Ooh la la!

And that's why I'm in a fight between Superman and Batman.

I should write another book.

So I read 1,000 arches.

Damn, Jiminy!


In May 2020, as a response to countless comic book shops across the country closed for the first time in 40 years, New Comic Book Day was cancelled!

PC got a decades-long contract with their distributor and started their own Comic Book Day...

Raising cost and conflict for comic book stores.

The world feels wonky—why, I know my inner-rhythm was still tied to New Comic Book Day!

The End...?
On Being Funny When Nothing Else Is

An award-winning comedian does the math during a global crisis — and it turns out she's more or less essential

by Rebecca Northan, BFA'96

In 1996, when my mother was diagnosed with cancer and given eight weeks to live, our death-related comedic exchanges were not for the faint of heart. I promised that, if she dared to leave me her treasured collection of 1,200 pieces of purple glass, I would most definitely plan a Greek wedding. Mom promised to haunt me. You may be familiar with the late, great comedian Steve Allen's classic formula: "tragedy plus time equals comedy." My mom taught me that, rather, tragedy divided by comedy equals sanity — an algorithm I believe I may have just invented, but don't quote me on it.

Admittedly naive in the early days of the pandemic last March, I was convinced it would blow over quickly. I made a big fat bet with a director colleague that COVID-19 would be in our rear-view mirror by May — he said it would last at least a year. I accused him of being a pessimist; he countered with something about epidemiology and scientists. Likely, I rolled my eyes. (For the record, I worship at the altar of science, but I am plagued with a competitive and contrary nature.) We agreed that the loser would pay for a very expensive dinner. We shook on it.

By April 2020, I had stopped folding my laundry. I would be in our rear-view mirror by May — he said it would last at least a year. I accused him of being a pessimist; he countered with something about epidemiology and scientists. Likely, I rolled my eyes. (For the record, I worship at the altar of science, but I am plagued with a competitive and contrary nature.) We agreed that the loser would pay for a very expensive dinner. We shook on it.

My good friends almost immediately started doing improv shows online. Improvisers are a particularly competitive and contrary nature. (Isn't it strange how improv is the way we talk about improv?) I pulled out my old Doc Martens — the fashionable improvisor's footwear of choice in the early '90s — and marveled that I was making a return to street performing at 48 years old. I found a growing acceptance that my impending sense of doom and periodic hot flashes had more to do with perimenopause than the likelihood that I had developed psychic abilities or contracted COVID.

And I made jokes. All kinds of jokes. Silly jokes. Immature jokes. Inappropriate jokes. Jokes infused with gallows humour and desperation. None bear repeating. Most you had to be there for. Many are utterly unmemorable, save for the resulting shared laughter.

The laughs we find in the middle of a tragedy are the ones we reach for as an act of survival. For the love of all that is sacred, may we find at least a few things to laugh at so we don't completely come apart at the seams. In my view, if we can follow the tenuous thread of a tiny laugh, we can usually manage to hold on to some scrap of sanity. Tragedy divided by comedy ensures we don't sit in it for too long — humour invites us to come up for air.

I suppose I am quite happy being non-essential. •

Enter the "non-essential" performing artist. Our job is to reframe things to provide a bit of distance from which to see ourselves, and you, as utterly human. "Remember when we all stopped wearing pants?!"

A woman who booked one of my curbside comedy shows sent a note that read: "When we booked you, we thought we were doing you a favour, but it turns out you did us the favour — laughing with the neighbours from our respective porches brought us together as a community."

Without a doubt, the best laughs are the ones that unite us in mutuality. We call those "warm laughs," and they travel faster than any other. They make us feel less alone. They don't come from punching down, and they tend to be accompanied by vigorous head nodding and sparks of recognition — "Oh, my god, that's me!"

Underneath those warm laughs, gleaming at their very centre, is a nugget of truth and vulnerability, floating on a sigh of, "Aren't we just so...human? Aww. Bless our wee cotton socks — and forgive us."

If there is ever a way, in the middle of an ongoing tragedy, that I'm able to offer that kind of a laugh, well, I suppose I am quite happy being non-essential. •

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Rebecca Northan is a Canadian Comedy Award-winner and an alumna of the Loose Moose Theatre and Second City, and has created several hit shows that have toured across Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. including Blind Date, Undercover and Legend Has It. Rebecca has also taught at UCalgary, the Canadian Film Centre, the Banff Centre, the Sud supporter Academy and the Stratford Festival Conservatory. This year, she joined the faculty at the National Theatre School of Canada.

Illustration: Kyle McTavish
Compelling recent reads from writerly faculty and grads on everything from how to get a good night’s sleep to a history of cyber-intelligence

**How to Fail as a Popstar** (Mar 2021)
Vivek Shraya, assistant professor, Department of English
How to Fail as a Popstar is Shraya’s debut theatrical work, a one-person show that chronicles her journey from singing in shopping malls to “not quite” pop music superstardom with beguiling humour and insight. Shraya’s book is a raw and humorous reflection on the power of pop culture, dreams, disappointments and self-determination.

**On This Day in History**
Sh!t Went Down (Apr 2021)
James Fell, BA’93, MA’96, MBA’99
Fell’s writing has evolved from fitness to motivation to social justice. Now, he’s writing about history. His latest book will expand your knowledge of world history in the most hilarious and profane way possible.

**Behind the Enigma: The Authorised History of GCHQ, Britain's Secret Cyber-Intelligence Agency** (Oct 2020)
Dr. John R. Ferris, PhD, professor, Department of History
Based on unprecedented access to documents in the U.K.’s Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) archives, Behind the Enigma is the first book to authoritatively explain the history of one of the world’s most potent intelligence agencies, revealing the fascinating truth behind this remarkable and enigmatic organization.

**The Intentional MBA: A Guide to Maximizing Your Decision, Experience and Investment** (Jun 2020)
Christine Dagenais, MBA’11,
and Renée Francis, BA’06, MBA’09
After three years of collaboration, the authors never planned to launch their labour of love during a pandemic, but they’ve soldiered on. Written for MBAs by MBAs, this practical guide will help those considering an MBA, studying in school now or graduated to find information on how to get the most out of the experience.

**Seven Songs and Seven Stories** (Aug. 2020)
Michael Sandberg, BSc (Eng)’98
While working in Saudi Arabia as an engineer, Sandberg began writing and ultimately burned to this new passion as a full-time pursuit. He was intrigued by the similarities and differences amongst people around the world — their cultures, priorities and histories. This collection of short stories and song lyrics (published under the pseudonym ML Sund) explores temptation, regret and redemption across the American Heartland.

**Sleep Good: Get the Sleep You Deserve** (Nov 2020)
Ruman GILL, RD, PhD’s
After two years of sleepless nights, GILL published Sleep Good — a handy guide on the essential practices to get a deeper sleep and better understand how sleep works. Learn how to wake up refreshed, handle shut-eye habits and self-reflect to a better sleep.

**Others of My Kind: Transatlantic Transgender Histories** (Oct 2020)
Dr. Annette F. Timm, PhD, professor, Department of History
Co-Authors: Alex Bakker, Rainer Herrn and Michael Thomas Taylor
Others of My Kind is the story of a transatlantic network of transgender people who, through the exchange of letters and photographs, established a community for themselves and carved out a space in the emerging study of human sexuality.

Looking for more reads? See the full list at arch-magazine.ucalgary.ca
Even if you saw her self-titled Hollywood biopic starring Claire Danes, there are likely a few things you didn’t know about renowned animal-husbandry expert and autism activist Dr. Temple Grandin, who makes UCalgary’s vet-med school a second home whenever she can.

If you could do anything for a living, what would it be?
I wanted to be an astronaut. I was in love with the space program as a kid, but I couldn’t do the math to go into engineering — I had to find something else that didn’t require algebra and calculus.

When and where were you happiest in your life?
When I was about 10 years old, flying my kite on the beach. I remember finding a message in a corked wine bottle when I was looking for shells there and running home to get a corkscrew. I wrote back, and I remember being very happy.

Who or what has had the greatest impact on the person you’ve become?
My high school science teacher, Bill Carlock. When I was a poor student in high school, he gave me interesting science projects that had visual illusions. He motivated me to study and that was a pathway to my goal of becoming a scientist.

What do you like most about yourself?
That I’m someone who is able to get things done.

If you could travel anywhere you wanted today, where would you go?
I’d like to go to the International Space Station.

Describe the most beautiful place you’ve ever been.
The Australian outback. I flew over it a few years ago, heading south from Darwin, in a little tiny plane. I was in the co-pilot seat. Maybe the outback isn’t exactly beautiful, but it’s just — wow, I can’t believe how big it is. It’s meaningful because it got me to thinking about how we use this land and one way is grazing animals. You can’t grow crops there, but why not raise food?

When you’re restless or unhappy, what do you do to improve your mood?
In my 20s, when I got nervous, I would make sure to get home at 4 p.m. to watch Star Trek. Now, I make sure to get a certain amount of exercise every day.

Current guilty pleasure?
Dark chocolate candy with raspberry filling.

Who or what in life brings you the most joy?
I feel a lot of joy when my students do really well.

If a song played whenever you entered a room, what would it be? Led Zeppelin’s Stairway to Heaven. — JM •

Dr. Temple Grandin, PhD, is a professor of animal science at Colorado State University. She is a frequent visiting lecturer for UCalgary’s School of Veterinary Medicine’s behaviour and welfare class and often presents to student clubs and industry groups in Calgary. Grandin recently co-authored a paper on rodeo animals with Dr. Ed Pajor, PhD, professor of animal behaviour and welfare and director of W.A. Ranches at the University of Calgary.
Kapow! Dr. Bart Beatty turned a childhood love of comic books into a career spent teaching and exploring some of the most popular, least-studied cultural artifacts of the 20th century (p. 46).